

## BOOK REVIEW

## Why Deaf Culture Matters in Deaf Education

Horejes, T. D. (2012). *Social Constructions of Deafness: Examining Deaf Linguacultures in Education*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press. 295 pages.

That Deaf culture matters in deaf education is the idea that most who work closely with Deaf colleagues understand and utilize in their building of practical instructional models as well as in conceptualizing research projects. Deaf culture matters because it represents a strong support mechanism within a hearing society, which is more often not attuned to Deaf persons' best interests. Deaf culture, with American Sign Language (ASL), and visual (and sometimes auditory) ways of experiencing the world, and its networks of people who share their experiences coping in a hearing world, may not be recognized nor tapped for resources but dismissed as irrelevant particularly in light of modern developments in genetic engineering, auditory technology, access to public education, and a decline in attendance in deaf clubs and enrollment in Deaf center schools. However, the modern day Deaf culture, similar to American hearing culture in general, is evolving and incorporating new ways of communicating, socializing, becoming educated, and working through the use of digital technologies. The Deaf culture of today may be different than the Deaf culture of yesterday, but it is still a vibrant and relevant entity (Leigh, Andrews, & Harris, 2018).

Why wouldn't parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers not want to have this important support system available as early as when hearing loss is diagnosed? Horejes examines this very question using a multitude of theoretical frameworks related to social constructions of deafness, identity, culture, and language. He unites these theories using the macro concept of *linguaculture* or the notion that a child's language and culture cannot be separated because they are intertwined.

Horejes proposes that deaf children can be exposed to both worlds—Deaf and hearing—and both languages—English and ASL—through bilingualism and biculturalism in the school. Linguaculture refers to the notion that language and culture are intertwined and are both needed for the Deaf child in forming his Deaf identity. For the author, the linguaculture of the oral classroom and the hearing world can be broadened as it happened in his own personal life, and it can become more inclusive and be united with the linguaculture of sign bilingualism.

Related to sign bilingualism or ASL-based teaching, for example, in the teaching of literacy and language, there are educational activities such as shared or guided book reading that incorporate Deaf cultural practices as potential tools. These tools include using Deaf mothers and Deaf teachers as ASL storytellers in the classroom. In addition, they can model the using

eye gaze, visual, and joint attention as means to regulate the child's attention to the teacher and to the storybook during the reading lesson. Other Deaf cultural and visual components that can be incorporated into literacy activities include rhythmic movements, exaggerated facial expressions, increased signed space, and exaggerated sign size during the shared book reading (Leigh, Andrews, & Harris, 2018). After reading and signing whole stories, during vocabulary reading activities, teachers can build on the connections between signed meanings of words and the language of written texts enabling comprehension for literacy using techniques such as "chaining" (Humphries & MacDougall, 1999). Even the furniture of the classroom shows how culture is embedded in teaching practices. For example, Horejes mentions that the crescent-shaped table in the ASL classroom allows children to have more face-to-face interactions which increases their socialization, collaboration, and stimulates metacognition and conceptualization. The ASL classroom is also "decorated" differently as it has culturally relevant ASL posters, the ABCs in sign language, books on the shelves with ASL vocabulary, other materials which model the two languages—English and ASL. All of these practices, according to Horejes, enhance Deaf cultural transmission and enhance the teaching of English literacy.

Similarly to Horejes' ideas, in his work with Deaf adult readers who are balanced bilinguals but who came from different linguacultures (some were orally taught and others sign taught), Hoffman (2014) found that linguaculture or the intertwining of language and culture was evident in their reading comprehension strategies of college textbooks. He found his five Deaf adult participants to use the skill of translanguaging (input in one language and output in the second language) while reading a text. For example, when reading (signing) English texts aloud, they did not simply translate the text from English to ASL but used spoken English, their knowledge of Deaf culture, ASL expansions, rhetorical questions, their background knowledge, metacognitive strategies, rereading, contextual cues, in order to comprehend the print. In other words, they used their multiple linguacultures in making meaning from print.

Horejes recognizes the divisions and conflicts between the linguaculture of oral pedagogy and sign pedagogy. However, he calls for "collaborative inquiry" and suggests "that both camps sit at the same table and discuss ways to work together for constructive collaborative inquiry to elevate dialogues on some of the issues

within the current state of deaf education” (p. 98). The [Common Ground Project \(2015\)](#), a joint project between the Conference of Educational Administrators for Schools for the Deaf (CEASD), an organization supporting signing-based pedagogy schools and OPTION Schools, which is an organization of oral-based pedagogy schools, have been meeting since 2013 to do just that—to see if both organizations can identify areas for collaboration to help all infants, children, and youth whether they come from an oral-pedagogy languaculture or a sign-pedagogy languaculture.

Clearly, Horejes has raised the *languaculture* term as one that can be investigated by both practicing teachers and educational researchers and can help us further the case that Deaf culture matters in Deaf Education. Graduate students and researchers in deaf education, sociology, and psychology will find this book rich in theoretical detail and ideas for future research. Qualitative researchers may find the appendices on his research methods helpful. On the practice side, teachers will find this book full of classroom applications as Horejes provides ideas on how to equip the teacher with bilingual teaching knowledge and techniques, as well as how to set up the classroom stocking it with ASL and English bilingual materials, as well as how to set up the desks and chairs to establish a visual learning environment. Horejes’ classroom architecture is similar to the concept of DeafSpace promoted by Deaf architects at Gallaudet University ([Leigh, Andrews, & Harris, 2018](#)). DeafSpace provides a space where children can interact, communicate, and collaborate with each other using both of the languages and not face architectural barriers. DeafSpace is a cultural tradition that recognizes basic elements of an architectural expression unique to deaf experiences. The study of DeafSpace offers valuable insight

about the interrelationship between the senses, the ways Deaf persons built environments that reflect their cultural identity ([www.gallaudet.edu/american-sign-language-and-deaf-studies/deafspace-institute.html](http://www.gallaudet.edu/american-sign-language-and-deaf-studies/deafspace-institute.html); last retrieved June 21, 2016).

Finally, Horejes’ compelling personal story is a major plus to this academic text and will provide interest and inspiration for Deaf readers from different languacultural life scripts.

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## References

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