Proactive Psychosocial Attributes and Tactics of Vocationally and Socially Successful People who are Deaf: A Pragmatist study

Paul Gordon Jacobs
BA (Hons), Grad. Cert. International Trade, MEd

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Abstract

Little research has identified the proactive psychosocial attributes and tactics that deaf individuals can use to maximise their potential with hearing peers. A comprehensive and systematic framework of psychosocial skills has also been absent in deafness-related research.

This study featured data gleaned from 49 participants from Australia, England, and the USA who were mostly highly educated, and vocationally and socially successful. These participants formed three groups: Oral Deaf (n=22), Hearing (n=19), and Culturally Deaf (n=8). All participants were over the age of 25 and self-regarded as maximising their potential in mainstream society. All hearing participants had had a close relationship with a deaf individual for more than one year and reported not having a disability. All deaf participants nominated whether or not they were culturally Deaf (CD) and reported not having an additional disability to deafness.

Most deaf participants reported pre-lingual deafness (n=18). All but one deaf participant reported greater than severe-to-moderate bilateral deafness. Eighteen (60%) deaf participants wore hearing aids, ten had a cochlear implant, and two had no assistive sensory device. Twenty-four (80%) deaf participants relied on speech-reading and all but one always used their voice to communicate. Nineteen (63%) deaf participants were educated solely in a mainstream school but only three (10%) were educated solely in a School for the Deaf. The majority (64%) of Oral Deaf (OD) participants had not learned Sign Language (SL) and only three continued or were fluent with SL. All CD participants used SL. Data trends also suggested that two CD participants were ‘purely’ CD, whereas the six other CD participants likely were ‘bi-cultural’.

This exploratory research used a framework of psychosocial themes used in a study with vocationally successful participants with a Learning Disability by Reiff, Ginsberg and Gerber (1995). These themes were grouped into Internal Decisions (Desire, Goal Orientation, and Reframing) and External Manifestations (Persistence, Goodness of Fit, Learned Creativity, and Social Ecologies). Control was the eighth theme that embraced all other seven themes. Reiff et
al.’s framework was modified for the current study’s purposes so that the combined effect of the three thematic categories of Control, Internal Decisions, and External Manifestations equals Potential Maximisation. Potential Maximisation was therefore defined as the measure of a participant’s psychosocial attributes and tactics used in social and vocational contexts.

Screening surveys were used to glean demographic data and to determine the participants’ eligibility. Eligible deaf and hearing participants were then administered follow-up surveys. These follow-up surveys included identical items that were scored for the purposes of between-group statistical analyses. The follow-up survey for deaf participants featured additional deafness-specific items that were not in the follow-up survey for hearing participants. The follow-up survey items were allocated to themes in Reiff et al.’s (1995) framework.

Mixed-methods were administered on the data. Between- and within-group analyses were also conducted. Three between-group comparisons featured statistical analyses on each of the four variables of Control, Internal Decisions, External Manifestations, and Potential Maximisation. The results of the ANOVAs and t-tests (2-tailed) showed no significant differences in the mean scores for each of four variables. These trends indicated that 1) the deaf and hearing participants used similar or identical psychosocial attributes and tactics to maximise their potential, and that 2) hearing status and 3) deaf identity were not factors influencing the maximisation of psychosocial potential.

Three within-group analyses were then conducted. These included case studies, composite pictures, and reporting qualitative data trends. The case studies showed that the highest scoring participant provided comparatively numerous, richer, and detailed psychosocial attributes and tactics than the lowest scoring participant. The composite pictures further showed remarkable similarities, which, again, highlighted the participants’ use of similar psychosocial attributes and tactics. Qualitative data trends particularly illustrated that deaf participants also used additional psychosocial attributes and tactics for circumventing deafness-related challenges.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
(ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) The thesis is less than 100,000 words, exclusive of tables, references and appendices.

Signature:.............................................................................................................
I first thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Margaret Brown and Dr Louise Paatsch for their mentorship and continued faith. It has been a privilege to be your student.

Professor Field Rickards gave me the opportunity to study at the University of Melbourne in 2002, which has been a blessing. I also appreciate the encouragement and opportunities provided by Professor Greg Leigh and Dr Rod Beattie of the University of Newcastle, and John Richards of the Western Australian Institute of Deaf Education.

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“… the yang and the yin: male and female, light and dark, strong and weak, dominant and submissive, upper and lower, solid and fluid, dominant and submissive. There was nothing which could not be seen in these terms. … Yet the two opposites were always two halves of one. …. The principle of life is ‘Tao’, ‘the Way’, to become one with the One, which implies rising above all opposites, because the Tao is the state of perfect balance in which the opposites no longer exist. … All sense of separate existence must be transcended, to achieve union with the One that is eternal.

… (Around 700BC onwards, Hindu teachings show that we can be) imprisoned in maya, that state of illusion which comes from seeing the world in terms of opposites, which are always getting out of balance. But within us is the atman, our true Self, that part of us which is part of the Atman, the Universal Soul. The only way to escape imprisonment in maya is to reach the state where all individual appetites and distortions of subjective consciousness are transcended. This is the state of nirvana....”

Christopher Booker, *The seven basic plots: Why we tell stories*

“When correctly encountered a disability becomes a stimulus that impels towards a higher achievement … Those who have attained remarkable success in life have often been handicapped in the beginning with disabilities and with great feelings of inferiority”.

Kenneth Lysons, *How to cope with hearing loss: The first comprehensive handbook*

“It may seem a paradox, but the deaf person – so far from being liable to be left out – is often in a strong position psychologically…. Though this is only true of those who have dominated, not merely accepted, the disability. Every disability offers the same alternative: either it dominates you or you dominate it. … once a disability has been dominated it ceases, truly, to be a disability but becomes an asset, a weapon”.

David Wright – *Deafness: An autobiography*
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