

The rise of a whole deaf identity

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The Deaf community has similarities with other marginalized communities that challenge oppression and affirm their identities to undercut their disempowerment. Kuntze (2008), in “Turning Literacy Inside Out,” argued that literacy should be based on the cognitive abilities that shape literacy. In “Critical Pedagogy and ASL Videobooks,” Fleischer (2008) applied critical pedagogy on the ASL Videobooks project for Deaf learners. Holcomb (2013) described the artistic perspectives and works of Deaf people in “Deaf Art.” In another essay, “Deaf Lit,” Holcomb (2013) illustrated the development of Deaf literature. The key concepts of these essays are the importance of rejecting traditional modes of communication and education that do not acknowledge and promote American Sign Language (ASL) as a natural, dynamic language system and the significance of continuously expanding access to and use of the artistic and literature channels by which the Deaf community can express themselves and become more visible to the public. Two articles underscore the theme of challenging traditional modes of communication and education that disenfranchise Deaf individuals from learning ASL as a natural and vibrant language system. Kuntze (2008) explained the differences between analogic and digital communication modes where analogic expressions include gestures and intonations, for instance, while digital communication consists of arbitrary symbols that a specific group has given meaning to (Kuntze, 2008, p. 148). He stresses that written communication falls under digital languages, while ASL combines analogic and digital communication modes (Kuntze, 2008, p. 148). He compared the importance of making inferences and understanding visual

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language for both written language and ASL to prove that ASL is also a rich, visual language like the written and spoken word. Kuntze (2008) concluded that literacy cannot be measured through writing and reading skills, but on the ability to process content and to organize and express ideas to others (p. 154). Another essay describes and evaluates the ASL Videobooks project that promotes literacy among Deaf students through ASL storytelling. After watching these videobooks, Fleischer (2008) wrote to the Director of Clearinghouse to complain that these products are useless to Deaf students because they are so literal in translation from English to ASL that they are “unnatural to the eyes of ASL users” (p. 162). Fleischer (2008) suggested the development of new videobooks that will build knowledge and skills in English and ASL. These essays underline the importance of constructing and sharing knowledge that comes from the perspective of the Deaf community. The next theme is continuously expanding access to and use of the artistic and literature channels by which the Deaf community can express their identities and become more visible to the public. Holcomb (2013) stressed that, in Deaf lit, Deaf people write through the lens of duality of being part of the mainstream world by using English and part of the Deaf community by using ASL (Holcomb, 2013, p. 134). He cited Brueggemann (1995) who stressed that Deaf lit showcases “biculturalism, bilingualism, and bicognitivism” (p. 145 as cited in Holcomb, 2013, p. 136). As for Deaf Art, two of its dominant perspectives are the resistance and affirmation arts. Holcomb (2013) argued that Deaf art allows Deaf people to express themselves in visual and performance arts, including music, for their own personal and collective reasons of seeing themselves and being seen by the world. These essays stress the importance of arts and literature to the

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development and expression of the Deaf identity.

As with other marginalized groups, these essays demonstrate that the Deaf community fights for its own valid place in history and society through describing its past and ongoing contributions to the arts, literature, and education sector. They argue that the Deaf are also entitled to mainstream channels of expression that will help them understand their identity and to also help the public understand their history and identity as Deaf people. These essays assert that the world of the Deaf is not at all inferior to the world of the hearing, and that their culture and language are equally important to use and to learn.

References

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