

## Cultural Implications in the K-12 Education Setting

Deaf Studies Conference Transformations Proceedings

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### Abstract

*The purpose of the workshop is to provide the insight of cultural difficulties in the K-12 educational settings where the educators would experience. When the participants learned about cultural difficulties, then they would have an opportunity to discuss and unpack their thoughts about the cultural difficulties and how will they improve themselves to reduce the cultural difficulties. This will benefit the educators to gain their understanding of cultural difficulties because they needed to put themselves first before becoming an advocate for the deaf individual or themselves. After the participants attended this presentation, they will have the benefits to learn and recognize themselves. It helps them to learn about potential factors that would be part of cultural difficulties. It will unpack the thoughts and attitudes toward the cultural difficulties in the K-12 educational settings. In addition, this applies to the concepts of cultural accessibility, accountability, and appropriateness that would influence their job performance. In overall, the educators will be able to have many positive insight outcomes on the cultural difficulties and remind themselves about their own positionality in the K-12 educational settings.*

### Keywords

Cultural differences, Black Deaf, education, K-12, educators, cultural accessibility

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### Presentation Transcript

(Slide 1)

My research topic is “Cultural Implications in the K-12 Education Setting.” Before we dive into that topic, I have a question to ask you. Raise your hand if you are working currently, or have previously worked in a K-12 education setting in the past. Any hands raised? Who has experienced employment in a K-12 education setting? I’m seeing a number of hands being raised. Great. Keep in mind that this topic is not necessarily limited to those working in K-12 education. This topic can actually also have implications at the college level or various other workplace environments. However, those implications come from an educator’s perspective.

(Slide 2)

The agenda for today’s presentation will include the following items. We will open with a cultural quotation that I feel will apply to everyone here today. Next up on the list, your positionality in your profession. We will discuss that. Let me just throw in — I know there are many examples of cultural difficulties so I’ve selected a few that provide important information. After we’ve done that, and hopefully with enough time, we’ll have an opportunity to do an unpacking activity in relation to your profession and experiences as educators.

(Slide 3)

Culture encompasses a larger picture consisting of different languages, traditions, artifacts, shared beliefs, religions, and various other aspects. All of this information is absorbed throughout your journey as a child. When you become an adult, the culture(s) you've learned becomes who you are. We've developed our individual identities and this has an influence on our jobs, in our positions as educators. How do we share this type of information with our students? Before we move forward, I want to show you an image that describes the concept of positionality.

(Slide 4)

The word “positionality” describes our identity and our journey. What kind of jobs and religions have we been exposed to? What cultures have we been part of and what have we seen and internalized? How do I share this information — my positionality — with youth? How do we do this? That's information we can share not only with youth, but also with adults. For example, my positionality is that I'm a Deaf, Black man. My family is white. I do not practice Black culture, but I've experienced this through incidental learning. I grew up attending a relatively large residential school for the deaf for all of my life. With the culture being predominantly Deaf culture at that school, the school forgot about other cultures, particularly racial identity. I didn't discover that until I enrolled at Gallaudet University. I was here during the fall of 2008 through May 2012. Between these four years, I learned so much about my own identity other than being Deaf. I absorbed so much from other people who had already undergone their racial identity journeys that I hadn't yet experienced. However, I am a twin myself as well. I have a twin brother who is also Deaf. We enrolled at Gallaudet together, but our individual experiences were very different. My brother had already identified as Black while I hadn't yet because I did not yet have the chance to truly connect with my Black identity. This was due to my experiences growing up and being influenced by the white perspective, white identity, and what white people expected. I went through life never thinking about racial identity, and that impacted my positionality. I didn't realize how crucial that was. Imagine being a student sitting in front of your teacher in the past, or even today, and taking in everything your teacher shares. That in turn becomes part of the student, who then passes that onto younger Deaf generations. That's a powerful positionality.

(Slide 5)

What are cultural difficulties? We know there are many different considerations that could impact you — or not. It depends on your journeys as students and on your jobs as educators. We have our own obstacles and experiences. I'll list some examples. Stereotypes. We each have our own, different interpretations of what this word means. For example, using symbols based on racial identity. For example, a Black student might be stereotyped as an elite athlete. I was a good athlete, but I certainly wouldn't call myself elite just because I'm Black. Plus, I was also good in academics yet I was often ignored. Cultural difficulties include the Deaf identity versus the racial identity, two separate things. We've already gone through the topic of Deaf culture, the use of sign language, language, and the love of Deaf culture especially through the Deaf school perspective. What about racial identity? The presence of racial identity often is nonexistent, weak, or fading, especially in sharing cultural values. I'll elaborate on that in the next slide. Racial identity is already a sensitive topic to discuss.

So should educators have the right to discuss racial identity in historical contexts? From a scientific perspective? Perhaps in the field of mathematics, psychology, literacy, or any educational context of your instruction? When it comes to language deprivation and cultural deprivation on a child, we already know that about 90% of deaf children are born into hearing families. We already know this. In fact, I'm one of that 90%. My hearing family, who I think is wonderful and I love them so much, did not teach me about Black culture. They preferred that I recognize my Deaf identity first. They already knew that I'd had my own struggles and frustrations in the community. They told me to go to a school where I'd get access via sign language. I was extremely fortunate to go to a residential school for the deaf while I was growing up. Regardless of these impacts on my positionality as an educator, I recognized that many students didn't have that privilege, which is disconcerting. Language deprivation sometimes, often, results from parents not sharing a common language. For example, it could be Spanish, Black ASL, or other languages that could be shared. Parents know that they will face challenges from learning a new language, so they take a step back because they're uncertain, even afraid. Parents want to see their children grow and be immersed in the white perspective, language, and expectations so the children can survive as they navigate the world. Barnhardt, in 1981, said that the difference between cultural assimilation and cultural pluralism was that cultural assimilation means assimilating yourself into one society and one culture. For example, white culture with its language expectations, shared beliefs, how one should get a job, and go forward in life. But what does cultural pluralism mean? It means that I practice different, multiple cultures. For example, I practice Black culture and Deaf culture, both different. I've had experiences where both cultures played a factor. My family used to be Jehovah's Witnesses. My mother realized that she didn't want our religion to deprive me of Deaf culture, so she allowed me to immerse myself in that. It took a while until I realized that my family had religious beliefs. I asked as many questions as I could and learned all I could about the religion until I finally understood better why my family did certain things. That was really nice, and I'm thankful to my mother for allowing me to go on my journey and discover things on my own. However, do many students have similar opportunities? Not many do and it's not just religion. It could be language, beliefs, family members like parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. They all have wonderful stories to share. We may place ourselves into a bubble by staying connected with just our immediate families and ignoring what's beyond. So it depends on each student, whether they experience cultural assimilation or cultural pluralism.

(Slide 6)

Cultural difficulties could also stem from a lack of role models, particularly for students of color. Especially with youth; they don't see many role models who share similar racial identities with them. When educators provide guidance, knowledge, and resources regarding racial identity, they should do so without the influence of the white perspective. By this, I mean that we need to start providing authentic and accurate information without using cultural appropriation. Educators are already in the position of sharing a wealth of information, so their job is to acknowledge different cultures, which I know is no easy task. How do we become better advocates? How can we help all students get access to these resources, especially if their parents deprive them of this access? Where do we stand in the picture? How can we help them? Some students, including myself, struggle with our identity processes and self-analyses. Also, teachers have their own challenges with their identities and how to appropriately share this information.

What kind of information do the students receive? The identity process consists of many years of constantly evolving identities. I didn't stick with just one identity. I learned about many different identities to consider, including LGBTQ, cisgender, and racial identity. "I'm Black," or "I'm Afro-Latino." We keep changing our identities because we keep making new discoveries about ourselves. It's not easy to "own" my identity and the difficulties that come with the process of analyzing my identity. For example, people will look at me and likely determine that I'm Black. I used to identify as being white because I didn't feel right identifying myself as a Black man at first. Compared to my deaf twin brother who I previously mentioned, he told me that identifying as a Black man was something to cherish and there's nothing wrong with it. I didn't understand because I wasn't sufficiently exposed. I didn't feel that it was right for me to talk about Black culture and Black identity because I didn't have the necessary experiences. I held a predominantly white perspective because I was raised by a white family. My experiences influenced me into who I am now. My perspective slowly shifted over many years of learning about Black identity. I've learned things that have profoundly affected me and made me proud to be Black now. However, I will still identify as a Deaf person first.

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As we already know, a role model is someone who possesses an amazing background, wealth of information and experience obtained through their unique journey that can be shared with others who want the same things. However, do these role models "own" their identities? And how do we connect with them?

(Slide 8)

My question is where are the Deaf Blacks, Deaf Asians, Deaf Hispanics and Deaf Native Americans? Where are they? Based on my experience as a K-12 student, growing up I only had one Deaf Black teacher. This was in high school and for only one semester. That was it. Now, I've been a Deaf educator for 5 years. I've found that I typically will say that I'm the only or one of two Deaf Black teachers there, that's all. That makes me wonder where they are. We have many wonderful people of color who could work in the education field. Yet there aren't many of them. They're overlooked or pushed aside. Often, we see many people of color working as either an after-school role watching over students, or as an athletic coach. There are different roles, but they're not on the front line with students who look up to them. That is the status quo. What about people of color? That has an influence on young students of color. They are always happy to see people of color in significant roles, yet there are not many. I had an opportunity to chat with one particular student. I asked the student how they would feel if there was a Deaf Black teacher for that student; keep in mind that this student was also Black. It wasn't until that point this student realized that there weren't many Black teachers. This student and I started talking about the possibilities of connecting with people of color as role models. But where can we find people like that? This student mentioned a Deaf Black male teacher, but wanted a Deaf Black female teacher. Then the student started wondering what it would be like to have them. That reminded me of what I just shared with you, how I had just one Deaf Black teacher and for only one semester, that's it. One semester means 16 weeks. Is that really sufficient?

(Slide 9)

The lack of, or the weakness of, educators' guidance results in the educator often acting as a third-party and simply passing on their knowledge of different cultures, practices, and racial identity. This cultural learning process shouldn't be that convenient. When it comes to resources, often the general curriculum is based on the white perspective, but what about studying literary works created by people of color? These literary works aren't being used as often as they should. Where are the books that describe the history of what has happened to the people of color? I did notice that there's been a slow change and there are more works being acknowledged, but there is still inequality in terms of perspective among published works. It's up to us to change, improve, and upgrade the curriculum and resources for teachers. Being assistants to educators. You know, analyzing oneself and going on that journey is not easy. You might know if you've been through this in middle school or high school. You might have spent time questioning your identity, learned different cultures and experimented, but who was there to help you? There are not many people who can give these students the appropriate resources and/or a clear path towards their goals. Often educators provide the white perspective and forget to consider multiple different cultures. Where is their accountability?

(Slide 10)

Stapleton and Croom proposed a new theory that I like. This is the big, broad idea of microaggression. There are different physical, verbal and psychological forms of microaggression. What we do or how we use these three factors will affect others. The second wheel is "audist" and the other wheel is "racist." The audist factor is the denial of using sign language and preferring oralism, resulting in language deprivation. With the racist factor, the traditional practice of passing on the white man's perspectives of expectations, culture, and society is implemented. Why don't we use examples drawing from multicultural perspectives? That isn't easy to do and all these factors work in coordination with each other. In our positions as educators, we need to think twice about how we share these resources and build relationships with students of color, including those who are deaf. We need to push our biases aside, and think about how to best advocate for these students. That way, these students will get access to the resources they need.

(Slide 11)

Foster and Kinuthia in 2003 shared research findings on Black students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf where they conducted surveys. They noticed a pattern when participants were asked who they identified as first. Was it their Deaf or racial identity? Based on our upbringing, do we notice that people identify as Deaf Black, Deaf Asian, Deaf Hispanic or Deaf Latinx? Or do they identify as Hispanic Deaf or Black Deaf? Which way do you lean towards? It depends on your individual journeys. Like I said, I identify as Deaf first, and then Black. What about you? What is your identity?

(Slide 12)

After I've given out instructions, I would like — the volunteers will pass out worksheets where we can unpack our thoughts.

(Slide 13)

I want to thank you for taking the time to unpack your positions and identify the dynamics of cultural difficulties in your workplaces. I've been watching all your conversations and it means a lot to me to see you putting in effort to unpack and improve cultural difficulties in your work environments. Thank you!

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