

March 10, 2010
Disability Studies 194
O'Byrne

Final Proposal

I. Introduction

I am interested in this topic because I, myself, am hard-of-hearing and interested in the arts. My inability to hear well has often prevented me from participating fully in most social groups, especially theater. Drama involves so much communication that a hearing-impaired individual can get lost easily if involved in a spoken-language performance as opposed to a production using sign language. Growing up as a partially deaf child in a hearing household and school setting, I felt shy and hesitated to integrate myself among friends and family for fear of being perceived as inconvenient when I needed things repeated. My teachers recommended I take a drama or public speaking class in my Individualized Education Plans so that I could grow out of my timidity. I experienced a Catch-22 situation because I enjoyed the attention I received from being on stage, but I never had any substantial roles because I believed my hearing loss would prevent me from immersing myself in the part. While this fear of stigmatization might have been purely psychological and not a reality, I definitely felt – more than once – that some drama directors and many peers did not understand my hearing loss and did not appear to be accepting.

If I experienced these emotions of ostracism and social exclusion, it is possible that other individuals with hearing loss might be going through similar challenges. How many more eager students would miss out on discovering their love of performance simply because of a physical circumstance beyond their control?

As an aspiring teacher for the deaf, I am discovering that my personal history strongly shapes my approach to mentoring younger generations of hard-of-hearing children. Many children and adolescents I have taught are just as enthusiastic, animated, and talented as their hearing counterparts. However, these students can often get left behind in regards to extracurricular activities because the public perception of children with special needs is that many of them cannot even master simple literacy and math skills required to succeed in school. While these children have hearing-impairments, I am wondering if there are potential explanations. For example, does their hearing loss directly correlate with a lack of confidence in artistic endeavors or does social stigma hold them back from even trying to participate in the arts?

II. Research Question

What strategies do professionals in the arts and special education employ to teach students with hearing loss and what are their goals for using the arts to promote learning?

III. Mini Literature Review

1. Kochar-Lindgren, Kanta.
Theatre Journal, Volume 58, Number 3, October 2006
Pages 417-436

Kochar-Lindgren analyzes the visual aesthetics of deaf theatre and its contribution to spoken language theatre. Disability advocates view American Sign Language as an extra art form that adds to the already visible spectacle of the stage.

2. Gross, A. "All Dressed Up...with Someplace to Go! Technology and Accommodations to Get You 'Out There' Again". Hearing Health. 2009 Fall; 25 (4): 6-11. (journal article – pictorial).

Gross discusses technological innovations that enable deaf and hard of hearing audience members to enjoy movies, sports events, and theatre performances.

3. Drennan, Ward R. "Music and the Cochlear Implant". Hearing Health. 2009 Fall; 25 (4): 16-17.

Drennan analyzes the strengths and weakness of the cochlear implant in regards to music. He states that deaf and hard of hearing individuals with cochlear implants cannot hear pitch well but are able to enjoy rhythm.

4. "Don't Give Up – Tune Up!". Hearing Health. 2009 Fall; 25 (4): 20.

Toddlers and young children with hearing loss who were recently fitted with cochlear implants benefit from listening to music. This practice will acquaint them better with discerning sound, overall, starting at an early age.

5. I'll Scream Later – The Autobiography of Marlee Matlin. Hearing Health. Fall 2009; 25 (4): 17.

Oscar-winning, deaf actress, Marlee Matlin, shares her life experiences on-stage and in film.

6. Marks, Victoria. "Dances for Camera".

This DVD explores a dance company's incorporation of disability into their performance. It redefines body movement of those with physical differences as being beautiful.

IV. Proposed Methodology

1. I will explore my research question by reading literature related to the arts and special education. I will examine the effect of arts performances on the general population and artistic methods that help children with special needs learn best. The therapeutic uses of art will help me understand how to apply arts education for children with hearing loss. Discovering artistic ways to strengthen deaf children's education will make my future pedagogical approaches livelier for both me and (hopefully) the students I will teach.
2. I will interview professionals in deaf education and the arts working in the Los Angeles area.

V. My faculty mentor is Professor Victoria Marks of the UCLA World Arts and Cultures department.

VI. Connection to Disability Studies

My research will advance the field of Disability Studies by examining the role of performance art in the world of disability. So many academic journals focus on the need

for children with special needs to learn academic subjects. Readers might forget that a child – regardless of whether or not he or she has a disability – should have all the possible resources to be well-rounded and fully education. Likewise, articles on arts-education for youth do not mention children with disabilities being able to participate. These topics, on paper, appear completely separate. It is difficult to find literature that concentrates on both. When I am done with my paper, I hope to have been a part of making performance relevant to the disability studies community and make the community of people with varying degrees of ability more immersed in the mainstream world. Maybe, with this paper, individuals will not have to recognize hard-of-hearing performers on the basis of their hearing loss; maybe they will even overlook it and treat the hearing-impaired performer as an equal – both on-stage and off.