

Learning Strategies of Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students in Higher Education

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The Evolving Aim of this Teaching and Learning Project

- To create actual involvement for a group of deaf graduates and undergraduates in recounting, for themselves, their learning strategies - traditionally teachers have been consulted rather than deaf receivers of education
- *“ Much of the learning experiences of deaf students and their educators within British HE Institutions remains within internal reports and could be described at best as observational and at worst as anecdotal”.*
Lawton, M. 2000

Harlan Lane says....

- *How can research on deaf children and adults be protected from the structural paternalism that dictates the training of professional people ... The single most effective remedy, it seems to me, would be to involve deaf people themselves...*

(Why the Deaf are Angry, 1984)

Further Project aims

- To enable deaf students to provide demographic information and identify their own learning strategies
- To identify their educational backgrounds with reference to their deafness and language
- Contrast the scope and use of service provision with the students' preferred learning strategies

Long term aims

- To aid students in accessing both integrated teaching situations and specialised provision
- To reinforce good practice in teaching and learning situations and highlight areas which need to be strengthened, amended or introduced
- To further involve deaf students in their own learning and therefore a) deepen learning and b) eliminate passivity

The Research

- Detailed research was made into existing theory and analysis of deaf students' learning
- A group of eighty deaf students were contacted
- The group emerged as a smaller target group of twenty-two students. The analysis was deepened, based upon the course analysis model created by Paul Ramsden, 1991 and utilised by J.T.E. Richardson, 2002

The research revealed

- The majority of students in the study were profoundly deaf and **75%** see their own language as a variation of Sign Language (BSL, SSE, SEE)
- Most students were required to speak at school but had changed their communication mode on leaving
- **70%** of students had attended a specialist school and were taught by qualified Teachers of the Deaf

Significant demographics

- **80%** of their parents had professional employment
- **48%** of the group had deaf family members (parents or siblings)
- **24%** only use sign language in communication with their family

Significant Communication Strategies

- **60%** of students use interpreters
- **75%** identified sign as their language
- **50%** used note-takers
- **51%** used English Support Tutorials
- **80%** of Males and Females selected English modules
- **98%** Females studied BSL while only 5% of Males studied BSL

Perspectives on support mechanisms

- Deaf Students are using support services as available and selecting specialist English modules
- Some signers are opting for 'live' notes rather than interpreted information
- Female students are opting to obtain sign language qualifications via modules
- Male students are not opting to further their academic sign language skills

General T&L features found

- **Only two** out of twenty-two students reported that they always understood assignment tasks
- **Nine** said they never understood their tasks, however, **eleven** said they sought help
- **Eleven** students said they translated written English into Sign language
- **Eleven** said reading required texts presented difficulty.
- **Ten** said English affected their grades

Independent Learning - Issues

- **66%** of deaf students said they did not cope with their workload
- **65%** said they could not approach lecturers
- **33%** said they enjoyed challenges
- **45%** of males were happy with their grades but only **25%** of females
- **75%** of students said they received useful written feedback from lecturers

Student Aspiration I

- **Seventy percent** of students had clear aspirations for their future and thought that their course of study would lead or had lead them to a linked career

Student Aspiration II

- The graduates in the group had achieved **2.1 and 2.2 Honours degrees**
- Graduates were employed or in continuing Education.
- No-one reported unemployment

Still to do - within Teaching and Learning I

- Challenge the problems deaf students face in understanding language of assignments
- Enable them to approach lecturers and offer them flexible workloads

Still to do - within Teaching and Learning II

- Encourage all deaf students to develop academic English and academic BSL
- Encourage male students particularly to study BSL to enhance their use of interpreters

Further Research I

- Discover how and why Deaf students who went to aural/oral schools, and whose family language is generally speech, opt to use sign language in HE settings
- Who then is teaching deaf students sign language?

Further Research II

- Does peer group learning of BSL exist?
- Is English enhancing or blocking deaf students' independent learning?
- Does HE integration offer educational success to all deaf students?

Further Research III

- Does Chomsky's LAD** exist for deaf people?

** Chomsky (1960) *Innate Language Acquisition Device 'LAD'*

I. King Jordan states that

- ... In order to take advantage of the emerging technologies, deaf people have to be highly literate. They must be able to read and write fluently! It is essential that deaf students become highly skilled in reading and writing in English.

(*The View from the President's Office, 2003*)
Darby, A. & Taylor, G, *Deaf Identities*

Opposing thoughts of two deaf students

- " Well, seeing that BSL is now recognised as a language by the government, then I reckon that any person that uses a language should have the freedom to communicate in their own language."

Deaf

student from a hearing family, 2003

- " It is up to all the Deaf to match up with hearing peers by sitting down in examinations without BSL support."

Deaf Student, from a deaf family, 2003

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- Thank you!
- Dekuji!