

WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS AND BLACK DEAF PEOPLE

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Good afternoon, Members of the PRWAD and Friends. Today I would like to present some thoughts and problems concerning work-study programs and the black deaf person. To discuss black deaf people is to talk about something that has far too rarely been talked about openly before in a meeting of this kind. One major breakthrough came about from the Babbidge report in 1964 which referred to the need for improved educational facilities for black deaf people. In 1967, Ernest Hairston reported on a graduate project he undertook at the Leadership Training Program in the Area of Deafness on the black deaf of Los Angeles; in 1970, the National Census of the Deaf began efforts to locate black deaf people; in 1971, Frank Bowe published an article on "Non-white Deaf Persons" in the June issue of the *American Annals of the Deaf*; and Dr. Larry Stewart is now working on a Model Cities project to help the deaf in Harlem.

Prior to this, there was relative silence. The people who have raised this issue are the rehabilitation people and not the educators. This is a credit to you of the rehabilitation profession and to PRWAD.

Perhaps some of the blame for this neglect rests on school administrators and boards who were content to remain oblivious to the problems of black deaf people. A large part of the blame, too, rests on the failure of successful black people, both deaf and hearing, to speak out.

It is my feeling that the problems of black deaf people have not been brought to the front due to the fact that there are so few black professionals in the field of education of the deaf.

The lack of black professionals affects the black deaf child very much. He has no models to emulate or to identify with, and more often than not, he stops trying to succeed as he gradually begins to feel that no one before him has succeeded; therefore, he cannot expect to be a success. They see nothing in sight to inspire them to achievement. I believe that the first step to take is to work with parents of black deaf children. We have to get them

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involved. I feel that this area is one where we as black deaf professionals who have been through the mill can tell it like it is.

The majority of black deaf children are far behind the progress made by their white counterparts. They are without ambition because they have been deprived of opportunity. In my study of the black deaf in Watts, I found that very few of them completed the eighth grade and that when it comes to the matter of finding a job, they are at a distinct disadvantage.

The Lunde-Bigman national survey (1959) with 344 non-white deaf subjects showed that 2.4 percent of the males and none of the females reported attending any college. In Schein's study (1968) of the deaf community of Washington, D.C., he found that 41 percent of the white deaf males and 34 percent of the white deaf females had attended college as compared to 9 percent of the non-white deaf males and 5 percent of the non-white deaf females. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Percentage of white and non-white deaf persons reporting any college attendance

	Lunde-Bigman Study, 1959	Schein Study, 1968
White Deaf		
Male	9.5	41
Female	10.1	34
Non-white deaf		
Male	2.4	9
Female	0.0	5

In 1968, Alan B. Crammatte made a nation-wide effort to uncover black deaf professionals, but found none. The median earnings of white and non-white deaf persons as reported by the Lunde-Bigman study (1959) and the Schein study (1968) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Median earnings: White and non-white deaf persons

	Lunde-Bigman Study, 1959	Schein Study, 1968
White Deaf		
Male	\$3000-3999	\$6473
Female	2000-2999	3542
Non-white Deaf		
Male	\$2000-2999	\$2611
Female	1000-1999	990

These statements may sound too sweeping, too distressing, but they serve to illustrate that the problems of the black deaf are such that they deserve immediate attention.

I think most of the answers we are searching for can be obtained under our present school structure with a few adjustments.

At the North Carolina School for the Deaf we have an on-the-job training program for students in the twelfth grade. We have students placed in upholstery and dry cleaning establishments and in some department stores. At the moment, this is only for those who are doing well academically, with a few exceptions. Other schools may have close to the same thing. I believe on-the-job training should be made available to those in the lower half of the class which is where most black deaf children are.

Two advantages of on-the-job training come immediately to mind. First, it helps acquaint students with the world of work and exposes them to new and different situations outside of the protective environment of the residential setting. This exposure helps the student set realistic goals and also serves as reinforcement where improving school work is concerned. In addition, it helps in minimizing the apparent frustration many deaf students tend to feel towards their slow and sometimes unrewarding progression through school to the ultimate goal of gainful employment.

Second, on-the-job training helps expose employers to the student, his ability, and the problems of deafness. Frequently, this paves the way for employment opportunities for additional deaf people.

What can the schools and vocational rehabilitation do? How can they work together? First, I am proposing consolidation of schools in those states which still have separate facilities, one of which is mainly white, the other mainly black. This would bring black and white students under one roof and could help facilitate better education for all deaf people. Although other problems might arise, both groups could benefit from such exposure.

Second, there should be recruitment and training of more black teachers and professionals in the fields of education and vocational rehabilitation.

Third, work evaluation programs should be implemented. Too often we do not know what deaf people can do. Sadly, the black deaf person often does not know what he can do either. Evaluation programs might give us some surprising answers.

Fourth, vocational rehabilitation might establish summer programs for evaluation and training of the adult deaf on a state-wide basis.

I challenge you to develop a genuine interest in your clients, regardless of whether they are Black, Puerto Rican, Indian, Chicano or whatever. Communicate. Learn how they think, what they think, how they feel, and help them to obtain training and employment that will give them a sense of self-respect, confidence, and pride. You know and I know that not everyone can make it, but your job is to rehabilitate, and "if you don't do it - it won't get done."

Thank you.

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