Black and deaf students: how can we, as educators of the deaf, improve their educational experiences

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Black and Deaf students: How Can We, as Educators of the Deaf, Improve their Educational Experiences?

MSSE Master’s Project

Submitted to the Faculty of the Master of Science Program in Secondary Education of Student who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Rochester Institute of Technology

By

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Student Signature

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, seventeen black deaf college students and faculty/staff from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) shared their personal experiences in educational setting, both residential and mainstream. These participants also shared how they developed their awareness of their black identity, how they identify themselves now, and who their role models were when growing up. Finally, these participants gave suggestions regarding how to work with black deaf students for their personal advancement; both socially and educationally.
Acknowledgement

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The objective of this project is to identify the special needs of black children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and who are enrolled in residential school for the deaf or in mainstream schools. Second objective is to develop recommendations for the educators of the deaf students that would address the needs of black deaf children in the classroom and outside the classroom. I have accomplished these objectives by doing interviews of black deaf faculty/staff and students at National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). These participants have reflected on their own schooling experiences and suggested what the black deaf and hard-of-hearing children need.

Why is this topic important for the field of deaf education? According to the previous research, 80 percent of minority deaf students including deaf black students drop out of school before they receive their high school degree (Parasnis, 1997). According to Cohen (1993), minority deaf students including black deaf and hard-of-hearing students on the average continue to score far below their white peers on standardized tests and other educational measures. They are much more likely than white students to drop out of high school or if they remain in school, to be tracked into vocational rather than academic programs. The point is those minority deaf students who do graduate from high school are less likely to enroll in college than white deaf students. Why is that? It is possible that those minority students are not getting the support they need throughout their education or their needs are not being accommodated. Secondly this topic is important to the field of deaf education because not much is known about how educators of students can provide a more supportive environment to keep black deaf students in school.
It is known one reason for the high failure rates of some minorities is the mismatch between the school culture and the social, cultural, and experiential background of minority children (Polce, 1987). It is recognized that schools have long neglected the effects of culture on cognition, attitude behavior, and personality (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). Specifically, schools have failed to recognize that black Americans are strongly influenced by their African heritage and culture (Hale-Benson, 1982). Educators have resisted strongly the notion that the differences between black and white children’s cognitive functioning and learning styles are simply differences, not deficits (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). What is not well researched is how to provide an appropriate school environment and experience for black deaf or hard-of-hearing children so they would succeed in the educational system.

An improvement in the school performance of black American and other culturally different children in schools will occur if the school curriculum and environment are made to reflect more closely the particular learning styles and cultural backgrounds of the students (Cohen, 1993). The cultural orientation of the African-American home and community is different from that of the school and educators need to understand that orientation and its relationship to the school performance of African American children (Hale-Benson, 1982). We, as deaf educators, can apply this information in the classroom so they can do better in school.

It is important to inform the students that their opinions and ideas matter in the world. Most of the times black deaf and hard-of-hearing students feel like their opinions are being ignored. This study is significant step to inform the students as well as their educators about how black deaf people view themselves and their educational experiences. Such information can be useful in increasing our understanding of the
educational needs of black deaf children and in helping change the educational system for the better.

Method

Participants

The participants were selected as follow. On April 1, 2005, I attended to the Ebony Club's 20th Anniversary Banquet. Ebony Club is a black deaf and hard-of-hearing organization on the NTID campus. I showed up at the banquet and introduced myself to most of the black deaf and hard-of-hearing students and faculty and staff who were there and also explained to them why I was there. I explained to them that I was doing a research for my master's thesis project and would like for them to be a part of my project. I explained that the activity is voluntary and is stated in the consent form. No money would be involved. I had a paper explaining the purpose of my project and for those who were interested in participating in my project, I asked them to sign their names and asked for their e-mail addresses so that I can contact them to set up the time and place to meet up for the interview. The seventeen participants who agreed to be interviewed did so as a voluntary activity and confidentiality was guaranteed. There were seven male and four female students who were black deaf/hard-of-hearing. Six black deaf/hard-of-hearing faculty and staff (two females and four males) participated in this project as well.

Interview Procedure

All of the seventeen participants agreed to do the interview. I contacted each participant by e-mail to discuss the best time to set up a place and time to meet on the RIT campus. They all signed an adult consent form in which I stated the purpose of my project and let them know that it was confidential meaning their names would not be mentioned in my project. I informed them that I would only do interview related to their
educational experiences. Most of all, they were asked to be honest with themselves. In the adult consent form, I informed them that at anytime while doing interview if they feel uncomfortable about it, they could resign without any penalty. The participants were interviewed individually for about an hour and ten minutes using the list of interview questions reported in Appendix A. As I went through the interview with each participant, I took notes. I gave the written summary of the interviews to the participants to review and received their consent to use the summary for my research.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Information

The descriptive information is listed in Table 1. I collected descriptive information about each participants, their gender, how long have they been involve in the deaf education, where they went to school, what is their educational background, age, their job title, their hearing status, their highest degree received, at what age they became deaf or hard-of-hearing, what their hearing loss was, whether they wore their hearing aid daily, how well they understood speech, how well they spoke English, how skilled they were in ASL, what age they learned how to sign, etc.

The seventeen participants ranged in age from 21 to 51. Their mean age was 27.1. When asked about their highest degree received, 64.7 percent received their high school diploma; 5.9 received their Associate degree; 17.7 percent received their Bachelor degree; and 11.8 received their Master degree. When asked about their job title, 64.7 percent were students and 35.3 were faculty/staff. The participants were asked how they identified themselves; deaf or hard-of-hearing, 64.7 percent identified themselves deaf; 58.8 identified themselves as hard-of-hearing. Only 5.9 percent identified themselves as
both meaning when they are surrounding by their hearing peers, they feel they are hard-of-hearing and when surrounding by their deaf peers, they feel they are deaf.

When asked each participant at what age they became deaf/hard-of-hearing, 4 were deaf/hard-of-hearing before age 2, 7 between 3-5, and 6 between the ages of 8-14. Only 5.9 percent had profound hearing loss; 64.7 percent had severe hearing loss; 17.6 percent had moderate hearing loss; and 11.8 percent had mild hearing loss. Each participant was asked if they wear their hearing aid daily and only 17.6 percent reported that they did not wear hearing aid. 82.4 percent wear their hearing aid everyday.

Each participant was asked how well he or she understands speech. 5.9 percent said not at all; 5.9 percent said a little bit; 11.8 percent said just average; 41.2 percent said quite a lot; and 35.3 percent said completely. When asked how well they speak English, 5.9 percent said just a little bit; 11.8 percent said just average; 35.3 percent said quite a lot; 47.1 percent said completely. Each participant was asked about how skilled they are in signing ASL. 11.8 percent said just a little bit; 41.2 percent said just average; 23.5 percent said quite a lot; and 23.5 percent said completely.

Each of the participant, they noted their own preference of communication. 11.8 percent preferred ASL; 64.7 percent preferred Sign and Speech; 11.8 percent preferred Speech only; and 5.9 percent said it didn’t matter. Only 29.4 percent had there are other deaf/hard-of-hearing members in the family. 70.6 percent, they were the only deaf/hard-of-hearing person in the family.

Each participant was asked what age did they learned to sign. 5.9 percent said unknown; 5.9 percent said they learned to sign very early because they came from a deaf family; 41.2 percent learned to sign between the ages of 4-7; 29.4 percent from 9-14 and 17.6 percent from 15-17 years of age.
Each participant was asked what type of school they attended. 88.2 percent said they attended mainstream schools; none of the participant attended only residential schools but 11.8 percent said they attended both mainstream and residential schools. Each participant was asked if they knew about an Individualized Education Program (IEP) when they were growing up. 52.9 percent said they have experienced IEP and 47.1 percent said they never heard of an IEP.

The descriptive information establishes that the participants came from diverse backgrounds with varying range of language skills and hearing loss. Most of them used hearing aids, and used sign and speech as their preferred communication. This preference is consistent with how communication occurs most commonly at NTID/RIT. Most participants went to the mainstream schools. This fact should be kept in mind while reading their experiences with the school system and about the development of their identity.

Now, I present a summary of the responses from the participants and the suggestions that were made by the participants. Quotations excerpted from the interviews are in italics.

**Awareness of Black Identity**

Each participant was asked the following questions: "When did you become aware of your black identity? At what age? How did it happen? Did you have any school experiences where you became aware of being black? What was your family’s role in developing your black identity?

**NTID Male Students**

“At the age of 9 or 10, that’s when I became aware that I was black. In the elementary and junior high school were mainly white. The area the schools were in was in a white area. The schools I was in were in the rich area. I noticed the way white people were living and how I was living so I knew I was different. In
my family, we always talk about family value. We never really talk about cultures or racism. We really never talk down about other culture or anything."

“I noticed I was black when I was going to preschool. I was in school surrounding around kids and I looked at all of the teachers and they were black as well. My mother and grandmother kept telling me I’m black. If I was living with my father, he would have told me a different story, like I’m Hispanic only.”

“At the age of 7, I used to play with white kids every summer where my parents signed me up for summer camp and I played with all the white kids. That’s when I discovered I’m black. My parents have never talked to me about my black identity because I was around them all the time.”

“I don’t remember what age I was aware of my blackness because I grew up in the black community. All of my friends were black. I knew the different between white and black. I don’t even remember if my parents have sat with me and talk about my black identity.”

“As a small kid, I knew I was black because the environment I was living in. I grew up in the black community. Everybody in the family is black. My family has always talked to about me being black just to remind me who I am and where I came from.”

“When I was in high school, I knew I was African but not emphasize because when I’m around deaf people, I forget my culture until I transferred here to NTID. I finally saw black deaf students here and that finally woke me up. One of my black deaf friends asked me why I dress like a white person. I explained how it happens, I hung out with white deaf students at CSUN and the number of black deaf students there were very small. From that conversation I was having with my friend, it made me realized I do have my African culture. From there, my African pride started to grow faster than the identity as a deaf person.”

“I know I’m black by the color but I don’t say I’m black, proud to be black blah blah blah, I just don’t. I am aware of my skin color since I was small. None of my family members ever talked with me about my black identity.”

NTID Female Students

“When I was growing up, I really never thought of myself as black, you know just never look at it that way. I always wanted to have long beautiful hair and be light-skinned. As I’ve grown up, I appreciate myself more than I did before. I’ve become more mature and accept things the way they are.”

“I was aware that I’m black when I was a kid. I don’t remember what age. There was no heavy emphasizing. I know when I go to school; I hang out with my white friends. I know I’m different from them. It wasn’t a problem for me.”
“I knew I was black all of my life and my skin color didn’t really impact me until I came to NTID. Growing up in NYC, I used to be around black people until I came here to NTID, it was so different, too many white people here. I felt I had to be more careful because of my skin color. As a black person, I feel I can get into trouble in whatever I do.”

“I don’t remember what age I became aware that I’m black. I just know everybody who surrounded me was black and I grew up in a black community.”

NTID Faculty/Staff (male and female)

“At high school, I went to a predominately black school where there were students of color everywhere. My friends were mostly black and the neighborhood I grew up is predominately black and Spanish so my exposure to my identity was early on. The church where I grew up was all black but the true identity of my blackness was at college where I learned about black culture and their history. Ironically because NTID did not have many students of color when I arrived.”

“My mother had never really sat with me and talk about my black identity. I went to black day care plus I grew up in a black community. In the black day care, they taught me about Kwanzaa and lot of black things in the black community.”

“I became aware that I’m black when I was a kid. White students were picking on me because what I had and they didn’t. I don’t remember what exactly what it was but I knew it was a racism thing. I don’t remember what age my parents had talk to me about my black identity but I do remember my parents explained to me about me about a slave movie called, “Roots”. I had questions about why black people were treated badly back in the slavery days.”

“When I came to NTID, that’s when I realized I’m black. When I was in high school, 90 percent of the students were black and 10 percents were white. Nobody really pay attention to the color of skin. So when I came to NTID back in 1991, I think it’s the people I saw. People from different place, different background, and didn’t know where they came from. That’s when I realized my black identity.”

“My awareness on black identity increased when I was in college. I learned almost all of the history of black culture after high school. I knew I grew up in the black community, but it was never acknowledged until later in life.”

“I became aware of my black identity about 7 years ago through Gallaudet University.”
Identity

All of the participants came from different backgrounds. They all have formed their own identity based on their experience or environment when growing up. All 17 participants, they identified themselves black first importantly then identified themselves deaf later on.

NTID Male Students

“Everywhere I go, I identify myself as a black person first, second a man, and third deaf. I identified myself that way based on how I was raised. My grandmother was the person who raised me and made me the person who I am today. Even when I get involve in the Deaf Community, I still feel the same, nothing has changed.”

I identify myself as a black man. I don’t feel that I’m deaf because I don’t have enough deaf exposure. Right now, I just identify myself as a black man period and nothing else. I’m half black and Hispanic. Right now, I feel closely to the culture because I’m mostly around black people than Hispanic people. My father is Hispanic and my mother is black.”

“I identified myself as a black deaf person because that’s how people look at me. I feel very proud to be black and deaf because I’m surrounding by other people just like me. I identified myself with both hearing and deaf cultures because I have the ability to speak, hear, and signs.”

“I look to think of myself as a black, male, and hard of hearing because that’s who I am. Think about it, I was born black. My hearing went down later on in life.”

“At NTID, I identified myself as a black deaf person. I speak for everybody else as a deaf person. When I’m out in the real world, I consider myself as a black person. They won’t know if I’m deaf or hard of hearing until I tell them, I like to test them to see if they notice I’m deaf or hard- of- hearing. Once they found out, they don’t know how to ask questions. They just don’t want to be bothered.”

“When I came from, the way I was raised, my knowledge, I would consider myself as an African first then deaf person. I was born in Africa and moved to America in 1987 and settled in California.”

“Sometimes I don’t look like I have to think I’m deaf first or black. I’m just an Eritrean (it is a country where my family are from in Africa) but anyway I’m just a person who is proud to be deaf and proud to be the color I am right now. I would say I identified myself as a black deaf person. When I came to NTID, I
became involved in the black and deaf culture. Before college, I was so much involved in the hearing world.”

NTID Female Students

“I simply identified myself as a black person first, a woman second, and deaf last. Well growing up, my parents were very protective. My parents really never show it. Example: I tell my parents I want to go outside and play with my friends. My mother would say, no, you can’t go outside because what if something happen to you. I have always thought it’s because I’m black and turned out it was my deafness. I really never thought of my deafness as a problem. I mean I did everything what the ‘hearing’ people were doing meaning talking on the phone and listen to music.”

“I identify myself as black female first, then deaf. My deafness isn’t really the issue until I’m placed in a situation where I don’t have complete access to information. Example would be going to church, there are no interpreters provided and I don’t be knowing what’s going on. Also many people don’t recognize that I’m hard of hearing until I tell them. Their reactions were shock because I can hear and speak very well. I’m in a little bit of both hearing and deaf culture.”

“When I was growing up, I thought of myself as a deaf person because of my family. The reason I said that because no one in my family signs and I didn’t understand them and they didn’t understand me. My parents speak in Creole language. Because of that, I feel deaf. When I’m around my peers, I feel that I’m in both worlds because I have the ability to speak and signs.”

“Everywhere I go, I identify myself as a black person period because that’s all I’ve known.”

NTID Faculty/Staff (male and female)

“I see myself as a black person, woman of color first. That’s the first thing I see when I look into the mirror. Deafness is an “invisible” disability, which I didn’t think of it until I started having conversation where I started to sign. When I’m out in the public, I’m very much aware of being black first. If I’m in a group of black people, then my awareness shifts to being a woman and deaf. If the group is black and deaf then my awareness to being a woman”

“I identified myself black first, woman, and hard of hearing because when I look into the mirror, that’s what I see.”

“I identified myself black first, deaf second because that is just who I am. I identified myself in the black and deaf cultures.”

“I identified myself just black and deaf because it’s obviously. I’ll take that back, instead of saying black and deaf, I rather to be label as black and hard of hearing
because that’s my preference. It’s obviously, people can see I wear hearing aid and I can talk and hear.”

“I currently think of myself as a black deaf person. While I was raised in a deaf family, I considered myself as hard of hearing, which I actually was. I wanted to be normal just like everyone else. I had some frustrating experiences in the hearing world, but I didn’t stop living. While I grew up in the black community I was not taught about the pride of being a black deaf person. My deafness seemed to be the most important back then. My experience in college boosted my self-esteem on my deafness. Communication was more important than my race. After being exposed to a large group of black deaf community and organization, I identified myself a black deaf person.”

“When I was growing up, I have always considered myself as hard-of-hearing because I only interact with hearing people. I kind of hid my deaf identity. At first, I see myself as deaf person since I wasn’t sure of my identity until much later when I entered Gallaudet University. Overtime, I learned more about my identity and the deaf culture itself. Now I do consider myself black first and deaf second.”

Role Models

When talking about role models, the participants agreed that it was important to have someone to look up as idols, for inspiration and support.

NITD Male Students

“I didn’t have a black role model when I was growing up and no deaf role model. There was no one to look up to so I really didn’t care about that.”

“All of my life, my mother is the perfect role model for me. I really don’t have anybody to look up to. My mother was always there for me.”

“My dad was my role model. He was a hard working man. He did what he had to do. Nobody can tell him anything. He was a big inspiration to a lot of people. They look up to him for help. I don’t have any deaf role model because I didn’t know any when I was growing up.”

“At the age of 16 or 17, my black role model was Morgan Freeman because in all of his movies, he plays positive characteristics, very intelligent and he showed that black men can be smart too. Black men can be rich and all the other great things that are mostly known as a white man’s role. There were no deaf role models for him when I was growing up.”

“I had no black or deaf role model when I was growing up. I was just being me.”
“When I was growing up, Bill Cosby was my black role model because he showed the world what black culture is all about based on value, legacy of slaves, showed family bond like make sure that black families are the priority.”

“Yes my black role model was my dad because he put food on the table, provided us shelter, and made sure we had the right education. I had no deaf role model when was growing up.”

NTID Female Students

“My grandmother was my black role model because she raised a family like her younger siblings and raised her siblings’ families, and raised her own children. She went to college at the age of 40 to pursue her B.S. degree in social work. My deaf role model is Claudia Gordon because she grew up in the same neighborhood as I did. She fought hard for everything she has now. She is the first black female deaf lawyer in America.”

“I really can’t remember, I doubted if they were anybody I look up to whether if they were black, hearing, or deaf.”

“I met a black hearing female interpreter. She changed me to be more serious in school, stayed away from bad things, don’t hang out with the wrong crowd, made me think positive about myself, and made me believe that I can do anything I want.”

“My family was my black role model because they provided for me, supported me, they installed my black culture in me and I cherish my black culture.”

NTID Faculty/Staff (male and female)

“My mother, MLK, and Harriet Tubman are my main role models because my mother raised me as a single parent. Martin Luther King ended the segregation and Harriet Tubman challenged herself with learning how to read and challenged the laws by creating and helped other slaves to freedom.”

“My mother was my role model. I did not realize that until years later. My mother was a single mom raising me as best as she could under the circumstances. The neighborhood where I grew up was not in the suburbs but we all felt safe where everyone on my block looked out for each other. They were my role models because they “had my back”. Unfortunately I didn’t know much about deaf culture when I was growing up. I didn’t think we could make amazing achievements. I mean look at us now.”

“I never had a deaf role model when I was growing up. I had several black role models who were black engineers which leaded me an engineer major when I enrolled to RIT in 1989.”

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“Yes I have black role models when I was growing up and it was singer, Michael Jackson, Bill Cosby, and MLK. Michael Jackson shocked the world by beating everybody on the Top Chart, even beat Elvis Presley. Bill Cosby because he encouraged not just black kids but everyone to get an education. MLK because he got us where we are today. There were no deaf role models when I was growing up.”

“When I was growing up, my role models were Sidney Poiter and Bill Cosby. My parents were always my role models”

“I didn't have any black role models when I was growing up but I did have a deaf role model which was my second older brother who graduated from Gallaudet University from Virgin Islands”

**Comfort Level**

The participants reported that there were times when they were put in situations where they were uncomfortable because of their race, identity, or disability when growing up in schools or colleges.

**NITD Male Students**

“At NTID, being black wasn’t the problem for me. When I first came to NITD back in 1999, a lot of profound deaf students didn’t really support me because they believe in ASL and no voice. I am very oral and hard-of-hearing. That made me more uncomfortable and made me not want to know about the Deaf Culture here at NTID.”

“I have never been in a situation where I was uncomfortable because I’m black or deaf.”

“At NTID, I felt uncomfortable because the Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) doesn’t talk about black history, black culture, and I felt pretty much being ignored.”

“Here at NTID, I hate to see a group of white students chatting. And I wanted to be part of the chatting. They either stop talking or walk away like they don’t want me to be part of their conversation. They don’t even respect me a 100 percent. I believe it’s all based on my skin color, not the communication access. I’m used to that, none of that will change the way I am today.”

“I had never felt uncomfortable is school or college just because I’m black or deaf. I never had problems in school.”

“I have been in a situation where I was a little awkward here at NTID. One time I was in a class at RIT and there were hearing black students looking down at me
just because I’m deaf. As for me, to avoid that feeling, I just act like I’m hearing.”

“I had never been in a situation where I felt uncomfortable just because I’m deaf or black. I’m always just being me and mind my own business. I don’t like when people think that deaf people can’t do certain things then I have to prove them wrong. For an example related to my experience, this guy who happened to be hearing thought I couldn’t win a soccer position as Caption because of my deafness. Guess what? I proved him wrong, I won the position as a Caption for the hearing soccer team here at RIT.”

NTID Female Students

“"Yes, at RIT, I’m taking a class called Intro to Philosophy. In the class, I feel intimidating because everybody is the class is hearing and I’m the only hard of hearing in the class. Sometime I want to raise my hand and ask the teacher to go back and repeat but I didn’t because I’m shy. I didn’t want students to feel that the teacher has to repeat everything to this deaf girl. In the beginning of the quarter, I didn’t sign up for an appointment to meet with the teacher for help not until recently. I really need help with my work.”

“In high school, I was challenged to socialize with hearing people. There were a lot of clique happening at the school because my peers identify me as a deaf individual and it was hard to get accepted and stand out on my own. During that time in high school, I identified myself as hard of hearing and felt more comfortable with hearing crowd and not the deaf crowd.”

“When I went to high school, I was scare to wear my hearing aid and signs because I felt that hearing students would make fun of me because they never seen a deaf student before. After a while, I realized that people didn’t treat me any different. Teachers introduced me to the students and informed them I’m deaf. Students treated me as if I was the same as them.”

“I don’t think I ever felt uncomfortable in school or college because of my identity”

NTID Faculty/Staff (female and male)

“"Yes, when I first attended NTID in 1987, there wasn’t many people of color so I would be the only one or few black in the classroom. In school, it was my deafness that set me apart but I refused to let it set me back. Yes there were people who made fun of my speech and me. I would actually get into physical fights with them. After awhile, I just let it slide and think of it as they being “ignorant”. I can honestly say that I don’t recall any uncomfortable situations that happened to me while at school. Believe it not, the first time a white person called me the “N” word was when I was in Florida on spring break. I just said the “F” word and walked away. I didn’t let it rattle me.”

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“I’ve been in an awkward situation here at NTID where faculty members patronize me because I’m black and they thought I don’t meet their standards.”

“At RIT engineering, I have always felt uncomfortable because I was the only black deaf student in all of my classes. I didn’t have anyone to team with or to be partner with. It’s possible that I’m black and deaf.”

“There are times where I have felt uncomfortable at NTID. One was where I was the only black student in the Industrial Drafting Technology major back in 1991. Another example would be whenever I’m in a class being the only black student there and all of them are white. The white students tell white jokes and it’s hard for me to get involve with that (laughing). Because you don’t know those kids, should I laugh or not? Better not”

“I had felt uncomfortable about my deafness as well as my black identity. I experienced communication difficulties with hearing world and thought it I was better off a hearing person so I didn’t have to deal with communication problems with hearing people. I thought being black was inferior. I went to mostly white schools and saw the difference in black schools.”

“Let me see... I don’t remember. I don’t think I ever felt uncomfortable in a situation just because I’m black or deaf”

School Experience

Each participant was asked the following questions:

a. Did you feel that you had full access to information? If yes, tell me what the teachers did in the classroom that helped you have full access. If no, tell me what you did not like about the way teachers taught.

b. If grew up in a mainstreamed school environment, explain what kind of support services you had. For example, were there interpreters, note takers, social workers? Were the IEP meetings satisfactory? Explain

c. If you were in a residential school, did you stay on campus? Was sign language used on campus? Was it used in the classroom?

NTID Male Students

“I grew up in mainstream schools. I didn’t have any support services. I was in class with regular students. I was not in a self-contained room. I was what you called it a resource room, a place where I go for help. The teachers didn’t make no different between me and other students (hearing). If I didn’t understand what was going on in the classroom. I would ask the teacher for help after class. I was passing all of my classes.”
"The teachers would sign in class, sometime the teachers would use overhead projector, show movies with closed captioning. I had ASL interpreters, sat in front of the class, which I hated the most. I never had note takers in any of my mainstream classes."

"Teachers use sign language, overhead projector, Internet access, showed movie with CC, and had interpreters in the class. I was in the self-contained class most of the time. I had two mainstream classes and had interpreters, no note takers."

"In mainstream before I went to high school, there were no interpreters or note takers provided for me. I had a resource room but never really went there for help. I never did my homework there. The only thing I did was met up my counselor there and talked about my schooling to see if I had problems with my homework or anything. Most of the time I understood my teachers and even if I didn't, I would go home and ask my mom for help. In high school, I enrolled a deaf and hard of hearing program called Miss Eight. I was placed in a self-contained class most of the time. The only mainstream classes I had were math, gym, and computer. There were no interpreters or note takers provided for me for my mainstream classes. TODs use sign in class, wrote on the board, and sometime they use overhead projector once in awhile."

"All of my teachers sign, use books, wrote on board, and gave out notes. I was in a self-contained class most of the time. I was in regular classes like computer, science with an interpreter. I had gym class without interpreters because I didn't need it."

"When growing up, I was in a self-contained class half of the day. TODs signed, showed overhead projector, and wrote on the blackboard. The other half of the day, I was in mainstream classes with my hearing peers. The only support services I had in mainstream classes a teacher aide who was also my interpreter. I had no note takers provided at the time."

"I did had full access in schools. If I didn't understand what was going on in class, I would get the interpreter right away or use the paper to communicate or repeat if I didn't understand the information. I don't recall having gone any trouble with my education related to access. I did had little problem with the note-takers not showing up for class or the handwriting being messy. I grew up on mainstream schools and had sign language interpreters and note-takers. My hearing teachers were aware of my deafness and treated me fairly just like they treated their non-disabled students. There were times when interpreters didn't show up in class on time, the teachers would wait until the interpreters show up then proceed. If the interpreter didn't show up for class, the teachers would go and look for another interpreter to accommodate my needs."
NTID Female Students

"From k-3rd grade, I had no interpreter, no note-takers, or any support services because I was in a Catholic school. In the Catholic school I was in, teachers would write on the board, I sat in front of the class. If I miss out in class, I had a friend in class would explain to me what's going on. In 3rd grade, I transferred to a mainstream school. I was in classes with regular students, again, there were no interpreters/ note takers provided for me. I had a resource room. The resource room is a place where I go for help with my homework. After a year transferred to a public school, I was put in a self-contained class called Mis Eight, where a small class full of deaf students and TODs. I stayed at MSSD for a year and half as I mentioned it before. I lived on campus as a freshman. At MSSD, everyone signs inside and outside of the classrooms. As the matter of facts, the whole campus signed ASL. That was my first exposure to ASL."

"In grade school, I was in mainstream classes where no interpreter or note takers were provided. The teachers wrote on the board. About one or twice a week, I would go to a resource room. I received help where I was struggling and did all of my homework there. By the time, I got to high school; I was placed in a self-contained classroom. I had interpreters for my mainstream classes and half of the time; I was in the self-contained classroom with TODs."

"In mainstream school, all of my life, I had interpreters for all of my classes. I feel that my interpreters gave me full access to information. I wore the FM system in all of my mainstream classes and was able to speak and sign. Yes I have experienced being in self-contained class with small number of deaf students for a short period of time. Yes I had a resource room where they help me with my homework and materials that I was able to use for my homework. I felt that the resource room and interpreters were my full access for my education. I went to Lexington School for the Deaf for a short period of time because the school felt I wasn't deaf enough and was more qualified to be in mainstream classes. They transferred me to public school that has a deaf program. I was put in a self-contained class for a while then put in mainstream classes. At LSD, we were using ASL inside and outside of the classrooms."

"When I was growing up in mainstream schools, I had full access to information. I was never in a self-contained classroom. I had no support services when I was growing up. I sat in front of my classes most of the time. In high school, I only had one interpreter for one class, which was computer. The rest of my classes, no interpreter provided."

NTID Faculty/Staff (male and female)

"I went to an elementary school which was oral (it wasn't working out for me) until middle school, a teacher realized I'm deaf, not hard of hearing. Teachers started to use sign language to accommodate my needs. After I learned sign language, I started to use interpreters for mainstream classes. They provided note
takers for in classes but none of those were fully accessible because I didn’t get all the information I needed. “

“Yes I had totally access to information in class. The teachers voiced and signed. The teachers wrote on the board and used a lot of overhead projector. There was no power point back then. I grew up in mainstream school. I was in self-contained class. My interpreters in my mainstream classes were also my TOD and that’s how I received one on one support.”

“I was in mainstream schools for 12 year. I had no support services, there were no interpreters or note takers provided for me. I wasn’t in a self-contained classroom. I was in mainstream classes all day. By the end of the day, I would go to a resource room and review all of the things I learned in all of my classes. I only went to St. Joseph School for the Deaf for two years. I didn’t live on campus. I commuted back and forth. As far as I can remember, we all signed ASL inside and outside of the classrooms.”

“Yes I did. The TODs used everything in the classroom like overhead projector, wrote on the board, and signed. That’s it. In high school where I was mainstreamed with my hearing peers, I didn’t have any interpreters or note taker not until I came to NTID back in 1991. Back to the mainstream classes, if I didn’t understand what I was suppose to do, I would go up to the teacher after class is over. There was no resource room at my high school. Out of the whole school year, there were only one teacher who knows sign language and I had her for social studies. She signed in class while I was there.”

“In schools, I had access to information most of the time. I was able to follow the teachers who used oral method in classrooms. Teachers often wrote information on the blackboard or used an overhead projector to share information. When I was in classes with hearing students for Physical Education or technical classes, I didn’t have any interpreter. I used my audio logical and speech skills to follow classes in the best of my ability. The only support services I had was the deaf program where teachers of the deaf taught only to deaf and hard of hearing students. I never had an interpreter in the classroom. A couple of years I had 2 teachers who used sign language and speech in the classrooms. During communication with parents, teachers used paper and pencil.”

“From elementary to junior high, I had full access to information. I was in a self-contained class. The teachers signed in class, we used overhead projector, and wrote on the blackboard. By the time, I arrive to Junior high, I was placed in mainstream classes because I was the smartest kid in the self contained class. In the mainstream classes, no sign language interpreters were provided. I had an oral interpreter and it didn’t benefit me because I grew up using ASL and all of sudden, I get this oral interpreter which threw me off.”
During the interview with each participant, each was asked about his or her experience with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Some of the participants didn’t answer the question because they have no clue of what an IEP is. An IEP is a written document that is developed for each public school child who’s eligible for special education. The IEP is created through a team effort and reviewed at least once a year. Before IEP can be written, the child must be first eligible for special education. By federal law, a multidisciplinary team must determine that he/she is a child with a disability or more and requires special education and related services to benefit from the general education program. According to the table chart on page 32, the statistic showed that only 52.9 percent of the participants have experienced IEP. Some of their experiences were good and some were not so good. Here are the comments that were made about their experiences with IEPs:

NTID Male Students

“Yes, I have attended a few of my IEP meetings with my parents and it was satisfied.”

“I have attended IEP meetings with my parents and went a few times by myself. The meeting was pretty good but they didn’t encourage parents enough to come to the IEP meetings.”

“Yes, I have attended to IEP meetings with my mom before. During those meetings, they discussed the plan for the following year like where I plan to be and so on. Now the IEP meetings, it didn’t really benefit me, it sucks. They talked and treated me like I’m a little kid.”

“Yes I have attended to my IEP meetings with my parents where they talk about your strength and weakness throughout my school year. They tell me areas where I need to improve, do reading more, need to behave more in class, be a leader of the whole class because the students really look up to me in class. Because of that, I had to be careful in what I do or say.”

“Yes, I have attended few of the IEP meetings with my parents and it wasn’t a good thing. At the IEP meetings, TODs think they know what’s best for me. The TODs felt that I would be better off to mainstream classes instead of being in a self-contained classroom due to my intelligent. The only thing that I didn’t like they didn’t even ask me how I felt about it, never asked me about my inputs. However, in my junior year
in high school, I finally spoke up and told them I know what I wanted; only I know. I told them I want to attend to a 4-year university, not going to some training school."

NTID Faculty/Staff (male and female)

“Yes I have attended to IEP meeting before. I really can’t say what I like and dislike about the IEP meetings because it was 18 years ago.”

“I have experienced IEP meetings before. Some of the IEP meetings had no access for me to understand what was going on. There were interpreters but they weren’t qualified interpreters”

Almost half of the participants had never known about IEP. Here are their comments:

NTID Female Students

“To be honest, I never attend to any of my IEP meetings. I don’t remember if I had any.”

“As for the IEP meetings, I’m not so sure what they are. I don’t think I ever attend to one. I did attend to Teacher/Parent Conference when teachers talk about my grade in class and my behaviors in class.”

“As for the IEP meetings, I don’t recall attending any of my IEP meetings when I was growing up.”

NTID Faculty/Staff (male and female)

“I never heard of IEP meeting before. My mother and I had never attended to any of IEP meetings.”

“As for the IEP meetings, I don’t recall attending to that kind of meeting but we had Parent/Teacher Conference.”

Something is wrong with this picture. 47.1 percent of the participants had never heard of the IEP. This suggests that these participants didn’t know their rights as disabled students. For example, 88.2 of the participants grew up in mainstream schools and half of them had never had sign language interpreters or note-takers in their mainstream classes. Is it possible that their rights have been denied? It is possible if no one ever educated them about their rights as disabled students and informed them the services that were available for them. At the least, something needs to be done in the
field of deaf that ensures that the deaf children and their parents know about their rights to get educated, to have full access to information.

School System

Although the participants were successful in the schools they attended, they felt that as they looked back, they realized that something was missing and wished they had more services and opportunities when they were in schools. Here are their reflections about their experiences with the school system. Here are the comments:

NTID Male Students

“They need more supportive teachers and not always following the school curriculum too much. Teachers need to open themselves more, do different methods to motivate students to learn. When I was growing up, all of my teachers were white, half of them were women and other half was men. I strongly believe that black deaf and hard-of-hearing children need minority deaf teachers. Just not black teachers but other minorities.”

“I feel that they need more black deaf teachers so they can help the children. They need to learn more about the black community, black history, black deaf history, and teach them the things that their parents never taught them.”

“They need after school program giving to them. They need a one-on-one aide inside and outside of the classroom.”

“We need more black teachers, females and males. We need more educated minority deaf teachers. Related to communication, teachers should have more than one language to make the class more interesting.”

“They need to read more books. They need to improve their writing and reading skills. If they learn how to read and write, they can easily graduate from high school and enroll in college. They need to follow the right path like following the right crowd in school.”

“Obviously what the school systems need more black deaf role models. With black deaf teachers, black deaf and hard of hearing students will be motivated to learn or stay in school. Black deaf and hard of hearing need to have communication at home which will lead them to do better in school. So basically communication is the key. Schools need to offer a Black Culture class so they can feel they can be black, deaf, and successful.”

“It is good to have the Ebony Club here on the NTID/RIT campus. It really helps me a lot. It really helps me with my black identity. Most of all, the school systems
"need more black deaf teachers for role model for the sakes of the black deaf and hard-of-hearing children."

**NTID Female Students**

“They need more support and extra attention. Some kids aren’t exposed to positive influential role model. Some blacks do not come from background where they are reinforced and encouraged to do well in school and make sound, intelligent decisions. Not necessary to hand-hold and cuddle with the black and provide extra reinforcement so they can stay on top of their goals.”

“They need black deaf teachers so the students can look up to them as role model”

“The school systems need more black deaf teachers because we’re lacking in that area. They need more black deaf organization to attend to they can feel comfortable around their own people.”

“They need support. They need to know it’s ok to have problems. They should have a club where black deaf and hard of hearing go for supports. They should have mentors to check up on the students like the Boys and Girls’ Club.”

**NTID Faculty/Staff (female and male)**

“More teachers that look like them (black). How can we expose our kids to the beautiful culture of both black and deaf if we don’t learn from someone who is alike? We also need to learn more about our black culture...this is very important because it will shape who you are as a person. Too often very little is taught about black culture except for the obvious! MLK, Malcolm X, the “famous” ones. What about the ones who are not famous? But they made a large impact on our people.”

“The school systems need more black deaf role models who are involved in the student community.”

“They need a lot more black deaf role models. They need a lot of positive encouragement. Parents need proper information so they can better prepare for their children. Black deaf and hard of hearing children to communicate with their parents and peers more often.”

“The school system is lacking black deaf professors so the students can look up to them as role models. It’s also lacking support for diversity environment. Example, if I’m a student right now, I’m looking for some supports from faculty from different diversity background. The reason for that is because most faculty does not get involved with students who want to drop out. They do not interfere enough and give them a reason to stay.”

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“Black Deaf and hard of hearing student of children need more support system to improve their education. Often they don’t receive good support from their families. A program committed to develop and increase the students' academic and leadership skills in needed for them. Change of attitudes by educators will make a difference for the children. Educators ought to carry positive attitude and faith in believing that they can learn and succeed in education. More role models (Black hearing or Black deaf educators) are needed for them. The exposure of role models will motivate the children to succeed as well.”

“In the school system, the black deaf and hard-of-hearing students need to learn English the properly ways in order to advance their knowledge about reading and writing.”

Recommendations

Here are all of the recommendations that were suggested by the black deaf/hard-of-hearing students and faculty/staff here at NTID/RIT for the Teachers of the Deaf.

"For the teachers of the deaf, they need to them a better taste of reality. When I say, reality I mean let them experience the real world. A lot of deaf people don’t know how to pay their credit card bills, car notes, and instead of having their parents taken care of their things, they should know how to do it for themselves.

TOD needs to teach students not to limit themselves on what given. To encourage black deaf and hard of hearing to take advantage of the opportunity what’s given to them. Not to limit themselves. TOD should encourage them to go to college, or go to a vocational school to have a better job. TOD needs to make sure that they will graduate from high school."

“To teach black kids to focus more on their education stay in school, keep them motivate by telling them something they really want to hear. Example: talking to the students about classic book, tell stories which will interest the students to read and about to learn how to read and write. Teachers should do more activities to motivate the black deaf and hard of hearing students to learn. That will keep them out of the street.”

“TODs need to find out what their problems are in math, reading, writing, and the problems at home if there’s any. TODs need to get involve with their parents, make them your neighbor. TODs need to interact the students more often outside the classroom. And try something to fix the student’s level and work him/her way to the top.”

“Teachers need to stop using books so much because books not always correct. Teachers should be teaching based on experience. Teachers should do my activities instead of too much lectures. Teachers need to be open to students more, not focus too much on their role as teachers. Teachers should dress nice everyday to capture students’ attention.”
“For TODs like yourself, Avery, be the students’ friend, not focus your role being a teacher all the time. Be flexible to your students, they will listen and learn from you. TODs need to have positive attitudes toward the students. Get to know your student importantly, find out what they like to read and find a book for them to read related to their interests. Most of all have patients with your students.”

“TODs should take a black culture class so they can understand where the students are coming from. Get involve in their life so the students can feel they’re worth it. Need to develop relationship with students and their parents. And be courage, listen, and be more supportive.”

“For the TODs, don’t look down on the black deaf and hard-of-hearing students. They need your special attentions. Treat them equally like you do your treat white students”

NTID Female Students

“Always teach them about the black culture, no matter what the subject you teach. Always form a relationship with your students, not exchange numbers, and go out on weekend like Michael Jackson does with the kids. Teachers should be open to their students, get to know your students more. Make the students feel comfortable to come to you with their problems or anything. Teachers need to be blunt to the students. For example: if a student is failing a class, tell the student that he/she if failing the class and need to bring the grade up. Most of the time, teachers tend to send out a warning to the advisor saying this student is failing my class instead of communicating with the students.”

“The TODs need to recognize the warning signs of students who are having problems. Practice early intervention. Also keep close contact with the student and the immediate parents about the student’s progress. Be a role model and take the time to learn about the student as an individual person in meaning form a rapport with the students.”

“TODs should focus on their weakness so they can improve better. Example would be if their English is weak, help them improve their English skill like writing and reading. I believe that TODs should involve parents so that way they’ll aware of what’s going on with their deaf/hard of hearing child and it will keep the child motivate in school.”

“TODs need to nurture them. Try to establish relationship with them. Get involve, to find out what’s going on in their personal life.”
NTID Faculty/Staff (female and male)

“For the TODs, have better understanding of their cultures. Everyone have their own uniqueness. TODs need to be sensitive to that. Patience is also the key because it may take time for students to see the teachers really care about them.”

“Train TODs about black culture for awareness. Also to bring role models into the classroom setting this will give students “black” something to grow on in knowing there’s a chance to excel their best. Inspiring the students to develop a mentoring connection.”

“TODs need to find their best potential. Don’t neglect them because they’re black or from the street. Teachers should find good role model meaning finding someone who’s black and deaf and successful to have them to do presentations. If in English class, make sure they select a book related to their race instead of forcing them to read The Great Gatsby, have them to read to read Native Son.”

“For the TODs, don’t look down on the students base on racism, just look at them as students period. If your student has a goal, you should be more involved helping the student reaches his/her goals. If the students are struggling or trying to understand a concept in class, TODs should spend some time trying to find ways to help the students understand it better. TODs should have some knowledge about “Black Culture and Deafness.”

“TODs need to encourage parent’s involvement to be part of their children’s education development. Establish sign language classes for parents to improve communication between students and family members. Set up panel of deaf/hard of hearing professionals sharing their success to students and parents. Encourage or assist students to develop a leadership club or organization to develop leadership skills. And attend two professional development activities to enhance their awareness and knowledge for effective teaching to deaf and hard of hearing.”

“For TODs, just make sure all of the black deaf and hard-of-hearing students will have full access to its reading and writing because it will take them further with more chance to success in their education. Also, encourage them to continue reading daily to enrich their reading level.”
Conclusion

Seventeen black deaf college students and faculty/staff from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) shared their personal experiences in the educational settings both mainstream and residential schools. The participants identified the special needs of black children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in the school systems. The participants suggested recommendations for the teachers of the Deaf on how to work with black deaf or hard-of-hearing children so they can be successful in the school. The reflections of these participants are valuable because they are based on their direct experience with the school system. These participants have successfully completed their high school education and beyond despite the barriers they had in having full access to information and knowledge. Their insights and experience can be of significant help to those educators who are committed to incorporate diversity in their curriculum.
References


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<td>5.9</td>
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Appendix A

1. What is your position at NTID? Circle one:
   - Faculty
   - Staff
   - Cross-registered Student
   - NTID Student
   - Graduate Student

2. What is your sex? M or F

4. If you are faculty, how long have you been involved in deaf education?

5. If you are staff, how long have you worked with deaf students?

6. If you are a student, how long have you been at NTID and/or RIT?

7. How do you identify yourself? Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (circle one)

8. What is your age?

9. At what age did you became deaf or hard-of-hearing?

10. What is your hearing loss? (circle one)
   - Profound
   - Severe
   - Moderate
   - Mild

11. Do you wear hearing aid?

12. How well do you understand speech?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  A Little bit  Just Average  Quite a Lot  Completely

13. How well do you speak English?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  A Little bit  Just Average  Quite a Lot  Completely

14. How skilled are you in the use of ASL?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  A Little bit  Just Average  Quite a Lot  Completely
15. What is your preferred mode of communication?

ASL, Sign and Speech, Sign English, Speech


17. Is there anybody deaf or hard-of-hearing in your family? If yes, who? Where did they go to school?

18. List your highest degree:

H.S. Diploma, AOS, AAS, B.S., M.S., PhD

19. Tell me about your educational background

   a. Did you feel that you had full access to information? If yes, tell me what the teachers did in the classroom that helped you have full access. If no, tell me what you did not like about the way teachers taught.

   b. If grew up in a mainstreamed school environment, explain what kind of support services you had. For example, were there interpreters, note takers, social workers? Were the IEP meetings satisfactory? Explain

   c. If you were in a residential school, did you stay on campus? Was sign language used on campus? Was it used in the classroom?

20. When you think of your identity, how do you see yourself? In different situations and at different times, different aspects of your identity are important. But overall, what aspects are important to you the most? For example, do you see yourself as a deaf person, or a Black deaf person, or just Black? Which culture or cultures do you identify with? Do you think of yourself as black first or deaf first?

21. When did you become aware of your black identity? What age? How did it happen? Did you have any school experiences where you became aware of being black? What was your family’s role in developing your black identity?
22. Did you have black role models when you were growing up? Did you have deaf role models when you were growing up?

23. Have you felt uncomfortable in situations at school or college because you are black and/or deaf? Explain. Give some examples.

24. Based on your experience, can you identify what the black deaf and hard-of-hearing children need in the school system? Explain.

25. What recommendations do you have for the teachers of deaf students to make black deaf and hard-of-hearing students succeed in school?