

Seventeen Voices, One Purpose: Providing Services for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Steven R. Sligar
Center for Sight & Hearing
Rockford, Illinois

Abstract

For a variety of reasons, the population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and attending mainstream postsecondary institutions has increased over the years. These students present access, administrative, and financial challenges to the institution serving them. A case study was conducted to examine Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services at William Harper College to understand how the services started and are maintained. The results of this study and a self-study questionnaire that is based on the results are presented.

Introduction

For a variety of reasons, including a societal effort to increase overall access, the population of students with disabilities attending postsecondary institutions has increased. Three key pieces of legislation – Section 504, the ADA and the IDEA – promote this growth of access. This growth is demonstrated by the increase from approximately 3% in 1978 to 19% in 1996 of all students with disabilities who attended a postsecondary institution (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). There was also an increase in attendance of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. In the 1992-93 academic school year there were an estimated 20,400 students who were deaf or hard of hearing, attending a mainstream postsecondary education program (Lewis & Farris, 1994). By 1999 there was an increase to 23,860 students (Lewis & Farris, 1999) that resulted in the need for more services and a corresponding increase in the number of programs. In 1972 a national study identified twenty-six programs, including Gallaudet and NTID, that served this population (DeNio, 1972). In 1999 a repeat of this study showed 148 programs nationally (Rawlings, Karchmer, DeCaro & Allen, 1999).

Research into programs and services for students with disabilities has surveyed needs and service delivery practices. Within the area of deafness, there are numerous articles that offer information on ways to improve service delivery; the primary source of these articles is PEPNet conference proceedings. Other publications – such as, the National Task Force (Stuckless, Ashmore, Schroedel & Simon, 1997) – recommend a best prac-

tices approach to service delivery. There is scant information on how services were established, and there are no studies on how a program has actually maintained services after establishment. Gugerty & Knutsen (2000) studied effective practices of service delivery. They identified, evaluated, and described a program for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Methods and Procedures

A qualitative approach was employed in this case study with a purposeful sampling to select the site, 17 participants, 99 institutional documents, and 34 pictures. Instrumentation was developed that allowed for concurrent data collection using both audio and video recordings and a protocol for interviews, materials review, and 15 field observations. MS Word and NUD*IST NVivo software served as the data management and storage mediums. The overall strategy of analysis was descriptive in nature with an application of three different interpretive approaches – chronological, life history, and ethno methodology. During data collection, open and axial coding with constant comparison enabled the development and identification of saturated categories. Risks to the trustworthiness of the data were minimized by participant review of their interviews, triangulation of the data sources, three different types of peer debriefings, and member checks through out the project. Finally, ethical issues were found to be risks to the participants and Harper College and were handled by maintenance of confidentiality and member checks. In addition, the need to apply cross-culture research guidelines was identified with corresponding inclusion in the overall design.

Results

The overall conduct of the study was guided by the following question: How were support services for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing at Harper College developed and maintained? The question's answer is found within the results from four related research questions and is presented as a model.

Research Question 1

How do the people involved with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) describe them?

Interview results indicated that the DHHS mission aligns with the mission of Harper College, particularly with an emphasis on community service. Services were described in terms of comprehensiveness and as desig-

nated specifically for deaf students. The closer the participant was to the services, then the more the services were detailed. All participants were aware of and had contact with interpreting services.

Research Question 2

How are students who are deaf or hard of hearing viewed by the institution and by the program offering services?

The students were characterized first by their identification with deaf culture, communication preference (ASL or English), and educational background. Next, age and ethnicity were identified. Both the services description and student perceptions were influenced by the amount and type of contact the participant had with the services and students.

Research Question 3

How did the development of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services unfold?

DHHS developed along three lines, e.g., administrative, programmatic, and a deaf presence. The rise, decline, and leveling in the number of students receiving DHHS shaped the administrative events. First, in 1972 a separate Hearing Impaired Program was established. In 1980 this was combined with two separate programs for other students with disabilities to form one administrative unit. Two key and ongoing sources, institutional funds and an external source, provided the funds during these formative years. In 1989 there was also a shift in the organizational structure when services were moved from academic to student services. Programmatically, the college saw an initial development of support services and – in 1985 – the establishment of English as a Second Language program (modified in 2000). A formal deaf presence at Harper has been maintained by a deafness organization, an annual celebration of deafness, and a peer-mentoring program.

Research Question 4

How and why are the services maintained?

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services are maintained by five types of influence. First is the temporal influence, which is comprised of a legacy of service, reputation, and institutional supports, including administration and funding. This has developed over the last 28 years and places DHHS within the institutional memory. Only one of the participants knew a time when there was no DHHS.

Second is personal influence that was evidenced through the use of two metaphors – family and champion – and the qualities of the service providers. Many of the participants spoke about the service providers as if they were family. The metaphors included comparisons to family members or direct comments about the participant's own family. There were also champions along the way who advocated for the services and initiated changes. Participants external to DHHS made com-

ments about the professionalism and willingness to provide more than what was requested by the DHHS staff.

The third influence included learning with a stronger emphasis on informal rather than formal training events. The participants described informal ways they learned about services or how to use the service. Particular emphasis was placed on interpreters and how they have considerable influence to help faculty, staff, and administration learn about the students.

Fourth is a sense of a deaf culture that has developed, because deaf persons have been present throughout the history of DHHS. This culture has generated a dilemma in the provision of services to persons who are not culturally deaf. It is important that their needs and requests for services are met, too. The deaf presence has also generated a paradox as a separate culture surviving in a mainstream institution. The students are taught to function within the mainstream at the same time a familiar deaf environment is maintained.

A climate of acceptance serves as a broader influence, because not only does it encompass the other influences, but it is also one in its own right. A climate of acceptance evolved from a tolerance of services as a disability issue to an institution-wide response to a group of people. DHHS has evolved from a vehicle of compliance to one of service for students.

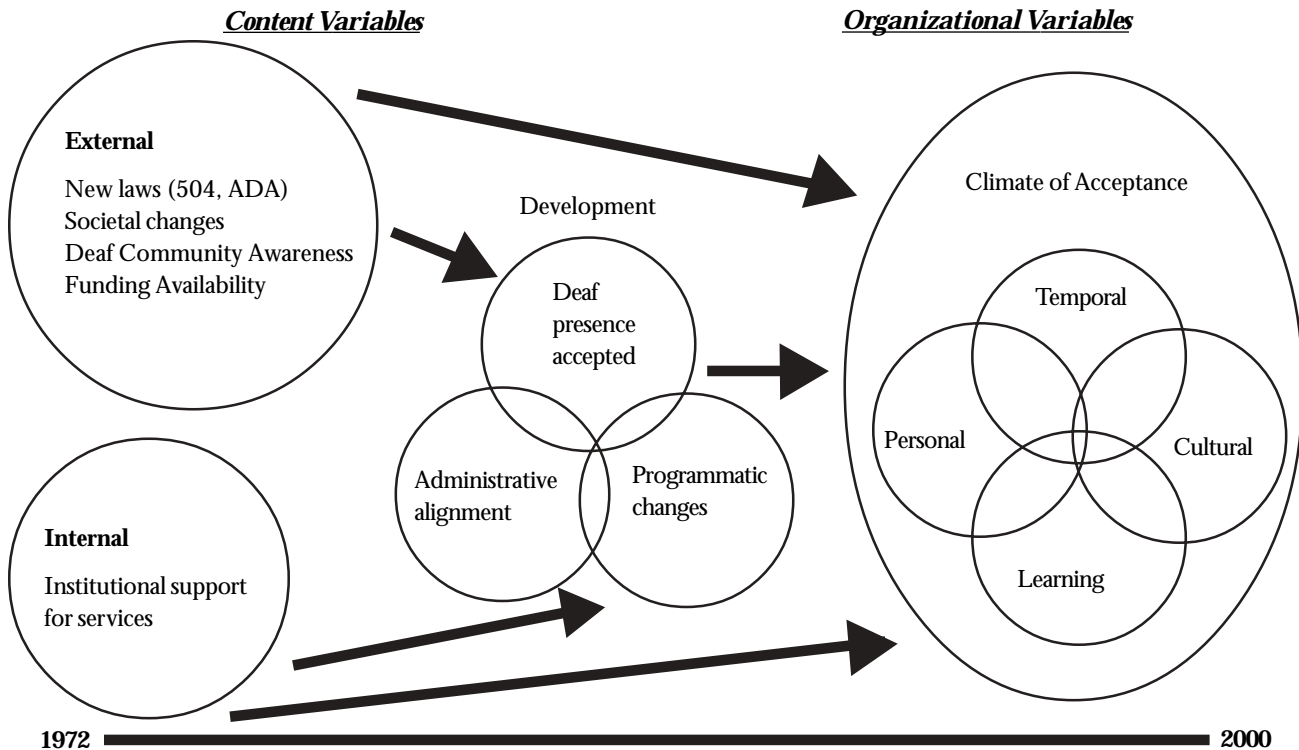
Model of Development and Maintenance

Two types of influences are used to explain the process of development and maintenance, and these are presented in Figure 1. First were content variables that served to influence the start of services; these are divided into two types – external and internal. Externally, legal precedents and requirements, societal changes, the presence of a deaf community, available funding, and inter-agency links combined with internal institutional support. These combined influences were the catalyst for the beginnings and initial development of the services. It is at this point where the organizational (second) variable came into play to develop and maintain services. Through a dynamic process of administrative and programmatic changes combined with a deaf presence, the services were initiated and able to remain within Harper College. Maintenance has occurred, because a climate of institutional acceptance developed over time with influences from the persons learning about the services and those served and because of an institutional respect for a deaf culture.

Limitations

A case study approach was selected, because it provided an in-depth way to study DHHS at Harper College. The uniqueness of the institution, participants, and circumstances that contributed to DHHS development and maintenance served to limit the generalizability of the results. Harper College is located in a predominately white, suburban community that is economically

Figure 1: Maintenance and Development Model of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services



advantaged. The participants were mostly white females. The beginnings of the program could not be recreated in today's society because of the legal and attitudinal changes that have occurred since 1972.

Discussion

A discussion of the findings is based either on their relationship with the literature or uniqueness to Harper College.

Findings That Relate to the Literature

The findings that are related to three areas of literature – deafness, services and programs, and adult education – are discussed.

Deafness

Cultural identification as a deaf person is discussed with a primary indicator of inclusion or exclusion based upon the individual's use of ASL (Higgins, 1987; Padden, 1989). The first characteristic describing the students by the participants was the students' linguistic preference, which then categorized them as culturally deaf, deaf, or hard of hearing. Deafness is a culture that is horizontally transmitted (Padden, 1989), and the deaf participants described this process. They were able to relate to the students as communication and cultural peers and thereby foster the development of a sense of self as a deaf person. The formal recognition of deafness events by Harper College also served to reinforce the presence of a deaf culture.

Services and Programs

One specific link with description of services, three links with development, and four with maintenance were identified.

The comprehensiveness of DHHS parallels the suggestions for colleges and universities that serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Gardner, Barr & Lachs, 2001; Rawlings, et al., 1999; Stuckless, et al., 1997), including an emphasis on staff development (Kolvitz, Cederbaum, Clark & Durham, 2000; Schuck & Kroeger, 1993).

The beginnings of the Hearing Impaired Program were grounded in the medical model of disability with its focus on pathology and the divergence of a person with a disability from the norm. Over time a change to a more interactional perspective (Chelberg, Harbour & Juarez, 1998; Kroeger & Schuck, 1993) took place. Harper College's first response to students was to direct them to the clinic. In 1985, with the establishment of an ESL program for deaf students, there was a clear shift in perspective. The beginnings also included the establishment of programmatic and funding links with other agencies that continues to the present. Gugerty (1999) found interagency collaboration was one of the characteristics of an effective program. The continual expansion and evolution of DHHS that was demonstrated by the administrative and programmatic changes are indicative of a capacity for change (Gugerty, 1999; Vreeburg Izzo & Hertzfeld, n.d.).

DHHS maintenance is characterized by administra-

tive support and services for students, faculty, and staff. This is perceived to be effective and empowerment-oriented (Gugerty, 1999). Institutional commitment is proven by the level of services offered and through recognition of DHHS as an important part of the administration. One important aspect of recognition is that personnel have designated job descriptions, and only competent and qualified personnel are hired (Kolvitz et al., 2000). Another part of maintenance is that DHHS staff members constantly seek resources and a better way to provide services (Gugerty, 1999). A final component of maintenance is an accepting climate, which is also recognized in the literature as critical (Chelberg, et al. 1998; Getzel, Stodden & Briel, 2001; Gugerty & Knusten, 2000; NCSPEs, April 2000a; Ross, 1998).

Adult Education

Both the participants and institutional documentation are indicative of the significant amount of formal learning opportunities that are also found in the literature of adult education. A more discrete, though significant, link is with the literature on learning from experience (Candy, 1990; Miller, 2000). This is clear, as faculty members describe their experiences working with ADS staff, and it is these relationships and interaction with the students that cause a personal change in perspective about deafness.

Findings Unique to Harper College

The institutional recognition of deafness and the temporal and personal influences of maintenance are unique to this study.

Because a deaf culture is recognized and nourished, DHHS experiences an inadvertent dilemma in the delivery of services to persons who are not culturally deaf. These students represent the mainstream more than the minority and, as such, receive mandated services, but they are not specifically included nor are they intentionally excluded from the deaf activities or classes. Another influence is the paradox of maintenance of a separate minority (deaf) culture while at the same time promoting access and inclusion in the mainstream of campus. The solution to the dilemma does not appear to be problematic, because the necessary services are provided upon request. The paradox seems to be managed by following the cultural rules of the host, i.e., when in the mainstream, make modifications for access, and, when in the deaf world, change the environment to suit the needs of deaf people.

The influence of temporality has produced a legacy, which continues to provide a momentum for maintenance. The services are situated in the collective history of the institution and extend beyond the specific memories of any one participant. The legacy is strengthened by the positive reputation of the staff as a group, which, in turn, is founded in a belief that the services are unique.

The reputation was built on personal relationships that developed into inter- or intradepartmental relationships both on and off campus. Another unique influence is the personal one with its two metaphorical descriptions of champion and family.

Implications

The findings related to the literature support the surveys and prescriptive recommendations as described. In order for an institution to develop a level of services beyond legally mandated accommodations, a long-term commitment must exist to allow time for services to become positioned in the mainstream of the organization. Learning by experience needs to be included as a part of the professional development activities along with formal training. A deaf presence and culture are important influences on service delivery; therefore, deaf staff must be hired to provide or manage services.

The findings that are unique to Harper have programmatic implications too. These include an organizational need to:

- Plan to handle the potential service dilemma and cultural paradox;
- Look for and use a champion to advocate for services and bring in new ideas; and
- Understand the possibility of the development of close working relationships and manage them as part of the process.

An Application of the Findings

Using the variables of influence, a self-study questionnaire was developed and is included in Appendix A. The questionnaire is intended for use as an analytical and discussion tool to help determine if there are specific institutional strengths that will support or hinder service development. Characteristics to be considered include the following:

- Links with external agencies;
- A par level of institutional support when compared with similar departments and when the program administrator has access to college administrators who set policy and the budget;
 - Program changes from year to year – a dynamic program;
 - The presence and celebration of a deaf culture;
 - Identification of the services as part of the institution and not as a one-person operation;
 - Services and staff are described as high quality and known throughout the institution;
 - Formal and informal learning are available and managed; and
 - The recognition and management of service dilemmas or cultural paradoxes, if they exist.

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Appendix A: A Checklist for the Development & Maintenance of Support Services

What are the external agencies/groups with which you have formal/informal links?

- Community rehabilitation programs
- Deaf consumer groups
- Independent living centers
- Other postsecondary institutions
- Professional organizations (such as, AHEAD or ADARA)
- Rehabilitation services
- Residential service provider
- Other

What kind and level of institutional support do you have? How are your requests for support (e.g. funds, space allocation, positions, personnel selection, student recruitment, etc.) met? When compared with other programs, do you routinely receive:

- Low priority
- Consideration the same as others
- Preferential treatment

Where are your services placed within the organization?

To whom does the supervisor of Disability Support Services report?

Are the college or university programs:

- The same from year to year or constantly changing and trying new things?

Is there a deaf presence? What specific events are hosted?

- A celebration of deafness, such as Deaf Awareness Week
- Formal deaf clubs?
- Do these receive institutional funds?

How long have the services been in existence?

How do the faculty and administration identify the services?

- By a person (champion)?
- By the name of the program?
- By the role of the staff, such as interpreter?

How do faculty and administration describe the service staff?

- Unknown by faculty and administration
- Known but only by function, such as captionist
- Known by a reputation for high quality service and professionalism

What type of training is available?

- Formal activities, such as disability awareness
- Informal activities, such as how to use an interpreter

Is there a deaf culture?

- How are deaf and hard of hearing people served and treated?
- How is a separate culture (deafness) recognized and helped to exist within the mainstream hearing culture?

What areas do you see that are your strengths?

What areas need to be developed?

What can you do on your return home to develop and maintain services?

For additional information or assistance, please contact: Steven R. Sligar at the Center for Sight & Hearing, an outreach site of the Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach at St. Paul Technical College ssligar@rockfordcenter.org or 815-965-4454.

