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THE HONORS PROGRAM

Observing a Residential School for the Deaf:
Identifying Factors in Creating a Deafcentric Environment

An Honors Capstone Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with
University Honors

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Abstract

Among many Deaf education programs in the United States, residential schools for the Deaf have a long and valuable history for the Deaf community as centers of cultural and linguistic transmission of U.S. Deaf culture. Several states maintain well-populated Deaf education programs that provide language and culturally rich environments wherein Deaf students receive American Sign Language (ASL)/English Bilingual instruction. In such an environment, which could be considered a Deafcentric setting, students are able to interact with their teachers, classmates, principals, and the staff in their native, natural language. Those schools are also designed to provide extracurricular activities with Deaf mentors, another key means of transmitting and nurturing Deaf culture. The purpose of this study is to identify the linguistic and socialization factors—inside and outside the classroom—of one known Deafcentric school in providing quality education that promotes self-advocacy and leadership skills for Deaf students. This research used a simple descriptive qualitative research design, including site observations (two classrooms, an after-school activity, and a dorm tour); interviews with a selected administrator and two educators (one with >15 years of experience and one with < 5 years of experience); and document (mission, policies, outreach information) review. The findings suggest that the use of visual instructional techniques, the creation of a visual learning environment, the respect for and consistent use of ASL in and out of the classroom, and the positive attitude of teachers and administrators towards providing a bilingual environment are key indicators in creating a Deafcentric environment at this school.

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Introduction

Among many Deaf education programs in the United States, residential schools for the Deaf have a long and valuable history for the Deaf community as centers of cultural and linguistic transmission of U.S. Deaf culture. Residential schools for the Deaf largely serve students at the K-12 levels and provide dormitories to accommodate students who live far from the schools. Often, states have one residential Deaf education program (Baskin, 2009), and the largest Deaf communities in the respective states usually are centered within the vicinity of a given residential school. Several states maintain well-populated Deaf education programs that provide language and culturally rich environments wherein Deaf students receive American Sign Language (ASL)/English Bilingual instruction. In such an environment, which could be considered as a Deafcentric setting, students are able to interact with their teachers, classmates, principals, and the staff in their native, natural language. Those schools are also designed to provide extracurricular activities with Deaf mentors, another key means of transmitting and nurturing Deaf culture.

Despite the well=known value of such schools within both the Deaf community and among educators of the Deaf, a dearth of research documents this kind of learning environment. In fact, only one study exists, the unpublished dissertation of Catherine O'Brien (2011), *The Influence of Deaf Culture on School Culture and Leadership: A Multiple Case Study of A School for the Deaf.* To validate and build on its results, this study seeks to test some of the conditions the O'Brien study identified as optimal school culture and leadership for Deaf learners, conditions which I have identified as Deafcentric.

The definition of Deafcentric is still very new. Don Grushkin (2011) uploaded a VLOG on YouTube explaining that Deafcentric comes from the philosophy that Deaf people have their

own community and education, which has large ties with culture, and our accepted standards of norms. One such norm concerns what has now come to be called Deaf space, "an architecture that fits [...] Deaf people including elements of design to meet the specific needs of Deaf people because they require an unobstructed line of sight" (Matumoto, 2012). Altogether, Deafcentric refers to having the environment be friendly for those who do not view deafness as a pathology to be fixed but a physical and cultural reality determining its own congenial practices. Creating a Deafcentric environment would require the pedagogies, physical environment, role models, and peers to achieve Deaf community's norms and behaviors. Ultimately, this project aims to contribute to expanding research on Deafcentric indicators of residential schools for the Deaf.

O'Brien looked at every facet of a state residential school for the deaf in terms of the influence of Deaf cultural norms. She included interactions within and among each group of students, staff, and administration as well as features of the environment both inside and outside the classroom. This project focuses on a part of these features, in particular the linguistic and socialization factors inside and outside the classroom that influence a U.S. residential school of the Deaf in providing quality education that promotes self-advocacy and leadership skills for Deaf students via Deafcentric education practices. This cultural focus guides the creation of the criteria that will be used in a simple descriptive qualitative research of one school for the Deaf.

This research used simple descriptive qualitative research design, including site observations, interviews, and document review, to analyze the indicators of a residential school for the Deaf in order to identify the factors that influence the school's ability to provide a Deafcentric education that promotes Deaf students' self-advocacy and leadership skills which contribute to better academic performance.

The research question for this study is: *Given each area of observation, what are the indicators of a Deafcentric environment?* The research question has the intention of identifying factors that influence the school's ability to provide Deafcentric environment for Deaf student that successfully promotes their well being.

Literature Review

The purpose of this project was to identify the linguistic and socialization factors inside and outside the classroom that influence one U.S. residential school of the Deaf in providing quality education that promotes self-advocacy and leadership skills for Deaf students via Deafcentric education practices. Oxford Press defines self-advocacy as "the action of representing oneself or one's views or interests" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). And leadership skill is defined as "a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent" (Clark, 2012). In this section, I will review literature in the following areas: 1) culturally-sensitive Deaf education, 2) the value of Deaf education, and 3) criteria to measure school success. Studies to date indicate the need for and value in studying this area of research of a residential school for the Deaf.

Culturally-Sensitive Deaf Education

Only one study's evaluation of education for Deaf students within a cultural perspective exists to date, the unpublished dissertation of Catherine O'Brien (2011), *The Influence of Deaf Culture on School Culture and Leadership: A Multiple Case Study of A School for the Deaf*. From her case study of a residential school, O'Brien (2011) distinguishes three important contributors to maintaining optimal, culturally-sensitive education for the Deaf: 1) anticipation - the ability to learn freely and communicate effectively; 2) acculturation – the sharing among Deaf students and staff of cultural knowledge through language, story telling, statements or demonstrations of values and beliefs; and 3) assimilation - the new students' acceptance of a Deaf identity and pride in Deaf culture (O'Brien, 2011 pg. 301-304). Anticipation, acculturation, and assimilation define specific avenues that can be undertaken to maintain high standards of residential schools for the Deaf. In practical terms, high-quality education for Deaf students is

achieved by providing spaces for students to socialize and relate with people who use the same language, share the same culture, and live in the same community as they do.

Other studies that align with emphasis in providing quality Deafcentric environment with correct pedagogies to maximize self-advocacy and leadership skills for Deaf students are studies that discuss the correlation between the social needs of Deaf students and their performance in academic and social environments.

Mayer's (2007) study states that when Deaf children are identified after five years, they are not likely to develop age-appropriate reading and writing abilities because they did not receive their education in their primary language, ASL during their critical learning period. The goal of discussing and developing pedagogies that would work best with Deaf children is to maximize their literacy ability and be equivalent to their hearing peers. This research is relevant to this project because it recognizes the importance of using unique methods in teaching Deaf children, particularly methods that go beyond the classroom. It contributes to understanding the importance of developing Deafcentric classrooms in order to maximize the learning of Deaf students. However, unlike the current study, Mayer's study does not discuss the benefits of those unique methods situated in Deafcentric environment where the Deaf students can take full advantage of the stimulation in classroom.

Jambor and Elliott (2005) discuss how to foster the self-esteem of Deaf students by comparing their performance with hearing and Deaf peers. Because this study also covers the articulation of self-advocacy and leadership skills in Deaf students, this research helps to recognize what kind of situations are the best for Deaf students to maximize their self-esteem and ability to interact with others. In fact, the study reveals that the Deaf students who have more hearing loss and bicultural skills have higher self-esteem in both hearing and Deaf communities.

Although this research also shows inconsistent findings of determinants of self-esteem for Deaf students, there are enough findings to determine that Deaf students perform better when associating with other Deaf peers, therefore supporting the importance of having Deaf peers as a key factor in Deafcentric educational success.

Wauters and Knoors (2008) discuss the academic and social performance of Deaf students who are placed in inclusive settings, any programs that focus on special needs or students with disabilities, or in this case, Deaf programs. This research reveals that Deaf students who interact with Deaf peers acquire higher degree of social skills than those who are surrounded by hearing peers. This research helps to understand the necessity of having a Deafcentric environment in dormitories and extracurricular activities in order to boost their self-advocacy and leadership skills.

Altogether, the studies contribute to better understanding of the need to develop a Deafcentric environment for Deaf students to maximize their performance and growth. Knowing which pedagogies or situations would work the best with their literacy abilities, self-esteem, and social skills would go some way to defining this Deafcentric environment. One common contributing factor in creating optimal, culturally sensitive education is the strength of Deaf leadership within the residential school and the external, proximal Deaf community. For this reason, the literature suggests that providing acculturation to Deaf life in a residential school underpins the promotion of self-advocacy and leadership among its students through developing Deafcentric environment. Observations during this study will test this assumption among other criteria. Whether such optimal conditions could exist for large mainstream programs is beyond the scope of this study and remains for a future study.

The Value of Deaf Education

Research studies suggest that Deaf students have increased engagement in the learning processes within residential schools for the Deaf given the context of having accessible communication, which is one of main elements of Deafcentric environment. Staten (2011) came to the following conclusions regarding the benefits of learning environments within residential Deaf schools: "unfettered communication and comfort through sign language, thus making their educational experience more comfortable; increased personal and social Deaf cultural identification; and perceived readiness for life after graduation" (p. 3). Another research study suggests that students who attend public school with hearing peers have a lower level of social well-being and self-concept than students who attend special schools (van Gent, Goedhart, Knoors, Westenberg, and Treffers, 2012). One of the possible reasons for that would be that they had the fewest opportunities to socialize with other Deaf people on daily basis because they are only the ones that can validate who one is as a person (van Gent, Goedhart, Knoors, Westenberg & Treffers, 2012 pg. 3). Hearing staff with non-Deaf backgrounds cannot provide this environment especially if they do not sign well. Not being fluent in sign language means that those staff cannot provide models of Deaf identity, as they may not know much about Deaf culture and have no direct, lived sense of how to navigate a hearing world after graduation. They would not be able to pass down vital life skills to graduating Deaf students. Fortunately, not all hearing staff persons are incompetent or have no exposure to both ASL and Deaf life. Therefore, hiring staff that is fluent in ASL and well aware of Deaf culture is a critical factor in providing quality Deafcentric education.

To have a quality Deafcentric environment, it is important to maintain Deaf leadership of those people who are already aware about the language and culture within the Deaf community.

Unfortunately, not all residential schools for the Deaf in the U.S. succeed in providing quality education based on average test scores (Qi and Mitchell, 2012). Previous studies suggest that one of the possible reasons why a culturally-Deaf perspective may not naturally prevail within a residential school is the widespread instance of Deaf children coming from hearing families who largely will not be Deafcentric. In fact, 60% or more of the students who enroll in residential schools originally come from hearing families and first mostly attended mainstreamed education programs; by the time they are enrolled in residential schools, they are often delayed in both English and ASL (O'Brien, 2011). Not only that, when they return home to their hearing families, they are not likely to communicate through the same language they use at school, which consequently impacts their language and social development. Without constant support from their families in developing both their languages, ASL and English, and their social skills, the students will continue to suffer. Family observation is not part of this study. But observation of their Deafcentric education programs is.

Criteria to Measure School Success

School successes have been measured using a variety of criteria. This criteria is established for residential schools for the Deaf environment, some measures in having linguistic and socialization environment will need to be altered if it is used for non-Deaf schools and Deaf programs. With the focus on a Deafcentric learning environment, research to date suggests three areas as most relevant to evaluate: 1) educational outcomes; 2) educational programs; and 3) linguistic and socialization experiences. In this section, each criterion will be discussed as it relates to the literature that supports its use in this study.

Educational Outcomes

Educational outcomes become very important grounds in determining the success of any school because they will measure whether the school has met the norm expectations in teaching their students. These expectations have been articulated in federally mandated assessments, especially the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment for competency of America's students in various subject areas: the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP).

NAEP is the one federally mandated representative assessment of student achievement and measures academic progress in various subject areas including reading, mathematics, science, writing, history, geography, and the arts (Hombo, 2003). With NAEP, schools will also have to achieve their promised missions, visions, and acceleration expectations that are developed between the schools and the state board. In addition to observing performance of the schools, NAEP provides a standard way to measure academic progress of students. Most state schools now require students to pass state tests in order to graduate with a high school diploma. Most of the information about their progress and performance are public documents, and therefore will be reviewed and considered as part of final analysis of the schools.

The results of students' learning processes depend heavily on how the content is being taught and delivered by the leaders of the school. As stated in the position statement paper of Early, Hearing, Detection and Intervention (EHDI), one of the important factors in the Deaf child's development includes having Deaf mentors (Joint Committee on Infant Hearing, 2007). A residential school that lacks Deaf mentors and follows the public curriculum without any adaptation for Deaf learners' needs will most likely impact their test scores or graduation rates because they are not receiving a program that is designed for Deaf students. Conversely, students receiving presentation of a curriculum in a Deafcentric way should have results more

competitive with their hearing peers. In analyzing how Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are deprived from adequate preparation for state tests, Qi, & Mitchell's (2011) study found the following:

> Two factors may contribute to the proficiency gaps between Deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their hearing peers. The first is the opportunity to learn: The services provided to this group of students with special needs may not be adequate and effective, so they lag behind their hearing peers. The second is the assessment system: the tests being used to monitor achievement may be biased against this special population. (p.10)

With the right preparation and attitude for the future of Deaf community, teachers can raise the bar with education in residential schools for the Deaf. More rigorous education achieved through Deafcentric means at residential schools can open many doors for the Deaf community as their future leaders would have both the educational preparation and cultural confidence necessary to compete in the larger hearing world. Therefore, educational outcomes like graduation rates and test scores, correlated with degree of a Deaf-centered learning environment, should provide dependable results in determining academic success of the school.

Educational Programs

The social development aspect of Deaf education mostly occurs via extracurricular activities, athletic programs, and in dormitories. One of the benefits of residential schools is providing Deaf students a comfortable access to literacy skills and higher degrees of social development with after-school programs (LaSasso & Lollis, 2003). These extracurricular activities include after-school sports, student body government/leadership organizations, and after-school study sessions. Residential programs include activities provided by counselors, naturally occurring interactive experiences with peers, field trips, and study time. As studies on

Deaf students in inclusive settings (such as mainstream or public schools) suggest, Deafcentric educational programs provide an essential tool in their students' social development because the chances of social acceptance for Deaf children among hearing peers are lower than when interacting with fellow Deaf peers (Wauters & Knoors, 2007). In mainstream environments where little social integration occurs, Deaf students are not likely to develop full self-esteem, therefore contending with feelings of isolation and loneliness. Conversely, a co-enrollment program provides the opportunity for intensive contact between Deaf or hard-of-hearing children and their hearing peers in an environment where they are not the only Deaf or hard-of-hearing child; this study of such an environment shows a significant difference in social integration, which again suggests that Deaf children respond better with peers who share the same language (Wauters & Knoors, 2007). And, as with dormitory life, the presence of Deaf staff allows enriched, extended learning of culture and language knowledge crucial for navigating life as a Deaf person, an experience that is not afforded to many Deaf children of hearing families. As one of the factors in having a successful residential school for the Deaf, the observable interaction in dormitories and extracurricular activities of the residential school in this study will be noted.

Linguistic and Socialization Environments

In line with the preponderance of research establishing the benefits of language accessible environments for Deaf students, residential schools for the Deaf should grant students full access to communication with their ASL-dominated classrooms; provide on campus dormitories for them to be surrounded by Deaf peers; and offer extended learning environments such as after school programs with effective communication—all of which consequently improves their language development and self-advocacy (O'Brien, 2011).

The linguistic and socialization environment is a very important element that residential schools for the Deaf must provide through both the classroom and dormitories. These contexts are essential places of cultural transmission, community, and language, providing spaces for totally culturally and linguistically accessible interactions. Indeed, the Deaf school experience provides the advantage of multiple relationships with teachers, peers, and staff members via their native, natural language, therefore developing a comfortable, highly interactive environment optimal for students to learn content and to develop self-advocacy. Most research suggests that students are motivated and more confident to thrive in classrooms and related environments where their language is understood, well respected, and used fluently.

Methodology

This research used a simple descriptive qualitative research design, including site observations, interviews, and document review, to analyze the indicators of a residential school for the Deaf in order to identify the factors that influence the school's ability to provide a Deafcentric education that promotes Deaf students' self-advocacy and leadership skills.

The research question for this study is: Given each area of observation, what are the indicators of a Deafcentric environment? The research question has the purpose of identifying factors that influence the school's ability to provide Deafcentric environment for Deaf students that successfully promotes their well-being.

Research Design

A qualitative design is used when data are collected to describe persons, organizations, settings, or phenomena (Maxwell, 2005). With this research design, data collection for this study includes document review—mission statement, outcomes, and outreach information; interviews with three staff members; two classroom observations; a dorm tour, and an after-school activity observation.

Procedure

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted the research specialist at the designated school to solicit the school's participation and approval. I sent out an email invitation to the principal and teachers for interview and observation. Then I scheduled an hour interview with a selected administrator. After the interview, the administrator then referred me to two educators that fit the criteria for the participants. Within a two week period, I scheduled two classroom observation, an after school activity observation, a dorm tour, and two one-hour interviews with classroom teachers whose classes I had observed. After

conducting all of this field research, I read through the information I obtained from their outreach materials, mission statement and outcomes (all available on the school's website) and then made observation notes to identify themes and to analyze the data provided. I used the criteria checklist (see Appendix A) for the classroom observation; the list proved extremely useful guidance in the search for factors that makes a successful Deafcentric environment.

Role of the Researcher

Before conducting research, the researcher must be aware of any personal biases that may affect the investigation (Maxwell, 2005). Though I was a student in three residential schools for the Deaf during the course of my K-12 education, I intend to remain committed to using an objective lens to determine if the criteria for being a Deafcentric program at the school selected for this study are evident in the ways they operate and their expectations for the students. In ensuring the use of an objective lens, the selected school is not one of three schools that I attended to in my past.

Having attended American School for the Deaf, Maryland School for the Deaf, and California School for the Deaf, Fremont, I can state they all differed greatly in their educational programs. Based on personal experience growing up, I decided that I wanted to make the emphasis of my research be on residential schools for the Deaf as I highly value how the schools aided my becoming a cultivated Deaf leader. On the other hand, while the first two schools developed my leadership skills, I had to displace myself to another school to maintain a good education along with that leadership development. While the other two schools provided some aspects of a Deafcentric environment, the gaps did have an impact on the ability to demand rigor in the educational experience and performance. For example, rather than use a strong Deaf background to interact with all students equally, some corruption in exploiting ties with Deaf

staff led to unequal treatment and lower expectations. In another situation, staff themselves seemed to exhibit one or the other of Deaf acculturation or academic preparation but not both. This situation had an impact on morale and thus on student performance. Perhaps one way to sum up this relation of academics to other aspects of a Deafcentric environment is to stress the integrity of application. In other words, a positive attitude includes a sense of integrity about how students are treated in all situations. Without that sense of integrity, education suffers.

Both my positive experience and frustration contribute to my passion and commitment to this project. Another reason is that I have spent the last few years at Gallaudet taking various classes and being part of organizations with people of various backgrounds, and I find myself interacting and working mostly with those who came from residential schools for the Deaf. Some shared positive experiences, but many did not, again because of gaps in a fully Deafcentric environment.

Altogether, my experiences over the course of the last twenty years as an active student leader, an ambitious academic achiever, and an avid member of Deaf community have contributed to the growth of my passion and dedication in designing this study.

Data Collection

Documents

In order to validate personal observation and interviews, document reviews of materials available to the public were used. These documents also provided background knowledge and expectation of the school before the actual visit.

Documents that were collected for review included:

1. School Website content

    a. Clerc Center Mission & Belief Statement

    b. Strategic Plan

The documents helped guide my observations, which I then used to confirm or disconfirm the claims of the documents. The documents reviewed will be used further to validate or reject the conclusions that will be made based on observation records.

Observation Settings

The purpose of collecting observations in this study is to become familiar with the social settings and the people involved at the residential school for the Deaf. More specifically, I looked at culturally specific interactions, leadership practices, and the relationships between teachers and students were noted in terms of the three selected topics relevant to a Deafcentric environment: educational outcomes; educational programs; and linguistic and socialization environments. The observations included educators, students, and administrators. I visited two one-hour class periods of different content with two educators—one with more than 15 years of experience and other with less than 5 years of experience. The goal of these observations was to have a clearer picture of whether the people involved and the activities observed in the setting reflected the indicators of a Deafcentric environment on a daily basis. On the day of the

observation, I introduced myself at the beginning of class and asked the students to explain their brief biography before the class began. I sat quietly at the back of the room documenting extensive notes to improve the accuracy of interpretations. After the observation, I contacted the teachers of the classroom for a follow-up interview. I also observed an after school activity, more specifically, academic bowl practice with two coaches for an hour. Last, I had an hour-long tour through women's residence hall. Observable behaviors were recorded during and immediately after each event to ensure accuracy, a critical aspect of my responsibilities as a researcher of this study.

Interviews

Participant selection for the formal interviews was based on willingness to participate. Once selected, all participants were given a consent form and fully informed of the research plan. During the formal interviews, the researcher maintained a journal to document information. The questions asked were semi-structured and open-ended, and the primary language that used in interviews was American Sign Language. The interviews were an hour long each. The targeted interviewees were an administrator and two selected educators. The educators were those of the observed classrooms. Questions are enclosed in the Appendix.

Participants

The field observation included observation of two classroom and an after school activity; tour in a residence hall; and interview with three staff members of their high school department. The focused themes were: background information, ASL/English exposure, teaching philosophy (inclusion of Deaf culture) and leadership and self-advocacy growth. With all observations at MSSD, fourteen (14) students and four (4) staff members were involved.

Educators/Principal

Name	Years of Experience	Gender	Ethnicity	ASL Fluency	Hearing Status
Administrator A	4 years	F	Caucasian	Fluent	Deaf
Teacher A	29 years	F	Caucasian	Fluent	Deaf
Teacher B	3 years	M	Caucasian	Fluent	Deaf
Counselor A	3 years	F	Caucasian	Fluent	Deaf

The pattern indicated in this table suggests that the majority of staff members of the selected school is Caucasian, Deaf, and fluent in ASL.

Classroom A

Name	Grade Level	Gender	Ethnicity	ASL Fluency	Educational Background
Student A	12th	F	Caucasian	Deaf/Fluent	Residential School for the Deaf
Student B	10th	M	Russian	Deaf/Fluent	Residential School for the Deaf
Student C	12th	M	Caucasian	Deaf/Fluent	Mainstream Program
Student D	11th	M	Caucasian	Hard-of-hearing/Uses Interpreter	Public School
Student E	11th	M	African-American	Deaf/Fluent	Residential School for the Deaf

The pattern indicated in this table suggests that students in Advanced Placement Biology classes are diverse in race, and all with only one exception are Deaf and fluent in ASL. Out of five students in class, four were male, and one was female. Three had educational backgrounds of residential schools for the Deaf; one had a background of a mainstream program with 30+ Deaf students, and one had experience of being the only Deaf one in the public school. The latter

student, Student D, is the outliner in this class as he was the only one who came from public

school, did not know ASL, and still used an interpreter.

Classroom B

Name	Grade Level	Gender	Ethnicity	ASL Fluency	Background
Student F	12th	M	African-American	Deaf/Fluent	Public School
Student G	12th	F	Caucasian	Deaf/Strong Skills	Residential School for the Deaf with Public School experience
Student H	12th	M	Caucasian	Deaf/Fluent	Mainstream Program
Student I	12th	M	Mexican	Deaf/Fluent	Mainstream Program and Public School
Student J	12th	F	African-American	Deaf/Fluent	Residential School for the Deaf
Student K	12th	F	Asian	Deaf/Strong Skills	Pubic School
Student L	12th	F	Caucasian	Deaf/Fluent	ALL (Public School, Mainstream Program, and Residential School for the Deaf)

The pattern indicated in this table suggests that students in Senior Standard English class

are diverse in race, educational background, and gender. In this class of seven students, there

were four females, and three males. Five of the seven were fluent in ASL. Only two had

residential school for the Deaf as the major contribution to their educational background; the rest

had their primary experience with mainstream programs or public school.

After School Activity: Academic Bowl Practice

Name	Grade Level	Gender	Ethnicity	ASL Fluency	Background
Player A	*12th*	*F*	*Caucasian*	*Deaf/Fluent*	*Residential School for the Deaf with brief Mainstream Program experience*
Player B	*11th*	*M*	*Caucasian*	*Deaf/Cochlear Implant*	*Residential School for the Deaf*
Player C (Student C)	*12th*	*M*	*Caucasian*	*Deaf/Fluent*	*Residential School for the Deaf*
Player D (absent, Student E)	*12th*	*M*	*African-American*	*Deaf/Fluent*	*Residential School for the Deaf*

The pattern indicated in this table suggests that participants in the Academic Bowl, which requires the students to have strong knowledge of educated trivia, are similarly fluent in ASL and shared a similar educational background experience: All four contestants had years of experience with residential schools for the Deaf. Three players on the team were males, and one female; three players were Caucasian, and one was African-American.

Analysis

The research question for this study is: *Given each area of observation, what are the indicators of a Deafcentric environment?* The research question has the purpose of identifying factors that influence the school's ability to provide Deafcentric environment for Deaf students that successfully promotes their leadership skills and self-advocacy, and ultimately their school performance.

Observable Use of Visual Instruction Techniques

My classroom observation included two teachers, and their teaching activities were completely different, but they both achieved a Deafcentric learning environment by connecting visually through eye contact that drew in all students and through the constant use of ASL. Teacher A had only five (5) students and one of them used an interpreter. Teacher B had seven (7) students.

To promote group engagement, Teacher A created a science lab done in pairs, and Teacher B created an imaginary battlefield for competing "armies" or teams of students. To teach content, Teacher A would follow the standard classroom technique of using PowerPoint, always pausing to look at students for comprehension and stopping to answer questions. Teacher B used active learning first before discussing the readings about the same topic of war. He first created the battlefield to allow students to experience war. For the first thirty minutes, the students would throw crumpled papers as ammos; drink stained liquid as dirty water; and eat cold soup as food. Then, they would watch Teacher B explain videos relating to the historical context of their assigned reading. Certainly active learning is central to the best contemporary pedagogy, but I would argue that this group involvement seems especially Deafcentric for a culture known for its collective focus and its reliance on visual learning.

Throughout both classes, ASL was constantly used. Using ASL and engaging techniques with much visual contact kept students motivated. Additionally, an aspect that may have played a role in the success of the classes seemed to be a focus on socialization or interaction that drew in personal experience and promoted collaboration. This can be considered a Deafcentric attribute of the classes because it is a way to build collective identity. Both teachers used this technique to encourage balanced socialization while learning. Teacher A paired the loudest student and the quietest student to work together on the lab. And Teacher B assigned students to teams for a similar kind of balance.

An additional quality both teachers had in common was a good sense of humor that helped attract the students to pay attention to what they had to teach. Humor certainly might be welcome in any classroom, but the study of Deaf culture shows value of jokes and other forms of humor to the community.

Equally important, both teachers concluded their classes by sharing outside news and news relating to school events to ensure that students will be kept informed. This sharing of news keeps the students aware but also fosters that collective involvement vital to a Deafcentric education.

Deafcentric Physical Environment

Based on observations and interviews of the selected school, it is suggested that a Deafcentric environment can be visually stimulating without being "visually distracting." However, the physical environment of the school is somewhat distracting mainly because it has artificial cubicle walls between each classroom. This arrangement makes it impossible for teachers to control lighting since one set of lights covers all classrooms in a given area. In

addition, most classrooms are small; the display of poster boards and the presence of equipment make the room feel crowded even before students enter.

In the interview with Teacher B, he explained some about the physical environment since 1950's, "Unfortunately, the physical environment isn't in the best respect to our Deaf students and teachers. It was designed to reflect on the vision that the architect in 1950's had about open classroom" (personal communication, March 5, 2013**).** To compensate, they tried the artificial walls, as the best they could do, but problems remain as noted above.

Of the two classrooms I observed, one had too many things on the walls. The other felt less distracting because the room was decorated to communicate a single theme (war history). A third room I happened to visit was also useful only because the walls were bare and therefore not distracting though a little boring.

What was on the walls may not be as important as are other aspects of the physical environment in terms of promoting interaction. For example, Classroom A had desks already shaped in C-formation, which serves as the most Deaf-friendly formation for the students to interact. On the chalkboard, the class and homework plan is already clearly outlined. The television in the middle of class announced the beginning of each period. Next to the television, the smart board was turned on with a PowerPoint of the class ready to begin by the time students arrived. The classroom walls were covered with science topics and various posters. The science lab equipment was organized in the back of the room.

Classroom B had a sign outside of classroom saying, "BEWARE!" and the whole classroom was not in its usual arrangement (C-formation), but instead had two sides of tables pretending to be the two camps in a war. This arrangement also facilitated interaction. Teacher B had the students situated behind either side of the tables. The television in middle of class

announced the beginning of each period, and it later showed videos with fascinating facts from the historical context of the war. The classroom walls were covered with country flags and bookshelves. When the class resumed its regular formation for the last twenty or so minutes in order to discuss the reading, the students returned to the C-formation once again.

The residence hall amplifies the whole linguistic and socialization experience that the school tries to enforce in various ways. First, when entering the residence hall, there are many informational poster boards, which empower the students to find out how they can get around D.C., gain their reward system, day schedule, and attend fun events all on their own. Not only that, there are also many poster boards that indicate Deaf pride such as De'Via art works and Deaf-related posters. In the dorm lobby, there are poster boards showing pictures of all counselors and a map with all locations where the women living in the residence hall are from. They also have a hangout place with a student-run snack bar, various activities such as a Ping-Pong table, and seating for conversation. Students earn time there from a reward system. This attractive place is a huge incentive. The hallways of the dormitory show officers of various student organizations to make it clear for students who they can approach when they seek answers. They also have a conference room available for any organizations to use; the space is Deafcentric because it is visually open to all sight lines. Altogether, the constant Deafcentric exposure in the physical environment provided through educational programs and after school activities encourages the rapid growth of Deaf students' feeling of belonging and understanding the Deaf community.

Deaf Interaction: Use of Sign Communication when Deaf Individuals are Present

The students' linguistic and socialization experience is enhanced by the constant exposure to ASL, Deaf role models and peers, and activities that boosts their leadership and self-

advocacy. Ultimately, these enhanced linguistic and socialization skills should positively impact their school performance. The students have access to various after school activities and educational programs that make sure that they continue to be immersed in some kind of interest ranging from athletic programs to the academic bowl, or even to performance arts. All of those after school activities encourage students to step up to become active members of the school community. Students are also able to participate in student organizations like Student Body Government or class officers. Other opportunities include working at the after school hang out place where they can gain experience as cashiers and work on customer service skills. A classic part of high school offered to them is winning popularity contests such as those for the Homecoming Court or Prom Court—confidence building experiences that are less possible in mainstream environments. Moreover, all of the people I interviewed seemed to agree on what Administrator A said about the interactive experience at the selected school, "Everyone on campus uses ASL everyday, and the staff must use ASL at all times even if they are Deaf or hearing out of respect to any Deaf individuals on campus" (Administrator A, personal communication, February 7, 2013**).** Being immersed in an environment where ASL is well-respected and used by role models does help the students discover their identity, and be more open to learning. In the end, the school aims to give every Deaf student an opportunity to grow into a confident Deaf individual; as stated in their mission statement, "…diverse communities implanting a rigorous and innovative program where students excel academically, achieve personal excellence, and thrive in a bilingual environment in which ASL and English are equally valued. Students graduate ready to begin college or a career and to be self-determined, engaged citizens of 21st century" (Clerc Center Website, 2012).

Teacher Attitude Towards Deaf Students

Teacher attitude is one of the prominent themes present in all of the interviews. All interviewees mentioned it first hand, and it was clearly exhibited in observations. The importance of teacher attitude in having a successful Deafcentric residential school for the Deaf is beautifully summarized by Administrator A, "Really, the bottom line is simple. It starts with people who work here—more specifically, their values, perspectives on and attitude toward the Deaf. It is vital as their beliefs will determine the direction of the school" (personal communication, February 8, 2013**).** The teaching staff has great rapport with each other as they have some events over the weekend where they will get together and bond. They all are fluent in ASL, and they will teach their classes in fluent ASL. They usually exhibit an accepting attitude toward students who struggle with ASL, self-esteem, or even motivation. They try constantly to be innovative with their teaching methods. Both educators interviewed explained that they would come up with group projects, classroom discussions, working in pairs, debate activities, ASL-English translation performance, and science labs to encourage interaction among students since this interaction promotes both content and language development. For instance, Teacher A explained her classroom strategies: "This class provides good Deaf role models like myself, quality Deaf guest speakers that I will bring to classes a few times per semester, and a heavy emphasis on prefixes of English words and Latin roots of English words during class lessons. They also do debates in class, and they develop the ability to argue logically, to think critically and to respect each other's standpoints" (personal communication, March 5, 2013**).** On a daily basis, the educators use ASL in classroom and the administrators use ASL with the students and educators in meetings and hallways. They also make sure that every student has an off-campus internship experience, which promotes growth in working with other people.

Teachers work to create respect and tolerance among all students. The students who came from residential School for the Deaf sometimes would be self-centric, which means they would act as if they should be the center of attention at all times; as a result, they would be less considerate of other classmates' participation. Educators mention that the pattern has been constant for a number of years. While the self-assertion is a strength, they need to be aware of others who do not come from that background.

In some cases, new signers will have an interpreter in class at the beginning, but over time, they will learn enough ASL to be okay on their own. In classes, the educators notice rapid growth in self-advocacy and leadership especially in students who came from mainstream programs or public schools because they can be actively involved in classroom discussions in an environment where their language is understood, well-respected and used. They also have the benefit of interaction with the self-centric Deaf students.

However, all interviewees expressed some concerns that teachers face, as they are unsure of how to deal with hard of hearing students who come in small numbers and who feel more comfortable speaking. Enough of these students do well in their academics, but the concern is their linguistic and socialization skills. Lack of development will eventually hinder their overall learning. Teachers usually let them be, because the teachers see that these hard of hearing students usually start signing by default over time. Their exposure to constant signing seems to invoke an intrinsic desire to sign.

To understand what motivates the selected people I interviewed to be involved with Deaf Education, I asked each of them to expand on their educational background. Not surprisingly, all four people that I interviewed have had their share of frustration with their own education experiences. In response, they became passionate in giving a better education for Deaf students.

One other factor that all four interviewees shared in common was they were attracted to the teaching profession either by monetary support or having a great support system from a line of educators. But they particularly felt drawn to this school because of the requirements for hiring: a B.A. in their content area and fluency in ASL. They all stated another reason why they loved working at this school, which goes beyond hiring requirements to the culture of the institution. As they explained it, everyone in the school shared the same friendly teaching attitude towards Deaf students. Clearly this school serves as a safe space for both the students and the teaching staff.

School's Support System for Bilingual Education

The administrator I interviewed explained that the school provides many accommodations and programs for those students who are delayed in either ASL or English. At first, they will take placement tests for both ASL and English. For those who have lower ASL skills, they will have additional ASL classes as part of their Emerging Signing Program. Students will have a constant access to linguistic and socialization environment of ASL users during school and after school. In addition, students are encouraged to have some consultant on their Deaf identity such as taking workshops or ASLology classes. Students are offered with a choice of having an interpreter in class until they learn enough ASL to be on their own in classes. Also, Deaf Studies class is required for graduation. Those who are delayed in English will have a second English class in their schedule. The first English class will be their grade level, and the second class will be an additional support. The selected school encourages the students to take a second or a third class in debate, creative writing, or critical thinking classes. The selected school provides AP classes for those who have accelerated placements, which makes sure that each student will be challenged at some kind of level.

Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to answer the question *"Given each area of observation, what are the indicators of a Deafcentric environment?"* The findings suggest that the use of visual instructional techniques, the creation of a visual learning environment, the respect for and consistent use of ASL in and out of the classroom, and the positive attitude of teachers and administrators towards providing a bilingual environment are key indicators in creating a Deafcentric environment at this school.

The findings of this study align with and support elements discussed in the literature. O'Brien (2011) proposed that high-quality education for Deaf students is achieved by providing elements of Deaf culture through teaching through the same language students use, sharing the same culture, and living in the same community as they do. The Deaf students have an experience of shared language and access to their peers in ASL in the classroom, which is often found in residential schools for the Deaf like the selected school of this research. The students did not only have access to their peers, but also to their role models who are teachers, staff, or administrators. In the observed classroom, teachers assume responsibility to balance the rapport among students, and both observed teachers balanced it by assigning new signers with fluent signers. As a result, students show more motivation to be involved with classroom discussion as their primary language is well-respected and used by everyone in the room.

Based on observations, visual instructional techniques includes group activities that suit the collectivist nature of Deaf life, use of ASL as a part of nurturing this collective involvement, teachers taking responsibility for socialization in pairing students, and sharing news to foster collective identification and involvement. Sign communication when Deaf individuals present is self-explanatory in one sense especially with a critical mass of fluent signers and Deaf staff—

always sign; however, it also is important as a sign of respect and invitation to participate. Staff members assured me in their interviews that the selected school requires constant use of ASL in and out of the classroom. With a Deafcentric school atmosphere, the teachers at the selected school exhibited a positive, progressive attitude about the future success of Deaf students. Informing this positive attitude was an awareness of stages of acculturation process such as different family and school backgrounds, and fluency in ASL. In this way, teachers could support the development of each student no matter where they started. The support system in the school manifested clearly in programming to cultivate bilingual (ASL and English) skills in each student and Deafcentric self-awareness by providing classes in both languages with support as appropriate, workshops in knowledge about Deaf studies and ASL studies, and value both languages to academic excellence such as AP courses.

This finding accords with that of Wauters and Knoors (2008) who discussed the importance of interaction with peers in the development of social skills. However, these researchers did not focus specifically on a school environment and so did not specify what this interaction means. In my study, it became apparent that the social development aspect of Deaf education mostly occurs via extracurricular activities, athletic programs, and in dormitories, but in this study it was also evident in the classroom. Based on observations of this school, Deaf students would have a fair amount of access to various after school activities and educational programs that make sure that they continue to be immersed in some kind of interest ranging from athletic programs to the academic bowl or even to performance arts. Not only those, the students are also able to participate in student organizations like Student Body Government or class officers where they can continue to grow through stimulating each other interaction in same language. One of key contributors to socialization experience other than residence halls during

after hours would be the student-run snack bar with various activities such as a Ping-Pong table, and seating for conversation. Altogether, the school environment accomplishes the suggested interaction that is needed to develop good social skills for the future.

This school accomplished the vision and maximized the benefit of having Deaf space for Deaf students. The previous literature suggests that Deaf space means an architecture that requires unobstructed sight lines (Matumoto, 2012). This school accomplished a Deafcentric physical environment in a appropriate amount of visual information on the wall—enough to stimulate but not too noisy so as to distract and overwhelm; C-formations of chairs or any formation that facilitated clear lines of vision among all students and the teacher; and poster boards reflecting aspects of Deaf culture such as art by Deaf artists and news about Gallaudet University.

The role of teachers in the linguistic and socialization environment is another very important element in a Deafcentric residential school for the Deaf. This is an overlapping area with the two discussed above. But it is important to note this role especially since research has not focused on it. A key contributor to having a successful Deafcentric school is to hire a teaching staff that possesses the same goal as every other employee of sustaining a school that serves as a place of cultural transmission for language and community. As mentioned by Administrator A, "Really, the bottom line is simple. It starts with people who work here—more specifically, their values, perspectives on and attitude toward the Deaf. It is vital as their beliefs will determine the direction of the school" (personal communication, February 8, 2013). Moreover, teachers play an important role in ensuring that ASL is always used in hallways, classrooms, residence halls, after school activities, and meetings.

Concluding Remarks

The importance of residential schools for the Deaf as centers of cultural transmission has been noted in the literature. Their ability to make an impact however lies in the school's ability to provide a Deafcentric environment that supports students' linguistic, social, and emotional development. In this study of one residential school, the use of visual instructional techniques, the creation of a visual learning environment, the respect for and consistent use of ASL in and out of the classroom and the positive attitude of teachers and administrators towards providing a bilingual environment where Deaf students can thrive were noted as factors contributing to the creation of a Deafcentric environment. In a Deafcentric environment that is well-exhibited in the selected school, the goal of having their students to be successful Deaf leaders of the future becomes more possible. With these factors identified, other residential schools can use the data as a precedent in improving the quality of their education.

Limitations

The limitations of interview and observation methodology are acknowledged here. Interviews provide self-reported data, which is why observations and document review will serve to compare and contrast information across data sources. All of the data analysis and results gathered for the final product will be based on my observation and interview notes, thus it is possible that, in the process of writing notes in English while receiving information in ASL, some information to be missed. To address this possibility, I sent all my interview notes to the participants so they could check the veracity of the information I wrote and provide me with corrections if needed. I also attempted to be faithful to the message and transcribe my notes immediately following the interviews and observations to ensure that my recollection was still fresh.

Observing a one-hour class may not give me the full, accurate description of the situation, for many factors can alter the outcomes. For instance, Student A did not complete her homework, and she was quiet for the most of the class. Student D claimed to be sick, and remained quiet for the most of the class. I can only guess whether it is their personality or temperament as a general cause or because of the factors that existed only that day. I observed the academic bowl practice with one player absent, and it could be an altering factor as Player B was quiet and left out. I can only guess whether he is usually a quiet or because he is most comfortable with the absent Player D. The tour of a residence hall occurred while students were out participating in after school activities, so that I did not have the chance to see the students socialize casually in this setting.

In a larger context, this research does not include Deaf students that are situated in Deafcentric environment in comparison with students in inclusive settings at hearing-dominated schools. Future research might expand the study to do such comparisons.

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APPENDIX A

CRITERIA   ROMANO

LINGUISTIC AND SOCIALIZATION ENVIRONMENT

A) OBSERVABLE USE OF VISUAL CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES

B) ENVIRONMENT REFLECTS ELEMENTS OF DEAF CULTURE

C) OBSERVABLE USE OF SIGN COMMUNICATION IN FRONT OF DEAF INDIVIDUALS

D) OBSERVABLE INTERACTION FROM EDUCATORS

    I. TOWARDS DEAF STUDENTS

        1. ATTENTION TO STUDENTS
        2. COMMUNICATING IN STUDENTS PREFERRED MODALITY
        3. PROMOTE STUDENTS INTERACTION

E) OBSERVABLE INTERACTION FROM ADMINISTRATORS

    I. TOWARDS DEAF INDIVIDUALS

        1. ATTENTION TO STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF
        2. COMMUNICATING IN DEAF INDIVIDUALS PREFERRED MODALITY

APPENDIX B

General Questions for all participants

1.   Why have you chosen to (attend/work at) a residential schools for the Deaf?

2.   Do you think your school promotes a Deafcentric linguistic and socialization environment? How so or not?

3.   Do you think that the school environment reflects elements of Deaf Culture? How so or not?

4.   Do you think that the school respects sign communication in front of Deaf individuals on campus? Why or why not?

5.   Do you think that the linguistic and socialization environment of the school promotes leadership skills and self-advocacy in Deaf students?

For Educators

6.   Do you use Deafcentric teaching methods that promote linguistic and socialization skills in your classroom? How so or not?

7.   How do you accommodate to students' preferred communication modality? What are the factors involved in your decisions?

8.   How do you promote interaction among the students in your classroom? What has it accomplished?

9.   Do you foster self-advocacy and leadership in your students in classroom? If so, how?

For Administrators

10.   How do you interact with Deaf individuals such as students, faculty, and staff on campus?

11.   How do you accommodate to Deaf individuals on campus' preferred

         communication modality? What are the factors involved?

12.   How do you maintain information of the progress made in Deaf education? Do

         you attend to national councils, committees, and conferences? Do you host

         regular meetings with your faculty? Staff?

13.   What are the qualifications in hiring educators? Administrators?

14.   What kind of educational programs do you have provided for the students? Are

         there any upcoming projects that will come?

15.   Do you consider your school to be Deafcentric? If so, what indicators make it so?