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

Paper and presentation delivered at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester NY. NTID Scholarship Symposium. January, 21 2016

Abstract:

This article critically examines a multimodal film produced by Rachelle Harris, entitled “Seizing Academic Power: Creating Deaf Counternarratives.” (2015). The film is presented in American Sign Language, accompanied with English subtitles and graphic/design (aesthetic) elements, which are employed to critique the 20th century model of deaf education as exemplified by Myklebust’s 1964 “The Psychology of Deafness.” Harris’ film is designed to inform individuals in the Deaf community about harmful metanarratives that have pervaded the educational contexts for deaf people throughout the past 50 years. Harris’ film explores the concepts of producing deaf counternarratives as a strategy to gain academic power and assert cultural autonomy.

In this exploratory study, two different researchers offer complimentary analyses that explore multidisciplinary theoretical lenses to decompose this film artifact. These orientations include: culturally relevant pedagogy, multimodal communication, deaf epistemology theory, and deaf gain theory (Ladsen-Billings, 1995; Kress, 2010; Paul and Moores, 2012; Bauman and Murray, 2013). Our findings reveal that our unique researcher positionalities, as well as the distinct theoretical orientations we employ affect the analysis. Cochell and Skyer chose different, though related theoretical frameworks that align with their perspectives regarding teaching deaf students as presented by Harris (2015) in her film.

Cochell views the film through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), as exemplified by Ladsen-Billings (1995a; 1995b). CRP is based on the notion that all students are capable of academic success, all can gain and maintain cultural competence, and all can develop critical consciousness within the classroom. This framework focused on the teacher’s conception of self and others, as well as the teacher’s conceptions of knowledge as a basis to analyze the facilitation of student learning, especially in a marginalized group, in this case, Deaf culture. Skyer draws from an eclectic array of post structural education and communications research to explore the ideological and aesthetic dimensions of this artifact of teaching. This approach uses Larson (2014), Ranciere (2013), and Kress (2010), among others, to explore the multimodal, multisensory avenues for teaching as exemplified by Harris’ (2014) film. This orientation reveals some of the ontological flaws of the 20th Century model of deaf education. It reveals the need for radical equipotentiality in all deaf educative contexts, and offers new ways to explore the political and aesthetic dimensions of teaching deaf students.

This interpretive, qualitative study employed specific analytic approaches in order to offer a complex picture of contemporary deaf education issues and dilemmas. We situate deaf studies in the 21st Century and explore recent philosophical “turns” of deaf education by investigating it historically and conceptually through hybrid empirical methods. Data were collected through several structured viewings of Harris’ film. Data were analyzed using process coding, reflective writing, and memo coding. Our study concludes with implications for further study in the disparate domains of a new 21st Century deaf education, including (but not limited to) pedagogy, discourse, ideology, and aesthetics.

Introduction: Skyer

The purpose of this paper is to critically explore a specific artifact of teaching produced by Dr. Rachelle Harris entitled, “Seizing Academic Power: Creating Deaf Counternarratives” (2015). Harris’ vlog describes harmful “master narratives¹” that permeate the literatures regarding deaf people, which have in turn framed the assumptions that educators make about their educational potential. Harris establishes a pointed critique of these ideas by employing deaf counternarratives. We view her work as a different form of teaching in a radically different postmodern era. Our goal is to describe this multimodal film document, as well as to analyze its discourses regarding historical perspectives on deafness and how contemporary efforts toward Deaf Education research could evolve in the 21st century. We do so by employing two different, though related theoretical frameworks (discussed below). Each researcher brings different “lenses” suited to the analysis task, these lenses reflect our unique research orientations and positionalities regarding the topic. Our findings indicate new important implications for human learning and uncover dynamic, participatory convergences characterized as multimodal and aesthetically affective; we do so while probing research regarding contemporary theories of teaching.

Deaf Education has a long, complex history, and for our purposes it is perhaps more useful to begin in the present theoretical moment and to track backwards from there, rather than to rehash and open up old wounds purposefully, although that is not to say that no scabs come off in the process. In the Winter issue of the *American Annals of the Deaf* (2010), two research teams published complimentary papers regarding the proposed concept of *deaf epistemologies theory*. Paul and Moores, alongside Hauser, O’Hearn, McKee, Steider, and Thew collectively posited an emergent theoretical model of cognitive deafness, drawing from the literatures of biomedical research and educational studies. Wang (2010) contributed an article in the same volume calling for an interdisciplinary “metaparadigm” (p. 428) exploring *deaf epistemologies* from a number of different angles.

¹ Although the term Harris uses is “master narrative,” we orient our analysis toward metanarratives, which appear to be similar though different in some important ways.

In their 2013 chapter of *The Disabilities Studies Reader*, Bauman and Murray (in Davis) broke new ground on the subject of *biocultural diversity* and *Deaf Gain*², which argues that an interdisciplinary Deaf Studies situated in the 21st Century has implications that go far beyond the deaf classroom. They write,

Deaf Studies argues for both intrinsic and extrinsic value, it must be careful to make the point that this argument is not simply for the preservation of deaf people and sign languages [but also] for the sake of scientific exploration of the human character. (p. 255).

Bauman and Murray move for a scientific inquiry of deafness that moves significantly beyond the “special education” or “medical psychology” realms to which it used to belong (Harris, 2015). Instead Bauman and Murray position deaf issues at the center of, what they call, postmodern biocultural research. We interpret Harris’ (2015) film as an artifact of biocultural education.

In the field of Disability Studies, Gabel (2009) advocates for a similar eclectic approach to deaf education; an approach that seeks to *dissolve* metanarratives of an age long since past, she calls on educators to critically examine their practices regarding how disabled students, in particular d/Deaf³ students, are treated in school contexts. Gabel notes that deaf students are at risk of “cultural genocide” (p. 8) writing that 21st Century researchers should draw their perspectives from disability studies and/or deaf studies or an interdisciplinary approach for analysis. These research orientations can offer researchers, teachers, and students access to unique enunciative spaces; we believe the film we have selected being a particularly compelling example. We analyze this film to better understand how deaf people can resist harmful or dismissive metanarratives in educational and social settings.

Our analysis is situated at this intersection, between the immediate demands for sound theoretical models for use within deaf classrooms, but also for the wider demands for

² Deaf Gain is a radical new proposition which is partially concerned with shedding negative connotations regarding “hearing loss.” As Bauman and Murray describe it, “Embracing deaf people and their languages will invariably lead toward a deeper understanding of the human proclivity for adaptation. In the face of sensory loss, we may better appreciate the dynamic and pliable nature of the mind and the human will to communicate and form community. In this light, deafness is not so much defined by a fundamental lack, as in *hearing loss*, but as its opposite, as a means to understand the plenitude of human being, as *Deaf-gain*. (In Davis, p. 247).

³ d/Deaf denotes both culturally deaf and audiologically deaf persons.

understanding the nature of human learning and the teaching practices which responds to biocultural diversity. We recognize the need for an interdisciplinary approach, and draw from a number of distinct though related theoretical models. We begin our discussion with this simultaneous inward/outward perspective in mind. We have two primary questions:

- *What are the relationships between American Sign Language (ASL) and Text-based English in multimodal academic discourse settings?*
- *How do teachers promote active student learning in a just and equitable way?*

Furthermore, what we suggest and explore in this analytical paper is that Deaf Education is in need of a thorough decomposition, a critical unpacking, a radical deconstruction in light of significant advancements made in postmodern social sciences, including, but not limited to culturally sustaining pedagogies, deaf gain, disability studies, as well as the pragmatic concern for democratic equity through the use of aesthetics in education. As Cherryholmes (1999) has succinctly stated, if we are interested in the consequences of education, we cannot remove text from context. Our paper is an attempt to work the contours of our research questions in order to understand what deafness means for deaf education, as well as for the overarching concern for equity and equipotentiality in all educative contexts.

Phenomena: Cochell

“Seizing Academic Power: Creating Deaf Counternarratives” is an approximately 20 minute film, about the need for individuals in the Deaf community to gain academic power in the hearing community. The film is presented by Dr. Rachelle Harris who 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.

Preface

The beginning of the film depicts an explanation and apology to the viewers. Harris explains that this film had been edited from its original format due to the use of racial analogies in the first film and the negative feedback that was received because of its use. Harris explains

that it was wrong for her to use such analogies because she would never be able to understand the same systems of oppression that they encounter. The actual introduction of the film includes the part that had been edited out and she explains her rationale for doing so. Harris had used narratives depicting the taking of resources from Native Americans and other people of color to introduce the terms master narrative (colonization) and counternarrative (anticolonization).

Narratives

After showing the information that had been edited out, Harris goes on to illustrate narratives that deal with the Deaf community. The first narrative involved a cartoon depicting a crying Deaf baby and a happy hearing baby. Through this Harris explained how it was believed to cause cognitive delays to teach Deaf babies sign language. However, teaching a hearing baby sign language was seen as good and parents and educators were encouraged to learn ASL to improve language development in hearing babies but not deaf ones. Harris asserts that both babies would benefit from the use of sign language. The second narrative involved a widely used book, entitled “The Psychology of Deafness” (Myklebust, 1957/1964) in which Deaf people were considered limited and unteachable. This was a foundation upon which perceptions of Deaf people were formed. Harris asserts that there is a need for counternarratives to reveal and break down the false ideas held by these master narratives.

Tools

Harris suggests a list of ways to break down the falsities presented among the master narratives situated in society. This section of the film is entitled: “How To Seize Academic Power” and Harris presents and elaborates on the following tools to members of the Deaf community:

1. **Recognize and Resist:** Harris mentions the importance of being able to recognize⁴ master narratives, because only then will you know how to resist them

⁴ It is perhaps important to note that the ASL sign for “recognize” is related to the sign for “seeing.” Many parts of the sign’s formations are identical including position on the body and movement through space.

and replace them with counternarratives. Harris describes three subcategories that help with recognizing and resisting the master narratives which includes:

- a. *Resist outsiders theories and labels*: Harris states the importance of resisting how outsider's label and define Deaf individuals
- b. *Recognize epistemologies*: Harris describes the need to make a clear distinction between hearing epistemologies and Deaf epistemologies, and explaining the Deaf epistemologies to others
- c. *Recognize gatekeeping techniques*: In this subcategory Harris describes her own experience in trying to get a paper published and how a particular journal kept turning her down. They submitted the same paper to another journal and it was accepted in its original form. She asserts the importance of recognizing these "gatekeepers" and resisting them by going down a different path.

2. **Seize and Carve**: Harris uses this metaphor to signify carving out a place which would then lead to change.
3. **Reframing**: Harris explains how Deaf authors have a section that relates to their background which also describes how deaf they are and what caused the deafness. She states how the backgrounds should be framed in a more positive way.
4. **Privileging knowledge and primacy of experience**: In this category, Harris describes how in the hearing academic community authors cite other sources, but in the Deaf community there are not as many publications and therefore the information should instead come from the authentic and genuine knowledge and experiences from experts that are within the community. We believe it should draw from both perspectives.
5. **Language of Publication and Press**: Harris mentions that publications should be published in ASL first, because the hearing privileged individuals are able to access and discuss the materials first because they are more comfortable with academic English.

6. **Ownership and Profit:** Harris discusses the importance of negotiating terms when asked to participate in research.
7. **In Front and/or Teams:** Harris emphasizes the importance of having a team concept that had everyone of equal status with a mixture of two leaders, one Deaf and one hearing, or with a Deaf leader and a mix of members that were both Deaf and hearing.

Harris ends the film by talking about the importance of counternarratives and their role in undoing the damage of master narratives as well as, academic research, on the Deaf culture, language and people. Before we fully engage in an analysis of these primary components, we describe our research orientations and theoretical frameworks. We use two different theoretical frameworks which are described below in order to analyze Harris' film in a systematic and processual manner. We also emphasize the individual voices of each researcher and what his or her positionality bears on the matter at hand. We do this as a self-reflexive gesture and a token of our talks over coffee, laptops, and good discussion⁵. The first theoretical framework comes from Cochell and is best represented by Ladson-Billings' (1995) work on Culturally Relevant Pedagogies. The second theoretical framework comes from Skyer who draws on Larson (2014), Ranciere (2013), and Kress (2010) and is characterized by its concern for the pragmatic application of multimodal assemblages in teaching contexts.

Theoretical Framework #1: Cochell

- Ladson-Billings (1995)
 - conception of self and others
 - concept of knowledge

The film was first analyzed through the lens of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). CRP is based on the notions that all students are capable of academic success, all students can gain and maintain cultural competence, and all students can develop critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Within this theoretical framework it is necessary for teachers to reject deficit-based ideologies or ways of thinking about diverse cultures (Howard, 2003), and

⁵ Wonderful discussions, really! :)

acknowledge and respect the diverseness of the students (Oran, 2008). Through critical reflection, which includes “an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students’ thinking, learning, and various understanding of the world” (Howard, 2003, p. 197), teachers are able to challenge how their own positionality effects students. Ladson-Billings (1995) proposes three aspects of culturally relevant teachers (1) conceptions of self and others, (2) social relations, and (3) conceptions of knowledge (p.478-481). Due to the fact that this film doesn’t include the interaction of teachers and students, only certain aspects pertaining to the propositions of conceptions of self and others, as well as the conceptions of knowledge will be expounded upon.

I. Conceptions of Self and Others

Teachers must believe that all students are capable of academic success and that all students bring with them knowledge that can be used within the classroom. Furthermore, teachers need to perceive their pedagogy as ever-evolving and see themselves as members of the community. Teachers also need to consider their practices and understand that teaching is an action that can give back or sustain the community.

Academic Success-Western educational perspectives and paradigms have tended to categorize students into various groups based on ability (Osborne, 1996). For those who do not belong in the dominant group, they tend to become marginalized and are usually found in the lower ability groups, not just because of their actual ability level, but because of subjectivities and assumptions that are set in place. However, Ladson-Billings (as cited by Howard) asserts that “if students are treated competently they will ultimately demonstrate high degrees of competence” (p.197). Along with believing that students can achieve comes the notion of believing that all students come to the classroom with knowledge, experiences, and languages that can be shared with others and built upon, rather than replaced (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Larson (2014) supports this notion by further stating that “all people know. People might know differently, but we all know equally and all these ways of knowing should be valued equally” (p. 21).

Pedagogy as art-Pedagogy needs to be seen as an art that is always evolving. Critical reflection allows teachers to not only continually evolve, but to also address

issues that pertain to race and culture (Howard, 2003). Howard (2003) asserts that “critical reflections should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students’ thinking, learning, and various understandings of the world” (p.197). It is not only a thought process, but should also lead to action. Through the processes and actions of critical reflection, teachers can make improvements to their practice as well as rethink old philosophies, this will allow them to become more effective teachers.

Furthermore, according to Eisner (1994), teaching can be considered an art in four different ways. First teaching can be aesthetic just based on how the teacher presents the material, activities are organized, questions are asked, which further provide intrinsic rewards. Second, judgements are made through the course of action, in that teachers have to be aware of the needs of their classroom as a whole and the students and change according to their needs. Third, teaching is an art because it is unpredictable due to the need for teachers to have a sense of inventiveness. Fourth, the art of teaching can also be seen when the ends of teaching are created through the process, meaning there are no preconceived ends, rather the end results become apparent through the teaching process.

Members of and giving back to the community-It is important for teachers to be members of the community as well as to see their role as giving back to the community. Teachers who are committed to the community show that it is “an important and worthwhile place in both their lives and the lives of the students” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.479). Through the act of teaching, teachers are able to embrace and instill community pride within their students.

Pulling out knowledge-Students come to the classroom with knowledge. Teachers are responsible for gathering that knowledge from students and integrating it into their pedagogical and teaching practices (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This not only engages students but allows the teacher to bridge the gap between students’ lives and what is learned in school.

II. Conceptions of Knowledge.

It is important for teachers to make connections between students' cultures, lives, and experiences to provide them with teaching experiences that are conducive to their learning. Within the CRP framework teachers should conceive knowledge as not being static. They should also view knowledge critically and be passionate about knowledge and learning.

Knowledge is dynamic - First, knowledge must not be seen as static, and should be, "shared, recycled, and constructed" (Ladson- Billings, 1995, p. 481). Students come to the classroom with knowledge from personal, cultural, and past educational experiences (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Within the context of a culturally relevant classroom, significant interactions occur among students and the teacher based on the cooperative learning community that forms (Oran, 2008). These interactions promote the sharing of ideas and the construction of knowledge. Villegas and Lucas (2002) go on to say that "learning is a process by which students generate meaning in response to new ideas and experiences they encounter in school" (p.25).

Knowledge viewed critically - Second, teachers are responsible for creating students who are critically conscious. To do this, teachers have to analyze the very curriculum they use by critically analyzing how marginalized groups are represented within the constructs of what they are teaching (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Villegas and Lucas (2002) assert that "culturally responsive teachers also help students interrogate the curriculum critically by having them address inaccuracies, omissions, and distortions in the text and by broadening it to include multiple perspectives" (p.29).

Passion for knowledge and learning- Third, it is vital that teachers be passionate about knowledge and learning. Not only do teachers have to gather a cultural knowledge base about students' culture, but they also have to be aware and critically conscious of the curriculum that must be implemented within the classroom (Gay, 2002). Furthermore, teachers have to be willing to build a learning environment in which students can learn from one another and also one in which they can build bridges between what students know and what is being taught within school. Due to the intensity of all the various factors that go into being a culturally relevant teacher it is important for teachers to be passionate about what they are teaching and how students learn.

This film is being analyzed through the lens of a culturally relevant framework because of the notion that culture, in this instance, the Deaf culture, strongly influences the instructional processes. There is a push for Deaf individuals to distance themselves from their culture and learn and accept the norms of the more dominant hearing cultural. By moving towards a culturally responsive way of teaching, teachers can aid in facilitating student learning, especially those in marginalized groups, that not only promote the idea that all students bring valuable knowledge with them to the classroom, but also helps keep culture intact while instilling a sense of critical consciousness.

Theoretical Framework #2a - Skyer

- Ranciere(1991/2013/Larson(2014)⁶
 - the ontological flaws of education
 - equipotentiality

In “The Ignorant Schoolmaster,” Jacques Ranciere (1991) asks fundamental questions concerning the nature of pedagogy. He asks how pedagogy relates to the senses used in learning: seeing, hearing, listening, speaking. Absent from his model is any conception of language that is not experienced in these four ways. Ranciere explains that traditional education approaches are ontologically flawed. His analysis focuses initially on the concept of *explication*, that is, the regressive analysis of content used by educators in order to teach a concept through the performance of words. Ranciere inquires as to the paradoxical nature of *text* interacting with *speech* in learning environments, and notes that in traditional education environments, speech, specifically the “talking” part of teaching holds privileged status. He continues:

⁶ *This theoretical framework contains two primary “lenses;” although the two approaches are theoretically distinct from one another, they have concurrent themes. The first lens is informed by Jacques Ranciere (1991; 2013) and reinforced by Joanne Larson’s “Radical Equality in Education” (2014). We have chosen to use this lens because it is particularly responsive to the ideological contentions and distribution of power regarding teacher research and emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary approaches. Our unique Deaf Studies approach filters these theoretical arguments and asks new questions regarding the nature of the body, particularly its sensory networks, and how it is oriented in educative contexts.*

The master's secret is to know how to recognize the distance between the taught material and the person being instructed, the distance also between learning and understanding. The explicator sets up and abolishes this distance--deploys it and reabsorbs it in the fullness of his speech (p. 5).

An approach such as this, "presupposes that reasonings are clearer, are better imprinted on the mind of the student, when they are conveyed by the speech of the master" (p. 5). This point of view marginalizes different ways of knowing. Ranciere questions this traditional hierarchy, the one that places instructional speech performances at a higher premium, and thus, minimizes other ways of learning and teaching. He asks, "How can we understand this paradoxical privilege of speech over writing, of hearing over sight?" (p. 5). In the specialized realm of Deaf Education, it is precisely this question, along with other related questions, that demand exploration anew.

- What does it mean to learn as a deaf person, with a different sensory array? What does educating deaf students entail? Is language instruction inherently a process of colonization?
- What do teachers of deaf students need to know about multimodal communication?
- How can we understand the tension between spoken/print based languages and signed languages?
- How can multimodal teaching approaches interface with these sensory arrays?
- How do educators make aesthetic decisions regarding their teaching practices?
- How do educators reflect on those decisions?

Larson (2014) draws on the writing of Ranciere's radically transformed educational model and employs the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics to propose profound changes that need to be made in all education contexts. Larson explains the concept of *equipotentiality* as assuming that although not all students have the same abilities or skill sets, they each contribute to the function of the classroom. She writes, "consistent with Ranciere's concept that all intelligence is equal, *equipotentiality* accounts for differential content knowledge and ability" (p. 24). Educators who work with deaf, Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in teaching environments stand to benefit from seeing their students through a lens of *equipotential learning and teaching*. Larson envisions heterarchical power relations in classrooms and teaching

contexts, she assumes that all students participate in meaningful ways and that teachers need to be cognizant of the vast but subtle differences among students. Educators of deaf students need to respond to this heterogeneity and work to create environments which sustain the cultural, linguistic, and identity variations embodied through all participants.

Theoretical Framework #2b -- Skyer

- Cherryhomes(1999)/Kress(2010)/Ranciere(2013)⁷
 - multimodality as ethical communication
 - aesthetic as political

This paper seeks to explore multimodal, multisensory avenues for teaching and appreciates the inherent dynamism in learning for deep understanding using these approaches. We have selected Harris' powerful bilingual film because it engages with its audience by using a dynamic synthesis of ASL, text-based English, and other aesthetic/semiotic devices in order to teach the concepts of "master narratives" in relation to deaf counter narratives. Bauman and Murray (2013) contend that "evolving definitions of literacy are happening in tandem with emerging film technologies that allow greater ease of producing academic texts in ASL" (p. 249). As we look at Harris' multimodal film, we look for aesthetic dimensions, particularly the re-editing of the film, and what such a revision means for her arguments about academic publication. Following Bauman and Murray (2013), we are interested in the pedagogical potential of this teaching practice. They 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" (p. 249). In our paper, we wish to analyze Harris' (2015) text using precisely these dimensions, although viewed through a lens of multimodal

⁷ *This theoretical framework contains three primary "lenses" informed by Cleo Cherryholmes (1999), Gunther Kress (2010) and reinforced by Jacques Ranciere (1991; 2010). We have chosen to use this synthetic lens because it is particularly responsive to the political as well as aesthetic dimensions of teaching. Our biocultural deaf studies approach filters these theoretical arguments and asks new questions regarding the nature of the aesthetic-sensory experience, the disabled body in social and ideological motion and inquires into the semiotic and linguistic resources of two radically different languages (ASL and Text based English) buttressed by multimodal design elements. We link equipotentiality with teaching by way of the aesthetic and political dimensions of discourse.*

communication. Our position inquires into the discourses that avail themselves in the processes of teaching deaf students about academic norms, as explained by Harris (2015) in sign and text-subtitles along with semiotic codes and graphic elements. An example tryptic is shown below. In this instance, Harris is reusing and emphasizing top-down power relationships by addressing the upper left corner of the frame, or *mise en scene*. Harris establishes this space as a placeholder for “power” and consistently emphasizes its fixed position as superior and actively resisted against.



Figure 1. [8:20, 9:37, 18:04]

In Ranciere’s view the political is the aesthetic, and vice versa. He writes, “politics, however, frames a sensory world that is its own” (p. 80). For Ranciere, *the aesthetic* and the knowledge experience are almost interchangeable; both are characterized by the imagination of politics, and both are expressed through the “Poetics of Knowledge” (Ranciere & Corcoran,

2013, p. 22). In our view, aesthetically informed equipotential learning environments afford teachers radical new tools that can be used to bridge the gap between divergent sensory systems. Ranciere writes that aesthetics are a mode of experience, a specific sensory array, or mode of consciousness, in addition to being an incantation of life (2013). He asserts that aesthetics are deeply political and viewing or participating in art is an exercise in autonomy, “aesthetic play thus becomes a work of aestheticization...the self-education of mankind is its emancipation from materiality, as it transforms the world into its own sensorium” (p. 118). In the specialized realm of deaf education, the aesthetic is a different ontological orientation toward human knowledge and how that knowledge is delivered through multimodal ensembles.

Ranciere writes that democratic education entails both personal subjectivity and interpersonal relationships. In his view reality is discursive as well as aesthetic and its politics exist between “the universal and the particular” (p. 57). In this way, the ideal of democracy cannot be attained through any one research lens. He describes the division between the political and the social as “the democracy to come” (p. 58). It is our position that multimodal discourses bridge these divisions; furthermore, we wish to rearticulate the meaning of art within communication and teaching. Similarly, Gunther Kress (2010) describes multimodality as an ethical approach to human communication. He describes social semiotics, language expression, as well as socio-cultural capital as political dimensions of discourse. 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.

We characterize the preceding discussion as mapping out some of the aesthetic dimensions of teaching by way of ethical communications, and have explained how these concepts connect with issues of equity and democratic participation in schooling. Bauman and Murray remind us, film is a good example of an emergent form of academic text, we wish to also understand the text as an aesthetic mode of teaching. We look Harris’s vlog as an aesthetic tool used for teaching, it is a multimodal ensemble that has social, ideological, as well as educative implications. Cherryholmes (1999) writes that “all teachers, students, and others who conceptualize consequences in the classroom take their turn at artistic production regardless of whether [or not] they think of themselves as artists” (p. 31). We look at educational endeavors

as inherently artistic, and wish to inquire as to the function of artistic or design elements in the practice of Harris teaching the concepts of master and counternarrative.

Similarly, if we are to employ and use some of the concepts of Deaf Epistemologies theory, we can understand that deaf students are primarily ocularcentric, and that modal dominance alters how deaf individuals navigate information. As Hauser et.al (2010) remind us, “aspects of the deaf episteme, not caused by deafness but by Deafhood⁸, have a positive impact on how deaf individuals learn, resist audism, stay healthy, and navigate the world” (n.p.). As we have written previously, culturally sensitive teaching platforms engage the whole sensory array, we feel that aesthetic orientations for deaf students are a particularly good convergence of the concrete and the abstract dimensions of education. We have chosen to integrate the theoretical models of biocultural diversity and deaf gain to our analysis since it better emphasizes the positive dimensions of deafness and eschews the all-too-common deficit ideologies that permeate much of the literature regarding deaf education. We find that looking at Harris’ film as an aesthetic modality of teaching to be congruent with the ocularcentric and embodied practices that enhance democratic and civic engagement of deaf students working within academic environments.

Methods: Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection:

The data collected included information gathered from two-way close analyses⁹ of the film entitled: “Seizing Academic Power: Creating Deaf Counternarratives with Commentaries” (Harris, 2015). The film was viewed several times to uncover the various layers that were being

⁸ Deafhood is a term coined by Dr. Paddy Ladd (2003). Although there are important theoretical differences, deafhood complements the ideas of deaf epistemologies theory as well as the idea of deaf gain.

⁹ Each member of the research team independently coded the film using distinct but related theoretical frameworks (explained above and employed below). Each researcher also comes at the analysis task with distinct, situated positionalities regarding the subject matters at hand: deaf education, teacher research, multimodality, etc. Each team member relied on the same coding schemes (described below) albeit in differing, personally modulated ways, for example, Skyer watched the film twice with captions and twice without, in order to appreciate how each layer of discourse was affected by the others. We employed all of the available materials we could find in our coding and viewing, including the film, its captions, the transcript (of the first film, which includes the “racial” analogies, its images, and ASL narrative). We emphasize the profoundly multimodal format of this film and have done our best to present our analysis in a clear and comprehensive way.

analyzed. During the first viewing, the data gathered pertained to the film content. The second viewing consisted of gathering data that related to or went against the various theoretical frameworks that were chosen to critique the film. Finally, a third viewing was done to collect data on how the first two steps influenced what was being taught in the film, as well as what *wasn't* said or who or what *wasn't* included.

Data Analysis:

We employed Provisional Coding (Saldana, 2009) as a first cycle method. Saldana explains that provisional coding is used as an investigation platform that uses “the study’s conceptual framework and research questions, previous research findings, pilot study fieldwork, the researcher’s previous knowledge and experiences...and researcher formulated hypotheses” (p. 121) as data sources. This cycle employed process coding, reflective writing, and memo coding. We have also used cross-researcher discussion for coding purposes. Axial Coding was used as a second cycle method (Saldana, 2009). Supported by the research of Charmaz (2006), Saldana describes axial coding as useful for exploring “dimensions” and “properties” of qualitative data (p. 159) through “diagrams” and “illustrative techniques” (p. 162). This reflects the aesthetic concern in two ways: first, that it integrates or interrelates parts and wholes, and second, that it openly employs visual diagramming, which is an example of text/art interfacing also used in the film. We have elected to use these congruent coding procedures in order to understand both how the “parts” of this film contribute to an aesthetic whole, but also how the aesthetic whole can be decomposed into its constituent parts. We do this with an eye toward culturally appropriate methods for the film’s medium and dissemination.

Results & Discussion:

Results:

This section is discussed in quasi-chronological order. We have chosen to split the film into three primary categories which follow the overall structure of the film’s chronology. First, *Preface & Master Narratives*, which includes Harris’ revised introduction and application of the postmodern theoretical concepts of metanarratives and counternarratives). The second is *Psycho-Medical Master Narratives & Myklebust (1957/1964)*, which explicitly critiques the nature of 20th century deaf education models, as exemplified by Myklebust’s (1957/1964) *The Psychology of Deafness*. The third section is *Seizing Academic Power*, which is Harris’s best example of teaching, in which she details seven theoretical “tools” that deaf students can seize

and employ in their educational endeavors. These three categories are followed by a discussion of the aesthetic and pragmatic dimensions of the film's innovative use of languages [text-based English, provided in captions and a transcript, and signed ASL] including a discussion about how these modalities, semiotics, and ideological power structures relate to one another.

Discussion¹⁰:

I. Preface & Master Narratives, two views [0:00-6:18] -- Cochell & Skyer

Preface & Master Narratives

Cochell-

Harris' film starts with an apologetic explanation of how it has undergone several revisions. In the first version of the film, Harris used racial analogies to compare to the experiences of people in the Deaf community. Although Harris is within a minority group that contains a number of cultures and races, she is forced away from using such analogies within the film because viewers portray Harris as being a member of more than one subjective orientation: both privileged (Caucasian) and marginalized (Deaf) cultures. Harris' response to her viewers, which included editing out the racial analogies, caused the information in the film to be portrayed from a viewpoint that pertained to just her own cultures and what she could identify with. However we wonder how the information, or the film itself, would change if it was presented by an individual who identifies with more than one marginalized culture (ie. African-american, Deaf, male).

From a culturally relevant standpoint it is important for Harris to recognize her own personal beliefs, opinions, and the racial identity of herself and others through critical reflection. In addition, Howard (2003) asserts that, "a critical reflection process enables teachers to recognize the vast array of differences that can exist within groups" (p. 201). Although Harris cannot personally relate to the racial analogies, set forth in the original film, she should have still used them and justified her reason for doing so because she comes from a culture that has a number of other cultures within it. By taking the racial analogies out of the film Harris seems to segregate these other cultures from the Deaf community. Anderson and Grace (as cited by

¹⁰ This section moves across interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks but also across researchers' theoretical lenses and positionalities.

Foster & Kinuthia, 2003) assert that “deafness should not be viewed as a dominant or defining experience that supersedes racial or ethnic differences” (p.272). Furthermore, the experiences of marginalized groups have persistent challenges that can apply to many of these groups.

If we view Harris as a teacher and her viewers as students we begin to see the challenges that teachers face who come from different cultural backgrounds than their students. It is important for teachers to bring to light the inequalities of marginalized groups, not just the ones they belong to. However, to do this teachers must implement a cultural caring community founded on mutual respect, and one in which the teacher has an established “identity as someone who respects and is allied with the political struggle of the community” (Hyland, 2009, p. 108).

Preface & Master Narratives

Skyer -

I first viewed Dr. Harris’ work the first day it was originally published in January 2015. The version that I was so profoundly impacted by was a rather different film than the one we are analyzing currently. In this analysis we are forced to use the new version of the film although we still have access to the old version’s transcripts and have employed them as well. I disagree with Harris’ reasons for re-editing strongly, though I do understand why the changes were made. Prior to the editorial retraction and subsequent adjustments, the initial film document, employed an overall metaphor of “colonialism” or “colonization” in reference to destruction of indigenous cultures and knowledges, something that is related to but distinct from racism and racist analogies.

In the original film, Harris compared the linguistic and cultural domination of deaf people to the linguistic and cultural domination of native tribes ranging from the Maori in New Zealand/Aotearoa to the Navajo in North America. In the first film she explained that deaf people have been subjected to hegemonic control systems that marginalized cultural and linguistic ways of being in much the same way as indigenous people have been subjected to colonial powers. I found her initial introduction as a useful illustrative technique to join two distinct literatures, deaf studies and postcolonial studies. To that end, her use of “racial

analogies¹¹ played a marginal role in the overall film, it was a way to compare the deaf experience to that of other marginalized groups. I find that her revised position is too extreme and borderline “*PC Fascist*.”¹² In my viewing, Harris extends the discussions of marginalized groups to include deaf populations, rather than further marginalizing those groups. I think her initial intent was within the bounds of fair use and was not racist at all.

In Harris’ retraction and revision, she describes that it was a mistake to use a colonial metaphor, and that her comparisons were fundamental “errors” to the project. Following a discussion with her producer and interactions with her audience, as well as a self-critical reflection, Harris now views the comparisons as racist and derogatory. The new version is touted as “more culturally respectful” [2:55]. The updated version includes Harris’ rationalization for this update: “I am not Indigenous or a Person of Color, I will never understand what it’s like to go through the violence, the systems (of oppression) they experience, and many more horrible incidents. I have never experienced those, and I never will: and for me to go ahead and discuss those experiences, to make analogies with those experiences was wrong” [4:17-29]. This statement however serves to minimize and distance the pain, suffering, and hegemonic assault on deaf people although it claims to do the opposite.

Furthermore, this revision becomes even more problematic because it skews the remainder of the edited film, which is now a shadow of its former self for at least two reasons worth noting. First, in Harris’ revision we see that deafness is the primary identity category of marginalization, and it implies (but does not state) that deafness itself cannot coexist with racial, ethnic, or other cultural affiliations. As Foster and Kineutha (2003) have noted, there are multiple and sometimes-conflicting identities for deaf students. Deafness is an aspect of identity, but it also interacts with others: sexual orientation, gender expression, as well as

¹¹ Harris calls it a “racial analogy” and I call it a “colonial metaphor” -- these literary distinctions are somewhat important, an analogy posits a 1:1 relationship, whereas metaphor is more amorphous and interpretive.

¹² This is a neologism as far as I know, and I use it here to describe the overall aversion that White people have to any discussion that involves race when the White person claims to be non-racist or anti-racist. In this description, authors or rhetors become paralyzed by the concept of race and in an effort to be politically correct they “police” themselves to the point where they no longer have anything pertinent to contribute other than reiterating their position as *NOT racist*. I find this to be equally if not more demeaning than outright discussions of racial tensions, regardless of positionality.

additional disabilities or abilities; deafness relates also to globalized movements of people across cultures, borders, ethnic lines, racial categorizations as well. Harris' curt revision neglects this complexity in preference for the touted value-neutral ideology of political correctness. I found that her earlier version had more to say about conflictive aspects of identity and helped me to understand what teachers should understand about such conflicts.

Second, I find that the willingness to revise is overshadowed by the reactionary apology of her revision. Viewed through the lens of equipotentiality, Harris interacts with her audience, reflects on their comments and suggestions, and then made changes to suit the results of those interactions. Although I support this praxis of action, begetting reflection, begetting more action, I disagree with the foundations for it and its reactionary politics, which prefers stylistic alterations (the film's new preface) over substantive ones (a thorough decomposition or critical unpacking of what race has to do with deafness). Sadly in this regard we found Harris' retraction aesthetically and pedagogically unsatisfying. We suggest here that part of multimodal communication in the postmodern era is that greater interaction with the audience can be understood as either a passage to or a barrier from greater understanding.

II. Psycho-Medical Master Narratives & Myklebust [2:57-9:07] Skyer

Ontological Flaws

Harris explains that the publication of Myklebust's *The Psychology of Deafness* was a watershed moment in the history of deaf education, although not entirely a positive one. Harris contends that Myklebust's textbook established ontologically and epistemologically flawed foundations for deaf education. Published first in 1957, then reprinted until the mid '60s, *The Psychology of Deafness* was extremely popular reference text that and used as a primary reference¹³ throughout the '80s. Myklebust's training was in abnormal and clinical psychology, particularly language and communicative disorders, as a result, the theoretical framework of

¹³ Harris goes to great lengths to describe this text's influence and wide audience: "This book was a bestseller at an international level. People used it for their work... those people were teachers, psychologists, administrators, supervisors, speech therapists, audiologists and more. This book was required for graduate school, universities, training, graduate and undergraduate classes [and was used] ubiquitously" (Transcript, 2015, p. 2).

*deficit deafness*¹⁴ characterizes the contents of its pages. His biography describes his career of working with deaf and aphasic populations; it reads in part: “without [a] doubt, Myklebust’s ideas about the nature of psycho-neurologically based learning problems formed the theoretical backbone for the learning disabilities movement from about 1950 through the 1970s” (Hammill institute, 2015). It is unsurprising that this biographical sketch emphasizes *problems* in deaf learning, not differential ontological foundations.

Myklebust’s ideas regarding the cognitive retardation of deaf students were widespread and pervasive and framed deaf students as impaired mentally, behaviorally, psychologically, academically, and linguistically. At the core of these failings, in Myklebust’s view, is that “the manual sign must be viewed as inferior to the verbal as a language” (from *The Psychology of Deafness*, [1957], p. 241-2as cited by Bauman, 2008). Harris (2015) describes Myklebust’s pathological viewpoint as the foundational metanarrative of early deaf education models and Bauman (2008) critiques the phonocentric nature of communication and traditional education contexts for deaf students. In ASL Harris explains: “The underlying message of the book is: Deaf people can’t. Deaf people are limited, their brain capacity cannot function beyond a specific level, and no amount of teaching will make a difference” [07:10-7:22]. Bauman writes, “the violence of phonocentrism [is that] it becomes institutionalized in medical and educational discourses designed to marginalize deaf people” (2008, n.p.). A common theme in both of these critiques of Myklebust is the errors in viewing deaf people and deaf students as inherently broken--medically or linguistically.

Harris’ ASL description of this point is particularly illustrative. She emphasizes the marginalization and systemic violence of Myklebust’s views on education for deaf students. As she describes it in ASL, the signs for *teaching* are overwrought and stylized, indicating the intensity of the task; similarly, her signs for “*learning*” are hyperbolic and emulate a requisite passivity or docility on the part of the students learning. In this critical description, deaf students must first submit to pedagogical tyranny, and even then, they stand little chance of academic success. Of course, Harris’ overwrought description of teaching is stylized in order to emphasize that which she critiques.

¹⁴ We believe that this is a new term. We mean that *deficit deafness* is an ideological structure that mirrors the concerns regarding “audism” although deficit deafness is an ideological construct (more abstract) than a concrete discriminatory issue or situation.

Figure 1.

Harris' critique of Deaf Education as characterised by Mykleburst's Psychology of Deafness

a) TEACHING*

b) LEARNING**



[7:19, 7:22]

*Harris' facial affect is purposefully distorted, and exaggerates the intensity of the act.

**Harris again uses facial and bodily cues to exaggerate the passivity/docility Mykleburst has described.

Harris' viewpoints on deaf education are clear and quite separate from those of Myklebust. Harris notes that deaf students experience the world in different ways than their hearing peers, similarly the linguistic and cultural norms for each group diverge in important ways. Harris' film and text dwell on the ontological flaws of submissive teaching and pedagogical hegemony. She characterizes traditional deaf education¹⁵ as a "weeding out" process, one that envisions the end goal of school as employment or simply menial labor [07:19-8:23]. This model of education positions teaching as laborious and futile and learning as worthless and oriented toward "survival" [08:41]. Harris uses this powerful example of Myklebust's master narrative to illustrate the ontological flaws of traditional deaf education. We choose to envision an alternative depiction--we view education as a political, civic, and artistic endeavor that unfolds and evolves alongside the culture it is imbricated within.

Equipotentiality

¹⁵ Harris describes traditional deaf education as survival-employment oriented: "As teachers enter [these] classrooms to teach deaf children, they are thinking: *it is worthless teaching them, but might as well try...trying is better than not trying.* They are thinking: *teach deaf children how to survive--by finding a menial job ... because they will never become geniuses, doctors, lawyers, or pilots--it is impossible!*" (transcript p. 3).

We have filtered Harris' film through the theoretical lens of equipotentiality¹⁶ because we view equipotentiality as a viable alternative vision for education that rejects the ontological and epistemological flaws of traditional education. Larson (2014) describes this concept in the following manner:

all intelligence is equally valuable, but that does not mean that all intelligence is the same...In equipotential participation structures, participation roles position everyone as a teacher and everyone as a learner in activities in which power relations are heterarchical (p. 24).

We characterize the preceding analysis as also linked to the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, and the capillary circulation of power. In our example we are focused specifically on the hegemony of psychopathological education and phonocentric communication models and how these deficit orientations impinge on specific ways of knowing and being deaf. In Harris' film and in our analysis of it, we envision an alternate reality in which teachers and students are mutually engaged in ongoing discourses and activities, as critical cultural workers that are engaged in the processes of making new knowledge. The editing, revision, and resubmission of Harris' film seems to indicate that she is engaged with her audience and is transforming herself even as she transforms her audience.

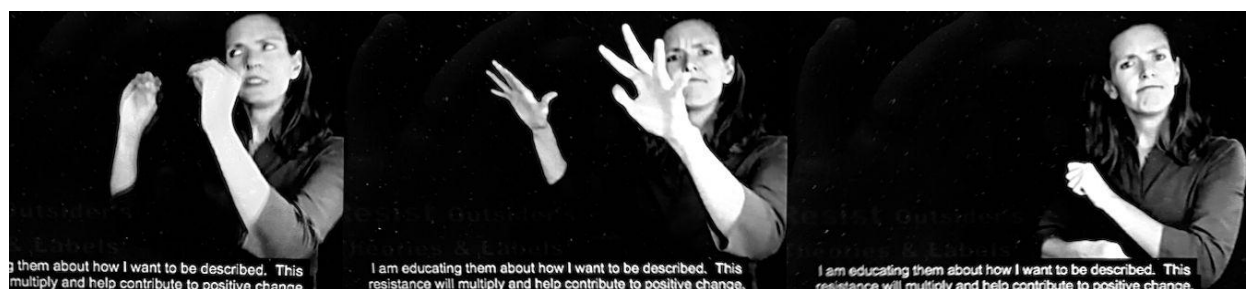
Building on the concept of master (meta)narratives, Harris explains that "master narratives can be internalized by both people within the dominant hegemony and the people being colonized" (Transcript, p. 2). In Harris' view master narratives like Myklebust's need to be recognized for what they are and students and teachers need to actively work to resist their discursive power. Borrowing from Ranciere and Larson's concept of equipotentiality, we reject the pathological viewpoint of deafness as an essential "lack," and instead subscribe to Bauman and Murray's concept of deaf gain. It is clear that Deaf students have a different sensory array. Deaf *knowing* differs from hearing knowing, deaf *being* differs from hearing being; however, it is incorrect to state that either one is inferior, or superior, for that matter to the other. It is correct though to assume that deaf students create knowledge in different ways and use ASL in ways that is quite different from spoken or print-based English. We understand this tension to be discursive as well as political. Politics, in this sense, is framed by discourse, culture, and language and is contingent upon access and participation in educational contexts. We regard

¹⁶ It is important to note that Harris' film is not a perfect example of equipotentiality, this point is expanded upon in the Discussion section.

the social and political participation aspects of education as contested processes that respond to and are responsive to the biocultural and biopolitical dimensions of pedagogy.

Deaf educators, in this view, are understood as cultural and political workers whose resources and pedagogical crafts can contribute to undermining hegemonic assaults on identity, culture and language. Within the realm of deaf education, the body is a site for ideological inscription, and counternarratives offer one tool with which students and teachers can assert their own autonomy and work to resist the deleterious effects of deficit ideologies of teaching¹⁷. 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.



In another segment of the film, Harris describes how harmful hierarchical distributions of power can be. She describes *seizing academic power* in part by describing that traditional research models as top-down affairs, she also suggests in ASL that toppling these hierarchical distributions of power is an imperative of progressive deaf education. To this point we now turn to Cochell’s analysis of this section of the film.

III. Seizing Academic Power [9:07- 20:38] - Cochell

The film depicts the struggle of the marginalized, Deaf community in regards to holding on to its cultural identity and breaking down the falsities within master narratives a more

¹⁷ Paris (2012) notes that deficit ideologies view students’ “languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being...as deficiencies to be overcome...the goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices” that students had and to replace them with White, middle class norms (p. 93). We borrow this concept and apply it to deaf education although there are important differences between the circumstances Paris discusses and our discussion here.

dominant, hearing academic community. To view the dynamics of Harris' discussion the culturally relevant theoretical framework, which in this analysis only includes the concept of self and others and knowledge, was used to analyze the academic power portrayed within the film and how it relates to, what is considered as, the best teaching practices of marginalized cultures.

Conceptions of Self and Others:

Using his proponent, the video was analyzed to see how well Harris believed in the capabilities of all individuals as well as how well her teaching practices aligned with a form of art. Furthermore, it was used to analyze how Harris perceived herself as an agent of change within a community.

Academic Success.

Through the Mykelbust discussion it was clear to see Harris's stance on academic success. Mykelbust claimed that Deaf students were limited and couldn't function beyond a specific level. Harris used this particular book to define her own stark, contrasting positionality on the elements found within the book. In doing so, she describes that Deaf students are just as capable as the hearing ones. Her belief of the capability of Deaf students, as well as others, is also illustrated in the narrative in which she discusses how both Deaf and hearing babies can benefit from learning sign language, compared to those who believe that learning sign language for deaf babies causes cognitive delays while it is encouraged for the hearing babies. Harris doesn't explicitly state that all students are able to reach academic success, but she does allude to this notion, through the hearing baby and deaf baby narrative, that everyone could cognitively benefit from learning sign language.

Pedagogy as Art.

As illustrated in the introduction of the film, Harris was continually reshaping and reforming the film itself. Through this she showed how she was in a continuing process of becoming. She was able to rethink her our beliefs and philosophies and make, what she considered to be, improvements. Harris was also able to show teaching as an art through her use of a multimodal presentation, her expressions, and hand movements. This art form was aesthetic in nature because viewers are able to engage with the presentation in a number of ways. Even more so, she was able to display her enthusiasm and desire to instill power into

Deaf individuals through her facial expressions and exaggerated and emphatic movements that conveyed her passion.

Members of and Giving Back to the Community.

Throughout the film Harris uses first person narration which shows her acceptance of the Deaf culture and her belongingness to the Deaf community. Within the film Harris also shows how she is a member of the community when she uses a particular sign that identifies herself as being, what others would label as, “disabled”. She uses this sign, instead of one that represents a “they” or “them”, to show how she identifies herself as belonging to the Deaf community. In doing so she is accepting her place in that culture and acknowledging that the labels that are used against the people in this community personally pertain to her as well. Harris also uses her position as a way to give back to the Deaf community. Harris transforms the knowledge she has gained from participating in the academic field into a list of tools that can be used to create academic success among this marginalized group. She goes on to mention that there is not much research about the Deaf community from the perspective of Deaf individuals. She provides these tools in hopes of positioning Deaf individuals in a way that will allow them to share knowledge with others about the deaf community, as well as add to the almost non-existent literature from individuals within the Deaf community.

Pulling out Knowledge.

As seen in the above section, the notion of community is important to the Deaf culture because their communities contain substantive forms of knowledge that defy the master narratives that view Deaf individuals from a deficit perspective. Harris states the following, “Why are we still adhering to their emphasis on citing publications over authentic, genuine knowledge and experience? Set aside the academic cultural rule that we are to cite publications by privileged people, and honor those with direct and authentic Deaf club or say, Deaf sport experiences, and many different types of experiences” (transcript, p.7). Therefore, Harris suggests that direct and authentic experiences among people in the Deaf community should be allowed within academic writing communities. This in turn is allowing the knowledge that already exists in the Deaf community to be shared with others, which also highlights a variety of lived experiences to be recognized.

Conception of Knowledge

This proposition was used to analyze the passion that Harris had for knowledge and learning and if she perceived knowledge as a continuous reflective process which must be viewed critically.

Knowledge is not Static.

Harris states the importance of using the authentic experiences of individuals in the Deaf community as a basis of knowledge within the academic community. The knowledge gained from these individuals is constructed from their own lived experiences and shared with others. The experiences also change throughout time and vary from person to person. This goes to show that the knowledge within the Deaf community is always changing. Furthermore, Harris is trying to make an even larger change by encouraging the implementation of this form of knowledge into the hearing academic realm.

Knowledge Must be Viewed Critically.

Harris makes it a point to emphasize how the knowledge gained from the hearing academic community needs to be critically viewed and analyzed, and at times resisted. The first tool that Harris gives is to “Recognize and Resist”, in which she informs viewers to: resist outsider’s theories and labels, recognize epistemologies of both the hearing and the Deaf, as well as to recognize gatekeepers. Harris explicitly uses these guidelines for students who are within the Deaf community who are trying to make academic gains in the predominantly hearing academic community, however the information can also be used by a number of cultures to also critically analyze the majority group that they are marginalized by, because Harris is discussing how to recognize and resist master narratives, which could include the master narratives of other cultures as well.

Passion for Knowledge and Learning.

I believe that Harris shows her passion for knowledge and learning throughout the film. Her passion seems to derive from the need to empower others, and herself, by overcoming the obstacles of being within a marginalized group while trying to be a part of the dominant culture’s academic community. Through her discussion on creating counternarratives, she illustrates the importance of breaking down false ideologies and theories from outsiders and replacing them with information obtained from the Deaf community itself. Harris emphasizes the importance of continually learning about, and gaining knowledge from both your own culture as

well as others, only then will you be able to truly gain a critical consciousness that can be used to promote your own community.

IV. Semiotics and Language Pragmatics [00:00-20:38] Skyer:

multimodality as ethical communication

Harris' film uses a dynamic ensemble of semiotic and discursive domains. This complex representational model provides an enunciative space quite different from the pathological and normative discourses that Myklebust's text define. ASL, once defined as a pidgen-language or iconic (non-arbitrary) language is no longer seen in this light (Bauman, 2008). Instead it is understood as harnessing both pedagogical and rhetorical power. Harris' use of facial affect, use of the body, use of space, as well as other semiotic tools are powerful rejoinders to the linearity of text or phonetic English. By this we mean that ASL harnessed in film form contain profoundly different ways of communicating, ways of knowing, and ways of being than lines of text in a book or spoken language in a similar context.

We have identified ten separate semiotic domains¹⁸, nine different discourses¹⁹, and five different domains of language²⁰ in her film. We refer to this visual complexity as the semiotic matrix. The semiotic matrix in this sense refers to the complex ways in which linguistic and discursive elements compete for ideological territory in social interaction. As our initial questions have asked: *How does Harris' semiotic matrix work together? How do the separate elements work apart from one another, and can they be used in a just or ethical manner?*

¹⁸ 1. title cards and splices, 2. edits and revisions, 3. colors and color themes, 4. ASL using space and time dimensions, 5. English using linear and textual dimensions, 6. numbers, 7. static images, 8, animated images, 9. mise en scene, 10, planes, layers and dimensions.

¹⁹ 1. Deaf Epistemology/Ontology, 2. Deaf Education, 3. Biomedical/Psychoneurological, 4. Academic Conventions, 5. Power/Knowledge/Resistance cycles, 6. ASL and Deaf Literacy, and 7. Colonization/Postcolonization, 8. Disability, 9. Metanarratives.

²⁰ 1. English, print based but not oral/aural, 2. ASL, as signed "through the air," 3. Performative language, different from casual language, but also different from "text" based language--Harris performs her text in addition to "speaking" it, 4. Affective language, using the face and body, and 5. Aesthetic language, contingent upon reception (seeing/reading/decoding) complex networks of representation.

Kress (2010) asserts that following the internet-revolutions in communication research new and radically different forms of communication are emerging using increasingly complex assemblages or ensembles of information conveyed with profoundly different assumptions regarding authorship, authority, and power. In this new complexity rules are still being formed. In his view, “communication always has been and will remain subject to social, cultural, economic, and political givens [however] new social, economic, political and technological givens require new names/metaphors capable of functioning as essential guides to thought and action” (p. 19). We position deaf education and Harris’ film as an artifact of this intersectional media space. That Harris’ film is a film should be self-evident; however, the ways in which it utilizes the semiotic matrix are not as self-evident. At the same time as we look at her film for content, the film itself and the design choices that encompass it should be explored as well.

Kress describes authorship in the internet-saturated communication sphere in different ways, and his point bears on our topic. Kress eschews the traditional concept of “knowledge” as a static thing, he also rejects that traditional creators of knowledge (the “author” in this case) are still at the center of knowledge creation. Instead interactive networks of people create representations and share them in participatory convergences--spaces or places in which scholars, educators, students, and ordinary folks are able to co-construct ideas together. Kress holds that communication in contemporary postmodern cultures work based upon the logic of reciprocal relations; Larson (2013) cites Kress’ “horizontal participation [structure],” (p.24) explaining that teachers need to orient their practices in ways that are increasingly reciprocal and interdependent. Harris’ film touches on many of the same points, indeed her film stands out as a direct challenge to the powers that be and she encourages her audience to participate and exchange ideas, approaches, orientations, etc. regarding the task at hand. Harris, along with her production team, and her audience all interact in social semiotic environments co-constructing knowledge and co-creating complex representational models, or multimodal ensembles.

Following Kress’ idea that “makers of representations are shapers of knowledge,” we see Harris in plural form: as a researcher, a scholar, a teacher, a student, a filmmaker, a performer, as a designer, an artist, as a rhetor. Kress describes “authorship” in multimodal digital environments as being a rhetor. We extend his concept of human communication theory and posit that teachers and students are both *participants* in educational contexts and all participants are rhetors as well as designers. Kress writes, “the rhetor [is] in full awareness of

the communicational potentials of the resources which are available in the environment and needed for the implementation of the rhetor's interests" (p. 26-7). For multimodal designers, on the other hand "knowledge is made and given shape in representation, according to the potentials of modal affordances: the processes of representation is identical to the shaping of knowledge" (p. 27). In this way we see Harris' comments regarding research design as a political action as well as a semiotic one.

Figures 3 and 4. [19:09, 19:52]



3. **HIERARCHICAL** (above)–; 4. **HETERARCHICAL** (below) –



Consequently, the act of creating a multimodal representation equates the creation of knowledge. As Larson (2014) has noted that educators must be cognizant of “scenario planning” (p. 70) as partially a pragmatic concern for consequences in globalized education contexts, but more specifically as envisioning plausible alternative futures. Larson’s scenario planning is drawn from the text *Curriculum in the Postmodern Condition* and describes this approach as attentive to the nuances of discourse, as a culturally responsive or linguistically sustaining pedagogical activities that envisions a plenitude of options that emerge as “embryonic experimental curriculum” (de Alba, Gonzales-Gaudio, Lankshear, & Peters, 2000, p. 14, as cited by Larson [2014, p. 70-3]). In figures 3 and 4, and the section of the transcript which explains Harris’ views in text form, “In Front or In Teams,” Harris describes what she considers to be inequities existent in classrooms and research contexts involving deaf students. Harris writes that “the person on top [of the hierarchy] is typically white, hearing, and male. The more culturally appropriate model would be a team concept, where everyone has equal status, with perhaps two leaders, one being deaf and the other hearing” (transcript p. 8). She also elaborates to explain that a heterarchical research approach would employ teams to reflect the heterogeneity of the task. She explains, “[Imagine] a scenario where there is a deaf leader, and a mix of deaf and hearing researchers participating in and consulting on the direction of the research project,” in this model, “Deaf-led research teams are crucial in keeping the research project genuine, honest, and authentic (p. 8).

We find that this example illustrates a number of things well. First, it demonstrates a keen awareness of how the semiotic matrix includes a variety of representational devices to convey its point. Second, this example reinforces the need for equipotential research, which Harris has described as culturally-sensitive. Third, we see this example as a particularly responsive example of Kress’ notion of creating new knowledges through the process of creating new representations. Indeed, if we follow his theory, the two actions are mirrors of one another, two sides of the same inexorably linked coin.

Findings/Implications:

What should teachers *do* with this knowledge? And what about these representations?

Our analysis was based on the following overarching questions which we will now revisit. In some important ways our questions become more complex as we continued with our project. What began as these two queries fractured into a number of different directions. In our inquiry we have found both aporias²¹ that refused to budge but we have also uncovered new passageways to deeper understanding of the nature of our phenomena and what it means beyond its mere existence. Our initial questions revolve around an axis of relationships between knowledge, discourse, and equity:

1. *What are the relationships between American Sign Language (ASL) and Text-based English in multimodal academic discourse settings?*
2. *How do teachers promote active student learning in a just and equitable way?*

The following paragraphs offer a tentative outline, a speculation of consequences within deaf education and beyond it. This reading does not claim any final completeness of interpretation; we hope that it is read in the spirit it is offered in: that of critical collegiality, equitable participation, while drawing from and acknowledging diversity. We map out some defining features of our increased understanding of Harris' film, its production, retraction, and re-publication. If we seek to plumb the depths of our questions we can turn toward a pragmatic attention toward the consequences of ones' actions. We recall Cherryholmes (1999) who wrote, "all teachers, students, and others who conceptualize consequences in the classroom take their turn at artistic production whether [or not] they think of themselves as artists" (p. 31). If we take a pragmatic approach to this emergent idea we might ask, what would constitute a "good" or "true" representation, and what, on the other hand might embody a "false" or "bad" representation? What sorts of logics govern the artistic creation of pedagogical materials and stances? How can we gain a better understanding of what comprises a semiotic matrix or a multimodal ensemble? How can we better understand the foundations of the human communicative predisposition? What is the role of art in education research? In human communication in general?

We look at human communications as aspiring toward democracy. Ranciere (2023) cites Deleuze to define democracy as always in the process of becoming (p. 170), we extend this into the ways in which art is experienced, particularly in educational contexts, can contribute to an aesthetic reading of the world, and that experience is "the democracy to come" (p. 58) which

²¹ Aporias are defined as "stuck places" (Lathner, 2001; Ranciere, 2013).

Ranciere refers to in his abstract discussion. We view this to mean that equitable participation and co-construction of knowledges occur in new ways following the intensification of the postmodern conditions generally in the early years of the 21st century. Audiences interact with rhetors in new ways in digital discourse spaces, films like Harris' self-described "video article" (transcript, p.1) that use multimodal approaches to teaching are engaged in civically oriented discourses across disciplinary boundaries and philosophical frameworks to produce a radical new form of teaching using ASL as a primary language supplemented by the remainder of the semiotic matrix. We follow Corcoran (2013) who prefaces Ranciere's work, "if the master's discourse is wanting, then it is because it relies on exactly the same poetic operations as those discourses it rejects" (p. 22). For Ranciere, as for us, the Poetics of Knowledge, politics' aesthetic nature, and the overall concern for democratic aspirations, we uncover radically different ways that knowledge is made, what forces shape its construction, and inquire as to the dynamic relationships between its multiple concurrent layers and dimensions.

We have begun to understand the nature of our second question as well. We find evidence that it was answered based off of the film analysis framed through the lens of cultural relevance. Through the film, we are able to see how Harris 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 learning how to achieve within the predominantly hearing academic community. Through her use of master narratives and counternarratives, Harris shows how she believes everyone is capable of achievement and success; furthermore, that the views and ideologies of the dominant groups should be critically analyzed and even challenged. Not only does Harris promote the success of all through critical consciousness, but she also embraces the importance of knowing and sharing your culture with others. By sharing cultural knowledge with others, those in the Deaf community are able to create a more equitable system that defies the dominating normalities.

Conclusions: Skyer and Cochell -

Through the analysis of this film we have become more aware of our own positionalities and how they influenced the way we viewed and interacted with the film. Skyer's philosophies align more with a critical perspective while Cochell's philosophies align with a more interpretivist and culturally relevant view. Skyer comes at the research task from a Deaf Education angle and uses new postmodern approaches for biocultural research. Cochell brings a culturally

sustaining angle and asks important questions regarding the ethics of communication in all modalities in educational contexts. Skyer is a culturally deaf researcher, who teaches English to deaf and hard of hearing students, Cochell is an African American researcher who teaches mathematics to hearing students. Although our positionalities differ, they had both have similar aims, which include promoting a sense of equipotentiality for all students and recognizing the deeply artistic elements and design principles that govern multimodal forms of communication and teaching. The dynamism of our aims are formalized through our own positionalities, and the frameworks we used to support and inquire about our questions, and the systematic approach we have employed to answer our questions. Through our critical exploration it was clear for us to see the powerful qualities of equipotentiality and aesthetics in use throughout Harris' presentation as she tries to aid in the reformation of the Deaf community and their positionality in a predominantly hearing academic community.

We began our paper with a discussion of Ranciere, who contends that there is a falsity inherent in common pedagogical approaches. Larson (2014) describes this limitation as an ontological flaw in education. Ranciere rejects the notion that "there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one" (p. 7). For the purposes of our paper, we too reject the notion that a "hearing intelligence" is better or, for that matter, worse than, a "deaf intelligence," in much the same way. Ranciere's radical approach can and should be applied within Deaf Education, which has for too long circled around itself asking the same kinds of questions. We also wonder what Ranciere's discussion has to do with deafness, Deaf Education, and this film in particular. It is our position that an argument founded on comparative epistemologies theories (c.f. Hauser, O'Hearn, McKee, Steider and Thew, 2010; Paul and Moores, 2010) is insufficient by itself to reform deaf education's contentious issues.

Throughout the literatures on Deaf Education, questions regarding language abound and frequent comparisons are made between deaf students' and hearing students' abilities and proficiencies. Lurking behind these innocuous comparisons are the often-repeated statistics that converge on one theme: that deaf students "lag behind hearing peers regardless of whether they use signed or spoken language" (Marshark, Sapere, Convertino, Mayer, Wauters & Sarchet. 2009, p. 368). The "new" debates of Deaf Education are frustratingly akin to the "old" debates: *Which modality of instruction works best? How can teachers exploit the merits of print-based language as well as "through the air" methods (speech, or sign, or both) of*

instruction? What sorts of remedial approaches are needed to “bridge the gap” between deaf students that consistently score lower on language aptitude tests?

In our view, the question it seems is *not* how can deaf people be more like hearing people, but instead, as Bauman and Murray (2013) have written, what does deaf education mean for the words that envelop it? What can “deaf cultural aesthetics²²” (p. 250) do for deaf education, but also for education in general? Different forms of intelligences, as Ranciere has suggested, do not necessarily demand comparative explication, that is, if we reject the concept of “superior” and “inferior” intelligences, we are left with different sorts of questions that move radically away from the “old” and “new” debates within Deaf Education, and mainstream educational research for that matter. For example, it would be absurd to suggest (however truthful it may be) that hearing people, by and large are awfully ignorant of the complexities of signed languages? Why is it that the opposite question does not feel absurd at all in either context?

If we understand the significance of Kress (2010) findings regarding the inexorable shifts that have occurred in human communication and place deaf communication as a particularly revealing subcategory of how humans interact with and are shaped by language, as we have noted, important shifts in biocultural and biopolitical contexts regarding the recursive nature of the body in ideological and discursive motion within complex socially informed co-constructed knowledge forms.

Bauman and Murray describe deaf education and deaf studies research in the 21st century as needing to address what it means to engage with language on a human level, and what that realization means for deaf education as well as human potentiality. In (2013) they wrote:

Instead, Deaf Studies may want to take the counterintuitive position that all individuals would be enriched by [becoming] a bit more Deaf. By that we mean society would do well to become more acutely aware of the nuances of communication, more engaged with eye contact and tactile relations, more fluent in a language rich in embodied metaphor, more aware of the role of being [members] of close-knit communities, and if nothing else, more appreciative of human diversity,

²² Using Bauman and Murray’s concept of deaf cultural aesthetics: “organic, curvilinear, and bathed in light...qualities of lighting, proxemics of signers, and the tension between open, visually accessible spaces and privacy” (In Davis, 2013, p. 250).

so that we [are] constantly reminded that the bedrock of reality may be as diaphanous as any other social construction (p. 255).

In this new era of postmodern biocultural research, new questions emerge regarding the nature of sensory systems used in education which are imbricated within overarching concerns for democratic equity, the political nature of communications, particularly teaching, as well as the encompassing theories of socially-responsive, culturally-sustaining pedagogical techniques. As we have demonstrated in this analytical paper, multimodal aesthetic ensembles can radically challenge and perhaps subvert ossified ideologies. We assert in this final section that the artistic dimensions of pedagogy, as well as their cultural grounding, are increasingly important and visible dimensions to the task of teacher development. We find that a critical unpacking of these timely questions is of the utmost importance for teachers who are interested in equipotentiality in all educative contexts.

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