MOVING TOWARDS EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE AGE OF IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

How can the development of partnerships be fostered among a group of participants who, though diverse in their backgrounds and interests, share the goal of globally enhancing educational opportunities for deaf[1] people? The 2010 ICED Congress addressed this challenge. In the age of identity and diversity, diverse disciplines attend to the role of emotion. The viability of deaf epistemologies has begun to be explored as an analytical tool for understanding diverse deaf lives and educational practices. This study examines the role of emotions in shaping contemporary deaf educational developments, and documents and compares deaf epistemologies to provide a critical perspective on partnership and inclusive universalism. A literature review and cross-cultural comparative research of deaf epistemologies in relation to education in Flanders and Uganda are presented. Qualitative data and a theoretical framework provide insight into multiple deaf epistemologies and contextualized practices of connectivity and learning. Taking into account the role of emotions in shaping deaf education, and reconceptualizing this process as one of shared emancipation, offers an alternative to the old medical/sociocultural dichotomy. If "Deaf participation and collaboration" as called for at ICED 2010 is to become a tool for transformation, education needs to enable learners to practice partnership, deal with diverse perspectives and reach shared understandings.

INTRODUCTION

The opening ceremony of the 21st International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) in 2010, in Vancouver, Canada, was titled "In Partnership". It called for advancing partnerships and fostering mutual respect among a group of participants who, despite different interests and backgrounds, shared the goal of improving educational opportunities and life chances for deaf people around the world (Moores & Jamieson 2011). This paper aims to explore practices and instruments which enable educational partners to understand each other's perspectives. It also aims to provide insight into the emotions involved in contemporary transitions, and illustrate how reflexive and dialogical approaches facilitate the development of a shared understanding.

Deaf education and its partnerships are formed in interaction with, and against the backdrop of, globalized societies where human beings have become strongly interdependent. In these complex settings, we increasingly come into contact with people from diverse backgrounds, who may look at the world

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[1] This chapter aims to use the term 'deaf' in a way that is sensitive to the fluidity and ambiguity of deaf identity formation, which may move between a wide and complex range of D/d positions (De Clerck 2012b).

from a different perspective, hold diverging beliefs and values, and exploit alternative practices and responses to challenges in life. Through interaction with other people and contexts, we develop our lives, identities, hopes, fears, and dreams for the future (De Clerck, in press b).

From the perspectives of both the world and the deaf educational landscape, contemporary times can be viewed as transitional (also see De Clerck 2015). One transition which has characterized the movement from the 20th to the 21st century is the mobilization of identity, which is described by French political philospher Dominique Moïsi (2009, 14):

> In today's world, ideology has been replaced by the struggle for identity. In the age of globalization, when everything and everybody are connected, it is important to assert one's individuality: "I am unique, I am different, and, if necessary, I am willing to fight until you recognize my existence."

Wood and Landry (2008, 23), scholars of interculturality and urbanization, state that this century is also one of diversity: "the central dilemma" is the development of "a coherent narrative for diversity and how it can answer the problems of our age".

The recognition and appreciation of diversity is challenged by the complexity of contemporary life, which, guided by emotions, tempts human beings to concentrate on differences. As such, Moïsi (2009) argues, if we want to be able to develop adequate and sustainable responses to modern challenges, we need to understand the collective emotions and cultural histories of others and of ourselves.

The role of emotions has increasingly received attention in different scholarly disciplines (e.g. Appadurai 2001; Crewe & Axelby 2013). In her books *Not for Profit* (2010) and *Why Love Matters for Justice* (2014), philosopher Martha Nussbaum emphasizes the role of empathy and love in education and political thinking, where it leads towards global citizenship and democracy, and inspires citizens to work for social justice.

Although international support has been growing for human rights, sustainable development, and appreciation of human and non-human diversity, serious challenges are found in violent conflict and ecological and economic crises (Dominelli 2007; Hessel 2012). As such, attention should be given to the relation between social and epistemological exclusion and the diverging discourses of governments, experts, epistemic communities, and disadvantaged people (Appadurai 2001).

The emerging exploration of deaf epistemologies, which have become understood as multiple epistemologies, can be situated in these developments (Paul & Moores 2010; Young & Temple 2014). Applying deaf epistemologies as analytical instruments is useful for understanding the diversity of deaf lives in complex societies that vary in their epistemological equity and inclusion of cognitive diversity (De Clerck 2012a, b).

From a perspective of deaf epistemologies, the next section explores practices of dialogue and partnership. (The scope here only allows the presentation of vignettes of cross-cultural comparative research in Uganda and Flanders; for in-depth discussion of methods, see De Clerck, in press b).

A PERSPECTIVE OF DEAF EPISTEMOLOGIES AND PRACTICES OF DIALOGUE AND PARTNERSHIP

Decision-making in deaf education has been emotionally loaded, as illustrated by the long process towards the 2010 ICED statement of principle of "A New Era: Deaf Participation and Collaboration", which rejected the resolutions of the 1880 Milan Congress and called for countries to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

How can the emotional geography of the deaf educational landscape be described? According to Moïsi, three emotions can be distinguished when we try to gain insight into the global geopolitical scene: "fear against hope, hope against humiliation, [and] humiliation leading to sheer irrationality and even, sometimes, to violence" (2009, xi). Padden and Humphries (2005) describe deaf communities' deeply rooted fear of biotechnology causing a return to oralism. This fear results from deaf people's experiences of not being able to shape their histories, and their uncertainty about being able to influence their futures:

> Surely educational programs can be developed that teach implanted children both speech and sign language. Surely the talents of doctors and scientists could be directed toward developing social programs that present speech and sign simultaneously to deaf children so that the benefits of bilingual acquisition in two modalities can be passed on to each new generation of deaf children. Instead the trend is a dangerously regressive one, threatening to return to the oralist project of the late 19th century. (p. 169)

Taking into account the emotions of deaf communities and possibilities for inclusive approaches of speech teaching and rehabilitation, Carty (2011, 167) raises a reflective question:

> … there is considerable ambivalence in the Deaf culture about the use of speech and hearing devices. But young deaf people will challenge us with their choices and attitudes. Are we willing to re-examine and debate this traditional view? Such a dialogue would also, of course, hold great potential for increased understanding between Deaf people and educators.

A stance of self-reflexivity is sensitive in a time when the survival of deaf communities is at stake, even though there have probably never been more instruments in place for protecting sign languages. However, these communities also creatively respond to the contemporary challenges. The slogan "Keep calm and carry on signing", part of a 2012 poster design for

Deaffest, a deaf film festival in Wolverhampton, England, reveals a sense of humor and resilience in activating a mainstream framework of strength in the preservation of the community's cultural and linguistic heritage.

The extent of global inequality is becoming more visible to disadvantaged groups through greater access to information (Moïsi, 2009). The effect of this is apparent in the first vignette below, which presents an example of confident community dialogue from Uganda on deaf education.

In January 2013, the Ugandan deaf community organized a meeting to discuss problems at the Wakiso Secondary School for the Deaf, in Kampala. The school had been established in 2003 by Ugandan deaf adults in response to a lack of secondary deaf education in the country and had become government-funded in 2008. The students had been on strike for weeks to protest against corruption and plans for reorganization in favor of new staff who had no training or experience in Ugandan Sign Language or teaching deaf students. The adult deaf community decided to hold a meeting on a Sunday afternoon after church, open to all community members, who could actively participate or just observe. Active participants included deaf students and staff members from the school, deaf community leaders, a deaf priest, representatives from disability organizations, and deaf adults who had established the school. Over five hours, the group followed an agenda, listened, asked for further background information, looked for solutions, and agreed on a strategy and action plan. Ultimately, the students were successful in their protest and negotiations, as a new director and board were appointed and the teachers were able to continue their work.

This example of collective problem solving creatively blends expert and indigenous perspectives, local forms of dialogue and frameworks for idea exchange derived from development work. The community's dynamics reveal fluid processes of knowledge formation and a critical awareness of the hierarchies involved in partnership (Sillitoe, Bicker & Pottier 2002; Crewe & Axelby 2013; Lutalo-Kiingi & De Clerck, in press).

A different approach of collective problem-solving was explored in the Flemish Deaf Parliament, a platform for participatory citizenship organized by Ghent University in cooperation with the Flemish Deaf Association.

In 2014, over 350 deaf community members gathered to discuss transitions in the community and challenges for the future. The initiative was developed in response to members' wish for participation in decision-making, and their concerns about the chasm between older and young deaf people, between elite and grassroots members, and between deaf people from different backgrounds. The platform can be conceptualized as a "community of practice" for democratic citizenship. For example, teenagers shared how they had grown up without knowledge of sign language and then found their way into the community; elderly deaf people explained why they prefer family workers who know sign language rather than communicating through writing. Some of the teenagers had never met older deaf people before, and adult members had their first opportunity to learn about young deaf people's

experiences of growing up with biotechnology and mainstreamed education. New ideas were explored such as whether the involvement of deaf people in family services would increase employment and life quality for younger and older deaf people respectively.

The platform enabled community members to share their perspectives, discuss sensitive topics, and gain more competence in cultural literacy and participation.

FACILITATING THE LEARNING PROCESS OF PARTNERSHIP IN DEAF EDUCATION

These vignettes from deaf epistemologies studies in Uganda and Flanders illustrate that it is vital for partners in deaf education to reflect on the emotions involved in debates and decision-making. From a cross-cultural perpective, they illuminate the value of informal networks and participatory platforms for citizens to listen to each other, discuss needs and challenges, exchange ideas, and practice democracy. Deaf epistemologies are a useful tool for analyzing cognitive diversity in complex worlds.

Educational contexts should provide young deaf learners with opportunities to gradually learn to deal with differences between people and develop empathic and dialogical capacities. This enables them to achieve shared understandings that facilitate problem solving in increasingly diverse societies. The acquisition of these skills is furthered by multilingual and intercultural educational practices in the arts and humanities (Wood & Landry 2008; Nussbaum 2010; De Clerck & Pinxten 2012).

Additionally, the partnerships and human rights called for in the ICED 2010 statement of principle may be fostered by an epistemological perspective which approaches human beings as insightful learners of language, culture and values (De Clerck & Pinxten 2012). This statement calls "upon nations of the world to recognize and allow all deaf citizens to be proud, confident, productive, creative, and enabling citizens in their respective countries" (Jamieson & Moores 2011, 28). In *Partners in Education*, Moores and Jamieson (2011, 211-212) recognize positive developments, but also find challenges: "Deaf professionals in many areas have little opportunity to participate meaningfully in educational decision making or implementation".

The human rights struggle has been a shared learning process. After the Second World War, countries were able to agree on the values of equality, freedom and solidarity. For the first time in history, all human beings were granted the same rights and basic respect in an instrument which has continued to be refined to become more inclusive (Hessel 2012). The UNCRPD's protection of deaf learners' linguistic and cultural identity is unprecedented (article 24). The ICED statement of principle, which is in alignment with the UNCRPD, can be considered a similar move towards altering an attitude of exclusion. Its implementation requires actively finding sufficient common ground for it to become a valuable tool for inclusive educational practices.

Similar to human rights approaches, a stance of "inclusive universality" (Brems 2001) may be constructive in this progression. Authentic partnership in education includes attention to the equal representation of all deaf people; similarities and differences in the needs of deaf learners in Western and non-Western countries; and the multiple histories and practices of formal and informal deaf education, citizenship and partnership.

These learning processes promote the realization of human rights, reciprocal notions of partnership, and shared responsibilities of emancipation. Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007, 439) emphasize the contextualized negotiation and meaning-making processes involved in the dialogue that can start from a human rights framework: "It is not so much that people are or are not citizens, but rather that citizenship is 'actualised' in diverse activities and relationships". This relational notion of citizenship offers a potential framework for an alternative to the familiar medical/sociocultural binary perspective. It may not only build bridges among deaf/sign language communities and their service and policy contexts, but may also help these groups respond to challenges of intergenerational reciprocity; a broad range of perspectives; and an inclusive outlook toward diversity in practices of language and learning.

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