

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHANGE IN ATTITUDES TOWARD DEAFNESS AMONG HEARING ADOLESCENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Since early civilization, deaf persons have been thwarted in their attempts to be fully accepted members of society by the attitudes of hearing persons. A historical overview of the deaf culture striving to attain its own autonomy reveals that, in western society, hearing people traditionally have held negative views of hearing impaired people.

The twentieth century has been characterized by substantial legislation in the areas of vocational rehabilitation and education which have affected the deaf population. As a result of this legislation and other significant developments over the past four hundred years, it would seem that the concept of deaf people as productive, useful members of society would be widely accepted. However, recent research (Emerton and Rothman, 1978; Barker, 1953; Bender, 1970) contradicts the existence of positive attitudes toward hearing impaired people.

Research has demonstrated that the attitudes of hearing people toward hearing impaired individuals may adversely affect a hearing impaired person in many aspects of his or her life. Markman (1972) stated that it is not the communication problems that are responsible for the conflict between hearing and hearing impaired people, but rather the existence of negative attitudes, which are a basic human condition, that perpetuate conflict within the two groups of people:

Human beings are basically egocentric, that is they believe that everyone's perception and experience of "reality" is essentially no different than their own and therefore it follows that difference

is seen as deviance which is equated with inferiority. So we have the formula: difference = deviance = inferiority. In the general public this attitude has led to many social injustices but the attitude is to some degree understandable, given that our education system spends little time preventing or ameliorating the situation (p. 11).

Attitudes may also affect a deaf person's educational aspirations (Schein, 1968), vocational ambitions (Rodda, 1969), work adjustment (Altschuler and Baroff, 1963), and self-concept (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1932). In addition, Ramirez (1975) stated that negative attitudes toward deaf people by hearing people may act as real barriers to the success of deaf persons seeking employment, educational opportunity, or interpersonal relationships.

With knowledge of the existence of negative attitudes of hearing persons toward hearing impaired individuals and the profound impact which such attitudes can have on the deaf person, the researchers elected to study such attitudes during the critical years of early adolescence.

A pilot study was conducted emphasizing presentations about deafness given by hearing impaired students to their hearing peers. As a result of this experience, the hearing impaired students appeared to learn and benefit from the preparation and execution of this project and there appeared to be an increased amount of positive interaction and increased understanding between the hearing and hearing impaired students. As a result

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of this effort, the current study was designed in an attempt to further clarify and quantify this observed benefit.

A review of the literature indicated that there is general agreement that deaf awareness programs are a necessary step prior to mainstreaming efforts. A few programs described in the literature have successfully inserted these programs into the mainstreamed curriculum (Vernon and Prickett, 1976; Northcutt, 1970, Kindred, 1976). As a result of these programs, it appears that some positive additional change has occurred. However, most deaf awareness programs have been presented by a hearing adult to the hearing teachers rather than to the students involved. No research has quantified the amount of attitudinal change that has occurred or has determined the conditions under which the greatest amount of attitudinal change occurs.

Thus, there would seem to be sufficient support in the literature to warrant further investigation of the effect of deaf awareness programs taught by hearing impaired students to their hearing peers on attitudinal change.

Methodology

This study was designed to assess the amount of attitudinal change which occurs after participating in a deaf awareness program presented by a hearing adult, the amount of attitudinal change which occurs when the program is presented by hearing impaired adolescents, and the difference in degree of change occurring between the two groups. This research was conducted at Westmont Junior High School in Westmont, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago. All hearing and hearing impaired subjects were enrolled at Westmont Junior High School in the sixth grade.

Two sets of students were selected. The first set was composed of seventy hearing students. They were chosen for their lack of formal contact with hearing impaired students in the school and were then divided into two groups. In addition, these students were chosen by homerooms that were group-

ed by the random selection of a computer, thus ensuring a wide sampling of students with regard to intellectual and maturity levels.

The second set consisted of six hearing impaired students with severe to profound hearing losses. These six students were selected on the basis of grade level, possession of skills in preparing and presenting a speech to a group of people, non-involvement in academically integrated classes, schedule compatibility, and expressed desire to participate in the project.

Two months prior to viewing the deaf awareness program the hearing students completed a revised copy of an "Attitudes Toward Deafness Scale" (Appendix) which was developed by Cowen, Bobrove, Rockway, and Stevenson (1967). The "Attitudes Toward Deafness Scale" is a twenty-five item scale which measures positive and negative attitudes commonly held toward deaf people. The respondent is required to answer each statement according to his or her level of agreement or disagreement.

Since the original scale is directed toward an adult respondent, it was necessary for the researchers to adapt the scale to ensure that the reading level was appropriate for use with sixth grade children. In an effort to lend reliability to the instrument, the Dale-Chall Reading Scale was used to determine the reading level of the scale. This scale yielded a fifth-sixth grade reading assessment of the instrument. In addition, three faculty members from the Department of Communicative Disorders at Northern Illinois University, all with extensive backgrounds in deafness, critiqued the scale and judged it as appropriate for use with child respondents. A copy of the scale used in this study appears as an appendix.

During the months of January and February 1980, the researchers worked with the selected six hearing impaired students in preparation for the deaf awareness program. The researchers spent three, forty-five minute sessions weekly throughout a six-week period of time, which totalled approximately fourteen hours of preparation time. During

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the initial three weeks, the researchers and the students collectively decided upon the topics which the group judged to be most important when presenting information about deafness, the actual content of the topics,

and the accompanying materials and activities to help clarify the topics. A copy of the topical outline and material which were utilized in the program appears as Table I.

TABLE I

DAY	STUDENT	TOPIC	MATERIALS USED
Monday	#1	Introduction and Purpose	
Monday	#2	Causes of Deafness	a. a poster citing the five major causes of deafness b. student-drawn pictures illustrating each of the above factors
Tuesday	#3	How Deaf People Learn and Communicate	a. a poster explaining the various components of "total communication" b. a demonstration of body language, mime, fingerspelling, and sign language c. teaching the alphabet to the hearing students
Wednesday	#4	Hearing Aids and Other Devices	a. a poster describing the parts and functions of body aids and ear level aids b. a poster illustrating various devices used by hearing impaired people in everyday life c. a TDD demonstration
Thursday	#5	How Deaf People Feel	a. sign language interpretation of the poem "I Hear Your Hand" with accompanying record
Friday	#6	How Deaf and Hearing People Can Get Along Together	a. eight transparencies taken from the book <i>Mainstreaming the Hearing Impaired Child</i> by J. Orlansky b. listen to the record "Getting Through" (Zenith Corporation) for a demonstration of what it sounds like to be a hearing impaired person wearing a hearing aid

The remaining three weeks were used to develop the individual skills necessary for presenting a speech. The hearing impaired students wrote their speeches on 3" x 5" cards, memorized the content of the speeches, developed skills in adlibbing, learned signs for the new vocabulary in their speeches, and refined public presentation skills. All material and procedures were rehearsed several times with the students prior to the presentation.

At the end of February, the deaf awareness program was presented to four home-rooms each day throughout a one-week period. The hearing impaired students alter-

nated in presenting their topics to two home-rooms with the assistance of an interpreter whose role was to help with difficulties in communication when necessary. Simultaneously, the researcher presented an identical deaf awareness program to two other home-rooms. After each daily topic was completed, a general question and answer period was held to foster dialogue between the hearing students and the speaker for that group.

On the Monday following the completion of the deaf awareness program, the "Attitudes Toward Deafness Scale" was readministered to the hearing students during their home-

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room periods with the same directions as previously given and with numbers assigned to each subject so as to facilitate pairing first and second responses.

Results and Conclusions

Data was collected from seventy hearing students who had participated in the deaf awareness program; however, a total of seven "Attitudes Toward Deafness Scales" were completed improperly and were eliminated from inclusion in this study. Three additional scales were randomly removed in order to balance the numbers of subjects in each group. Group I was composed of the hearing students participating in the deaf awareness program presented by hearing im-

paired students while Group 2 was composed of the hearing students participating in the deaf awareness program presented by a hearing adult knowledgeable in the area of deafness.

Pre (trial 1) and post (trial 2) scores were calculated for each individual subject according to the scoring criteria set forth by Cowen, *et al.* (1967). In order to answer the questions of difference between the experimental groups, a two-factor mixed design with repeated measures on one factor was used. As a result of using this test, the size and direction of the attitudinal change was measured.

As a result of statistical analyses, the following data were obtained:

TABLE II
VALUES OBTAINED FROM THE STATISTICAL ANALYSES

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	MEAN SQUARES	F VALUES	P
Total	11653.325	119			
Between Subjects	10246.325	59			
Conditions	35.2084	1	35.2084	.1998	—
Error _b	10211.1166	58	176.0537		
Within Subjects	1407	60			
Trials	232.4083	1	232.4083	11.5548	.005
Trials x Conditions	8.0083	1	8.0083	.3981	—
Error _w	1166.5834	58	20.1135		

Differences in the mean scores of subjects were indicated by the results of the F-test. Differences were significant at a .005 confidence level on analysis of trials (differences between pre and post attitudes), but not significant on the analysis of conditions (differences between Group I and Group II) or trials x conditions (differences between interaction methods).

Thus, it was found that both groups of students (hearing students participating in a deaf awareness program given by their hearing impaired peers and those hearing students participating in a deaf awareness program given by a hearing adult knowledgeable in the area of deafness) significant-

ly increased their positive attitudes toward deafness as a result of participating in a deaf awareness program. It was also found that one group did not significantly produce more change than the other group. Finally, it was found that the variable of a hearing impaired peer versus a hearing adult presenter did not significantly influence the degree of attitudinal change.

Discussion and Conclusions

An analysis of these results reveal evidence that in this study, hearing adolescents' positive attitudes toward deafness did increase as a result of participating in a deaf awareness program. This finding has demon-

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strated that the initial attitudes of hearing adolescents may be of a negative nature. It also indicates that one cannot assume that a hearing person will possess positive attitudes toward deafness when his life experiences have not allowed him to come into contact with or experience what deafness is. Yet, when measures are taken to change attitudes of hearing people toward deafness, positive attitudinal change may occur within the hearing person.

It may also be concluded from this finding that this deaf awareness program, and perhaps those similar to this one, was successful in changing attitudes and encouraging awareness of disabled persons. Positive attitudinal change may occur as a result of participation in a relatively short-term, concise, yet informative deaf awareness program.

The second area of consideration of this study focused on the interactive method used in a deaf awareness program. It was found that, although positive attitudinal change occurred in both groups of hearing adolescents, one group did not produce a more significant amount of attitudinal change than did the other group. These results do not imply that a hearing presenter knowledgeable in the area of deafness will disseminate information with any less impact than the hearing impaired presenter(s) will. Rather, it is important to note that the any presenters will share information in their own individual styles, based on their experiences and skills. These factors will probably vary highly between hearing and hearing impaired presenters.

This second finding also has implications for the presentations of future deaf awareness programs. It appears that, in this study, the hearing variable (hearing or hearing impaired) of the person(s) presenting the program is not as significant as the presentation of the program itself. If future deaf awareness programs are conducted, the presenter may be either hearing or hearing impaired and similar positive results would be expected.

Results of this study might be useful in addressing the question of who is responsible for presenting deaf awareness programs. Based on the evidence found in this study that either a hearing impaired person or a hearing person knowledgeable about deafness will foster positive attitudes through a deaf awareness program, it seems appropriate to conclude that it be a shared responsibility among all people who have the abilities and qualifications to successfully implement deaf awareness programs. Perhaps a combined approach utilizing hearing and hearing impaired presenters might yield beneficial results as well.*

In summary, this study has supported the view that negative attitudes do exist toward hearing impaired persons and that utilizing a deaf awareness program involving either hearing or hearing impaired presenter(s) is an effective method in fostering positive attitudes. The results of this study reinforce the notion that many persons have the potential and ability to be change agents in helping to increase the understanding between hearing and hearing impaired persons.

*Research studies which explore alternative deaf awareness programs might provide valuable information in this area. Innovative programs with different formats, varying conditions and other age populations could be compared to determine which program produces the greatest amount of attitudinal change. This information could be beneficial to the fields of education, counseling, mental health, and rehabilitation.

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APPENDIX

Attitudes Toward Deafness Scale

Read each sentence. Circle the answer that tells your opinion.

	SA — strongly agree	A — agree	D — disagree	SD — strongly disagree
1. The deaf usually do not act as grown-up as the hearing do.	SA	A	D	SD
2. Deaf people are more nervous than hearing people.	SA	A	D	SD
3. It is impossible to really get to know a deaf person well.	SA	A	D	SD
4. Deaf people somehow seem sadder and think more about themselves than hearing people do.	SA	A	D	SD
5. The deaf do not seem to be bothered by usual life events any more than hearing people.	SA	A	D	SD
6. Because a deaf person needs someone to feel sorry for him/her, it is very important that the deaf person have someone understanding to talk with.	SA	A	D	SD
7. Deaf people seem to complain more about health problems than hearing people do.	SA	A	D	SD
8. Deaf people often act odd.	SA	A	D	SD
9. A person who is deaf has an equal chance to be born a leader as anyone else.	SA	A	D	SD
10. Deaf people seem to be "too" polite and do not act naturally.	SA	A	D	SD
11. Most deaf people think they are worthless.	SA	A	D	SD
12. Most deaf people are unhappy with themselves.	SA	A	D	SD
13. The deaf have as many interests and hobbies as the hearing have.	SA	A	D	SD
14. The deaf adult is not as "grown-up" as a hearing adult.	SA	A	D	SD
15. It's hard to understand the deaf because they stay in a group and don't talk to hearing people very much.	SA	A	D	SD
16. Deaf people feel less equal to hearing people because they must depend so much on others.	SA	A	D	SD
17. It seems that deaf children are not as smart as hearing children most of the time.	SA	A	D	SD
18. Being deaf is as bad as not being able to use your arms and legs.	SA	A	D	SD
19. A deaf person cannot take the risk of talking back to other people.	SA	A	D	SD
20. You should not expect the deaf person to do alot.	SA	A	D	SD
21. A deaf person is always worried about what will happen to him.	SA	A	D	SD
22. A deaf person is not afraid to tell you what his feelings are.	SA	A	D	SD
23. Deaf people get upset faster than hearing people.	SA	A	D	SD
24. Deaf people seem to have more fears about the world than hearing people do.	SA	A	D	SD
25. Deaf people usually do not trust other people.	SA	A	D	SD