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Learning to create environments for deafness among hearing preservice teachers: A defectological approach

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes a series of three discussions of C. J. Heuer's *BUG: Deaf Identity and Internal Revolution (Bug)* in a university service-learning course for teacher candidates (TCs). *Bug* provides a collection of short pieces written from a deaf perspective to convey the way the author has experienced life in the insensitive, dismissive social world of hearing people. The course was organized so that TCs explored issues of human diversity in book clubs in which they chose their own texts, discussed them inductively among themselves on their own terms, and then led their classmates in an exploration of the key issues raised in the texts. Their discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Using a lens provided by Vygotsky's work in defectology—a field that, in contrast to the term, draws attention to the social consequences of a human difference, rather than finding the condition itself a “defect”—we identified the themes explored in their discussions. Vygotsky argued that the “problem” of human difference concerns the re-education of people considered “normal,” rather than the remediation of a point of difference such as deafness. This study outlines how the student-generated insights from their discussions comprise a form of re-education among hearing students with little prior exposure to, or understanding of, deafness.

Deafness is often considered to be a problem of the deaf. Vygotsky (1993), in his work in the field of defectology, argues that the problem with deafness is that hearing people treat deaf people in dehumanizing ways. His response was to urge educators and others to create inclusive environments within which deaf, blind, and cognitively impaired people—especially such children in school, of whom there were many after years of warfare—participate in society in valued and respected ways.

In this study¹ we analyze how five hearing U.S. undergraduate university teacher candidates (TCs) discussed a book written by deaf author C. J. Heuer (2007), *BUG: Deaf Identity and Internal Revolution* (hereafter, *Bug*). The course featured in this study relied on a book club model in which self-chosen groups of about 5 students picked three books from an extensive menu of titles covering a wide range of social, psychological, historical, cultural, and educational issues. The group's choice of *Bug* gave them access to a first-person perspective on how the author feels to be treated as subhuman because he is deaf.

Each TC entered the discussions with little knowledge about deafness. Their reading and discussions brought the TCs in contact with a segment of the population with which they stated that they had experienced very little contact, and about whom they knew

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¹ This research was approved by The University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board, and all participants signed letters providing their informed consent.

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little. They thus provide a suitable focus for a study of how a set of prospective teachers learned about the deaf population and its experiences from a non-pathologizing, emic perspective; and how they in turn talked about what sorts of inclusive, respectful environments they hoped to create as teachers.

From a data set and coding process that documented many processes, we focused on the following research questions:

1. What did the discussions reveal about the TCs' prior states of knowledge about deaf people and Deaf culture?
2. What changes did the discussions produce in their understandings, and what factors helped to account for those developments?
3. What teacher identities did the TCs project for themselves and their classmates based on a clearer understanding of Deaf culture and deaf people?
4. What solutions did the group identify to make schools more gratifying sites for both deaf and hearing people?

Our study is not designed to investigate the most current issues in teaching communication skills to deaf people and sign interpreters, a common concern of deaf education research. Rather, it is to analyze how engaging with a deaf author's perspective enabled these TCs to adopt a major emphasis of Vygotsky's defectological approach: to create more humane and supportive social contexts for people lacking typical bodily makeups. They did so without reading Vygotsky at all. Rather, through reading, discussion, and other thinking, they arrived at an understanding of deafness that aligned well with Vygotsky's view that deafness is a social problem whose responsibility for social inclusion falls to the hearing population, rather than a problem of deaf people. We next review Vygotsky's account of defectology, including its history and how Vygotsky sought to change what surrounds deaf people socially so as to make them feel accepted, respected, and valued in society.

1. Historical and theoretical framework

Vygotsky did not invent the field of defectology, nor did he name it (McCagg, 1989). The term's seeming callousness belies its empathic and nurturing approach. Soviet defectologists were passionately devoted to the education of children whose bodies and minds did not conform to norms typified in age-based developmental schedules. Of special concern to Vygotsky were the many Soviet children whose sight, hearing, and cognitive abilities were diminished or destroyed during the many years of warfare of the early 1900s: a revolution in 1905, World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Polish-Bolshevik War, and several years of Civil War before the Soviet Union was established.

Vygotsky (1993) saw such variations from the evolutionary norm in the context of his broader emphasis on human development. Typically, deafness is considered to be a deficiency to be repaired, leading to a persistent "philanthropic, invalid-oriented point of view" toward difference (p. 75). Rather, he felt that *including people in rewarding cultural activity* ought to be the goal. This integration and assimilation would, he felt, cultivate the potential of the whole person within the bounds of cultural goals and practices.

Vygotsky (1993) emphasized *altering the environment itself*, rather than fixing the deaf child: "The child's physical and psychological reaction to the handicap² is the central and basic problem—indeed, the sole reality—with which defectology deals" (p. 32), because feelings of inadequacy follow from being treated as inferior and defective. Vygotsky did see feelings of inadequacy as having, in some instances, a positive outcome in that they could serve to motivate positive new ways of engaging with society.

More germane to our study, feelings of inadequacy are often reinforced socially to produce the *secondary disability* of profound insecurity and doubts about personal worth. The primary disability is the source of difference itself, such as deafness. To Vygotsky (1993), being deaf or lacking any typical human function is not the problem. The people surrounding the deaf, blind, or otherwise different child are the problem when they construct a potentially disabling environment, rife with negative means of reinforcement that lead to feelings of inferiority. Vygotsky asserted that "the social aspect formerly diagnosed as secondary and derivative, in fact, turns out to be primary and major. One must boldly look at this problem as a social problem" (p. 112). This insight regarding the role of the social environment on a deaf person's feelings of worth stresses the importance of empathy and shared responsibility for making other people's lives more gratifying and rewarding. What is defective in this conception is the disabling environment. Education therefore "must cope not so much with these biological factors as with their social consequences" (p. 66; emphasis in original).

This shift might become available through *empathic framing* in understanding difference (Smagorinsky & Johnson, 2021). Empathic framing follows from an emotional connection and therefore greater understanding of a person exhibiting human difference. We adapt this notion from work in *reframing* (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974), in which whole conceptual lenses shift toward a subject. Empathic framing involves an emotionally-motivated form of *repositioning* (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009), which occurs when, in a relationship characterized by a power inequity, a person's status is shifted by others to view the person in a different way. Empathic framing, or reframing, involves the repositioning of others such that the status differentials are diminished through the new understanding that follows from an emotionally-driven shift in perspective. To Vygotsky (1993),

Full social esteem is the ultimate aim of education inasmuch as all the processes of overcompensation are directed at achieving social status. ... *the task is not so much the education of blind children as it is the reeducation of the sighted. The latter must change their attitude toward blindness and toward the blind. The reeducation of the sighted poses a social pedagogical task of enormous importance.* (pp. 57, 86; emphasis added).

² This is the term available through translation, and does not conform to 21st century terminology more sensitive to difference, even as such terms were part of the diagnostic language of Vygotsky's day, along with "idiot," "retarded," and other terms no longer acceptable in professional circles.

Vygotsky wrote interchangeably about deafness and blindness in his conception of defectology, allowing our extrapolation from blindness in this comment to deafness in our study. We focus on hearing students engaging in a self-chosen reeducation about deafness, largely through Heuer but relatedly through additional sources they consulted to inform their growing awareness. This study is about the “reeducation of the [hearing].” This reeducation came in the context of a course in which TCs were encouraged to read about populations with which they were unfamiliar and learn about their experiences in school and society. Our report of their discussions reveals how this group made sense of *Bug*, initially among themselves, and ultimately as leaders of a discussion with their classmates.

2. Context of the investigation

We next provide author subjectivity statements, describe the general outline of the service-learning course, profile the participants in the focal book club, and summarize the books they selected to read and discuss during the semester.

2.1. Author subjectivities

The first author was a faculty member who taught the service-learning course in which the discussions analyzed for this study took place. He is a hearing person whose learning about Deaf culture came late in life, through both his exposure to the group's discussions and his later work on Smagorinsky, Tobin, & Lee (2019). This project involved meetings with deaf scholars and ultimately their publication in the volume, along with others writing from perspectives of blindness, multiple sclerosis, and engagement with other atypical ways of being.

The second author is a high school English³ teacher and doctoral student under the first author's advisement at The University of Georgia. She is a hearing person whose involvement in this study comprised her first extensive exposure to Deaf perspectives. She was not enrolled in doctoral studies at the time of the data collection.

2.2. Service-learning course

The service-learning course in which the discussions took place was an undergraduate elective at The University of Georgia. Service-learning refers to experiential education

1. under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that
 - is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
 - is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and
 - helps foster civic responsibility; and
2. that
 - is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and
 - provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience. (Youth.gov, n.d.)

Service-learning is hyphenated to indicate the bi-directional nature of the experience, one in which learning and service are equally important.

The TCs in the course had two related responsibilities. One was situated in the city's alternative high school, a public school for students who either did not fit with conventional schooling, had work or family obligations that conflicted with conventional school schedules, or had been removed from a mainstream school for rules violations. The TCs met the course's service-learning requirement via tutoring and mentoring disaffected youth in the school, while simultaneously learning about the lives of people much different from themselves.

The other principal experience, and source of data for this study, took place on the university campus in weekly class meetings. In these sessions the TCs met in book clubs in three 4-week cycles to discuss books that they chose from an extensive menu of diversity-oriented texts prepared by the professor. The books were identified because they provided a wide range of possible topics, without requiring any. The book clubs provided a medium for student-led discussions conducted with books of their choice, within the broad scope that the books enabled them to learn about populations from outside their own experience. They also governed their own discussions, first within the book club, and then as leaders of their classmates. The students determined what to talk about, and how to talk about it. (See Smagorinsky, 2011, 2014, 2019; Smagorinsky, Brasley, Johnson, & Shurtz, 2017; Smagorinsky, Clayton, & Johnson, 2015; Smagorinsky, Johnson, & Clayton, 2015, for published accounts of the course.)

Each of the three cycles had a similar structure (see Fig. 1). In the first meeting the TCs discussed the book with their book club colleagues in an open-ended way of their choice. The second week built on that foundation as they planned how to lead their classmates in a discussion of their book. In the third and fourth weeks, the four book clubs led their classmates in discussions of their books covering 60–80 min; that is, in the third week, two groups led discussions of their books, and in the fourth week, the remaining two

³ “English teacher” refers to a teacher in English-language nations whose subject is centered on national literature, composition, and language study. It is different from ESL, TESOL, and related fields in which English is a target language for speakers of other languages.

Group	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
1	Initial discussion of chosen book	Prepare to lead discussion of chosen book	Lead class in discussion of book	
2	Initial discussion of chosen book	Prepare to lead discussion of chosen book	Lead class in discussion of book	
3	Initial discussion of chosen book	Prepare to lead discussion of chosen book		Lead class in discussion of book
4	Initial discussion of chosen book	Prepare to lead discussion of chosen book		Lead class in discussion of book

Fig. 1. Book club cycle.

groups led discussions of their books.

The first author/professor's main contributions came during the discussions involving the whole class. For all TCs, this class represented their first experience teaching a class. They were thus prompted in how to encourage class participation so they wouldn't default to lecturing. For example, for those who chose to use presentation software, he recommended never leaving a slide without a question, making it so that a segment never ended with a proclamation from an information source. He also provided them with techniques from his studies of classroom discourse for prompting students to elaborate on their initial comments, such as repeating a key term from their statement as an interrogative, thus suggesting the need to expand on it (see Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993, for the source of this method). He rarely contributed to the content of the discussions, and then only to provide adjustments to factually questionable comments that were not challenged by students, or to suggest different ways of phrasing characterizations that had pathological implications, such as using "dark" or "black" as a negative portrayal (dark side, black sheep) in ways that might be extrapolated to racial stereotyping.

2.3. Participants

The focal book club consisted of five white hearing undergraduate women⁴: Margie, Alice, Phyllis, Ashley, and Courtney. (All names are pseudonyms.) They shared the profile of most students at the university, which has a Carnegie classification of Very High Research Activity (R1) and another for Community Engagement. They had excelled in either public or independent schools to gain admission to the university, largely in elite academic tracks. All spoke of having limited experience with deaf people outside school, and none as students in school.

2.3.1. *BUG: deaf identity and internal revolution*

The author of *Bug*, Christopher Jon Heuer, is listed as an instructor in the Department of Applied Literacy at Gallaudet University, a college for the deaf, which also published his volume. Heuer was born with impaired hearing and became deaf early in life. His essays generally center on problems with hearing people who are insensitive, ignorant, uncaring, and discriminatory toward deaf people. He also criticizes deaf people he finds narrow-minded and insular. He also does so with humor that the TCs said they appreciated, and that helped them to resonate with his views and troubles with hearing people. To open the book, for instance, he writes,

When I was growing up, my mother's response to every problem I had was: "Well, he just needs to adjust to his deafness." Bloody nose? "Chris, you need to adjust to your deafness." Homework not done? "I know it's hard adjusting to your deafness, honey, but ..." Acne scarring? "Lots of teenagers get zits, Chris. I know it's hard for you, dealing with this while trying to adjust to your ..."

On and on this went—for years. One day, I got sick of it. I don't really know how the argument got started, but I ended up banging my fist on the table and shouting, "Ma, stop!" Stop, because it's not your deafness that spits in your ear and slaps you upside the back of your head as it runs past you in the hallways of mainstream schools. It doesn't talk down to you, treat you like a Retard,⁵ or leave you sitting at the dinner table, neglected and alone, in the presence of oblivious, yapping multitudes.

Other people do that.

Thus my intention was to kick a little ass in my column [which served as the basis of *Bug*]. I was mad, and Hearing America has had it coming for years. It's not easy, trying to tell them off. The problem isn't the argument. It's the audience. The ability to hear is not the same as the ability to listen. Brutal truths are painful and therefore threatening. Avoidance is easier. Denial is easier. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself" is easier. Their only alternative is acknowledging their part in the problem. (pp. 1–2)

⁴ We make no assumptions about their sexuality beyond the sexualities they performed in class, and by which they referred to themselves.

⁵ We assume that Heuer's use of "Retard," capitalized, is ironic and designed to mock the term, not to endorse it; see previous note on how this term was once diagnostic, but has become pathological and fallen out of respectful use.

These themes concerning the ways in which deaf people are ill-treated, and the TCs' engagement with Heuer's sardonic way of presenting them, recurred in the discussions we report in the [Findings](#) section.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

Data for this study consist of the audio-recorded book club discussions. Over the course of the semester, the group chose three books, one for each cycle. Our focus is on the group's three discussions of *Bug*, the second book in their series. The individual voices in the transcripts were not associated with names, making it difficult to identify the speaker with certainty during their discussions in the overall cacophony of the class and its multiple concurrent discussions. We recognize this lack of speaker identification as a limitation of the study.

3.2. Data analysis

We developed the codes inductively through discussion of each statement in the transcripts, enabling us to evolve our system as our insights about the discussions grew across the discussions analyzed (see [Smagorinsky, 2008](#), for a rationale for collaborative, recursive coding rather than independent coding meeting an agreement threshold based on a priori categories). We identified the concepts raised in each of the three discussions of *Bug*. The TCs discussed a host of topics, principally generated in response to Heuer's essays but also informed by other knowledge sources: the media, film, other university courses, occasional deaf people they had been around, and many others. Topics raised by Heuer included Deaf culture, deaf communication, deaf education, discrimination against deaf people, the imposition of cochlear implants on deaf people, and many others that provided an emic perspective on deafness and how deaf people feel when they are treated unsympathetically, dismissively, and condescendingly.

4. Findings

We next present the three discussions conducted by the book club. Although the class members had never read [Vygotsky \(1993\)](#), their discussion of Heuer's personal perspective paralleled Vygotskian themes related to creating more supportive environments for deafness by reeducating the hearing population that surrounds them. These new settings would be informed by an understanding of deafness as a phenomenon, and the responsibility of hearing people to take an inclusive and respectful perspective toward deaf people. This stance would include opening up authentic avenues for participation in meaningful, self-affirming cultural activities, and was projected into future teaching identities they hoped to develop as sensitive and caring educators.

Our presentation of findings includes both quotes from, and summaries of lengthier discussions. We begin with the first discussion of the semester, and proceed chronologically through the remaining semester's meetings.

4.1. Discussion #1

The TCs' first discussion concerned their growing awareness of the experiences of deaf people and the obstacles they face from hearing people, and promoted their empathy for human difference and a desire to be respectful, inclusive teachers. The discussion included four primary topics: the deaf experience, the notion of "disability" as a form of human diversity, issues that follow from a dominant culture's imposition of values on people from outside that culture, and the environments that create the context for deafness in US society.

4.1.1. Deaf experience

The TCs discussed the deaf experience in three areas: their developing understanding of Deaf culture, the communication practices of deaf people, and the educational experiences of deaf people.

4.1.1.1. Deaf culture. Heuer outlines the differences between "small d" deafness and "big D" Deaf culture, which appeared to be a new set of constructs for the TCs. Deaf culture, they learned, has important bonds that make it a community and that make it inaccessible to hearing people. Deaf people's feelings of insularity and cohesiveness, asserts Heuer, follow from the lack of respect shown to them by those with hearing, a point explored by the TCs⁶:

Speaker 1: I remember it from the special ed[ucation] class that we had to take. Like they don't want you to always see it as this person has a disability, you want them, you want to see them as just they're different. And they have a different way of communicating. It's not that they're like disabled, you know? And I think that's what he's trying to get at. He's like, I'm not just disabled. I just, this is how I was born, and I'm just this way.

⁶ We use a dash to indicate a pause or unfinished thought, and 3 or 4 dots (...) to indicate an ellipsis where we deleted parts of the TCs' speech on behalf of the economy of the manuscript. In the Heuer quote that we provide earlier in the article, the use of dots is from his text and is not an ellipsis of ours.

Speaker 2: ... I guess I would look at someone who is deaf and want to heal them per se. You know?

Speaker 3: Someone that needs to be fixed.

Speaker 4: Yeah, and want to make them better. But I mean you wouldn't look at someone who's African American or Chinese and say, oh, lay hands on you and make you white. You know? Just because you're not the majority.

We see this exchange as somewhat awkward as the TCs explored ideas newly occurring to them in their first discussion of the book. The example about making Black people white, for instance, could be taken as evidence that they viewed whiteness as the desirable norm. We see this instance as an indication of where they were at the time in their socialization, a developmental point that the course was designed to help to refine.

One group member also acknowledged that she assumed that "healing" deafness was her first impulse, with another joining to describe her assuming that a deaf person "needs to be fixed." The group members appeared to be struggling with new concepts in ways that required them to map new knowledge about Deaf culture onto prior knowledge based in pathologizing views that made them part of the problem, from Heuer's perspective. As Heuer said to open his book, hearing and listening are not the same thing, and their hearing assumptions, they were beginning to understand, required reeducation. The TCs appeared to be working at a stage of early concept development, characterized by [Vygotsky \(1987\)](#) as a "complex" or, in more unified way, "pseudoconcept," those notions that are in the process of being constructed and so are laden with contradiction and inconsistency.

4.1.1.2. Communication. The TCs' status as hearing people led them to discuss issues of communication among deaf people and between hearing and deaf people, one of many instances in which they began to critique and move beyond their entering ableist assumptions. The issue of cochlear implants, they learned and discussed, is quite controversial in Deaf culture:

Speaker 1: Part of me ... I feel like everybody [who is] born deaf should get transplants and all that. But like after reading this, I'm [thinking], I don't know what I'm talking about. There is, what about, like, the important bonds that they have like within their community? Who is to say that my way of living is right?

Speaker 2: True.

Speaker 3: And that's just another way of the dominant group, which in this case would be those of us who can hear. Kind of making those [inaudible] can't feel inferior. Because I mean, I thought that too, if you're deaf why not get the cochlear implant or whatever? To make your life better. But who is to say that makes your life any better? ...

Speaker 4: As hearing Americans, [installing an implant] would be our first like instinct, if I knew my child was going to be deaf. And who's to say that's an issue? But we've been so focused on the fact that that's a disability. That's like, oh, it's a disability that we can fix, let's fix it. But then he makes the point that, it's not fair because that child never has the opportunity to say no, I'm okay with being deaf. And I'll embrace this and live with it. And I would have never thought about that.

The speaker's admission that she would "have never thought about that" suggests that Heuer's points about cochlear implants were new and radical to her, yet worthy of adopting into her own ideology as she examined her assumptions in light of Heuer's narratives and illustrations of his painful encounters with hearing people.

The role of American Sign Language (ASL) was a common point of discussion in the group. Signing, they learned, plays a role in maintaining relationships, and produces inhibition in deaf people when hearing people can't or don't use ASL. One TC turned to Heuer to inform her understanding of the problems that misunderstanding sign language can create for the education of deaf students, saying during the discussion that

The last paragraph on page 12 talks about the mother who believes her deaf son's illiteracy is caused by his deafness and not her own refusal to learn to sign, and the deaf education teacher who makes her students [believe that academic struggles] are caused by their deafness, not her own poor teaching and low expectations.

This observation shifts responsibility for communication to the hearing population, rather than making deafness the problem of the deaf. The group members' reading of Heuer opened their eyes to new ways of viewing human difference that made them accountable for matters of inclusion, and that made human difference something that needn't be repaired.

4.1.1.3. Education. The group discussed the education of deaf people and its problematic nature. Schools exclusively for deaf and blind people, they agreed, enable the students to learn in ways specific to the needs of deaf people. Yet they also segregate deaf and hearing people from one another and limit the possibilities for mutual understanding and acceptance. One TC phrased the issues as follows:

It's hard, because we have schools for the deaf and schools for the blind. And you know, I mean if I were deaf, I feel I would probably want to be in a school with kids who learned the same way I did. And required more attention and whatever. But like, you know, we didn't grow up with, or I didn't grow up with deaf kids in my classes. So how are we supposed to be exposed to it when our teachers in public schools can't teach kids like that? And you know, I think it needs to change if we are going to be more accepting and more understanding of [deaf people's lives].

The group agreed that both mainstreaming deaf children, and segregating them in special schools, are problematic. Teachers who

are unprepared to teach deaf students often provide instruction that results in low reading levels, and can embarrass deaf students by treating their differences as defects. Visible hearing aids can also be a source of embarrassment. Meanwhile, they agreed, sign language should be included among Foreign Language offerings so that more hearing people can communicate with deaf people and allow them feel less marginalized. These realizations helped the group members to develop an understanding that they had lacked before reading *Bug*.

More positively, they said, teachers can create an environment of acceptance for deaf students without pathologizing them. They arrived at this point by considering the callous ways in which deaf students are often treated in classrooms:

Speaker 1: And that's just another way of the dominant group, which in this case would be those of us who can hear. Kind of making those [inaudible] feel inferior. Because I mean I thought that too. If you're deaf, why not get the cochlear implant or whatever? To make your life better. But who is to say that makes your life any better? So—

Speaker 2: Yeah, and I thought like when he wouldn't wear his hearing aids to school, the teacher is yelling at him. I was thinking to myself, like, how embarrassing for a kid to wear like those big hearing aids

Speaker 3: Why, why would you yell at a child for something like that? Why?

This effort at inclusion and respect would involve making hearing students accountable for communicating with students with hearing difficulties, thus distributing responsibility and making the communicative task less onerous for students without full hearing. This attention to the social environment of human development helped the TCs recognize what [Vygotsky \(1993\)](#) described as *deafness as a social problem*, rather than a problem of the deaf individual, and gave them a sense of accountability for the emotional life of people different from themselves. One TC's observation about how it must feel to be excluded embodies Vygotsky's account of the secondary disability, with empathic framing enabling her to shift toward the perspective of a deaf person: "If you keep telling these people, okay, you're in this group. These low expectations, like, you just like grow up believing these things. And maybe succumbing to like what society, where they want to put you, you know?"

The data suggest that the TCs remained moored in their incoming beliefs in some ways, reflecting the "twisting path" of concept development that [Vygotsky \(1987, p. 156; cf. Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003\)](#) argues is characteristic of human development. Two of the TCs had attended Christian schools prior to entering public education at the university, and their indoctrination to religious conceptions of humanity informed their views.⁷ They drew on Heuer's narrative about his experience with a girlfriend who took him to church to attempt to cure his deafness. In this context, one group member suggested that deaf people are made deaf by God, and so should embrace their deafness as part of God's creation.

Speaker 1: We've been so focused on the fact that [deafness] is a disability. That's like, oh, it's a disability that we can fix [with a cochlear implant], let's fix it. But then he makes the point that, it's not fair because that child never has the opportunity to say, "No, I'm okay with being deaf. And I'll embrace this and live with it." And I would have never thought about that.

Speaker 2: I mean, you think about it as like, God made them that way. But they should embrace it, I guess?

The second speaker interpreted deaf people's satisfaction with deafness as a consequence of being part of God's creation as a way to interpret how they might not desire an intervention to repair their biological condition. Her way of incorporating new information into a worldview grounded in creationist assumptions included a form of distancing, with "them" and "they" used to refer to deaf people, in contrast with the first speaker's effort to see the world from a deaf perspective and speak from its position using first-person pronouns. At this point in the series of discussions, the TCs were exploring their understandings without necessarily agreeing explicitly or tacitly, and engaged in a process of reeducation without which, as the first speaker acknowledged, she "would have never thought about that."

The TCs' engagement with Heuer contributed to their understanding that ableism is not everyone's desired goal. Deaf people, they said, are often diminished by able-bodied people who do not know or understand their lives. The group attended to Heuer's portrayals of hearing people as insensitive to and uncaring about the needs, concerns, self-esteem, status, and other issues facing deaf people. They lack understanding, impose limiting assumptions on them, and are oblivious to variation among them because they view them stereotypically and reductively and don't see their potential or even their current possibilities.

Hearing people, they agreed, are not well educated about Deaf culture and so don't understand deaf people or their needs. Even multicultural courses in the College of Education focused on the categories of race, gender, and social class and elided other forms of human difference, as one TC said:

I would have never thought of Deaf culture as a minority until I read this.... Because I feel like I've taken so many like multicultural like courses about discriminated people, all about it. And every single one is about race, and sometimes gender. But never [deafness].

The condition of deafness matters greatly in society, they agreed, largely because of the ways in which hearing people treat deaf people. Society, not deafness or deaf people, is the problem, including the faculty teaching foundational multicultural education courses. Their insights resonate well with [Vygotsky's \(1993\)](#) contention that blindness, deafness, and other departures from the evolutionary norm are social problems, rather than being ills that are subject to rehabilitation and remedy.

⁷ [Vygotsky \(1993\)](#), in the atheistic Soviet Union and as a Jewish man, rejected Christian charity and pity as a proper response to deaf, blind, and cognitively impaired people.

The TCs' discussion included occasions when they produced *projected teacher identities* (Johnson & Smagorinsky, manuscript under review; Kessler, 2021). Projected teacher identities involve imagining a future self as a teacher who works according to a set of principles. A projected teacher identity maps out a conceptual pathway accompanied by appropriate conduct. In this group, the projected teacher identity worked in conjunction with empathic framing such that the future conception built on an emotional connection to produce more sensitive teaching for diverse groups. As one TC put it during this first discussion,

As teachers maybe you can try to help the parents like become sensitive to these things and offer, you know, ideas of what to do. But sometimes I think that certain kind of parents, they still, like I don't know if teachers talk to his mom, if she would do anything else? I really don't know. But at least make the kids in the class more sensitive to it, and don't make it awkward, make it like a part of the classroom and that way at least he could have friends. Or some support.

They imagined themselves as future sensitive educators who accommodate human difference by helping parents become responsive to difference, and who develop strategies for their students who are different from themselves. In their own teaching, they hoped to include and validate deaf students in their classes, possibly by including an ASL translator. At the same time, they were concerned that they wouldn't know how to undertake this validation.

4.1.2. Summary and transition to Discussion #2

This opening discussion, involved an exploration of issues and beliefs that they acknowledged had never occurred to them before reading Heuer. They had to reconcile his adamant stance about the legitimacy of deaf life with their often-pathologizing assumptions about deaf people, which, they acknowledged, were based on how they had always viewed deaf people as wishing they could hear. These ableist assumptions began to fragment under Heuer's often withering portrayals of hearing people's insensitivity, suggesting that the conception of deafness with which the TCs had entered their reading was under development toward a more compassionate understanding of how deaf people define and live the good life.

4.2. Discussion #2

In the second meeting on *Bug*, the group both discussed the book, and prepared to lead their classmates in a discussion of it the following week. The group felt it important to create connection and empathy via the humor in Heuer's narratives. Indeed, Heuer's engaging personality helped them take on his perspective and make emotional connections to the sympathetic portrayal of deaf people that he provides:

Speaker 1: He really just humanizes everything, you know.

Speaker 2: He's so honest.

His honesty prompted them to examine their own assumptions, which they believed would benefit their classmates. We next review the issues that the TCs emphasized as important to raise when leading their classmates in a discussion.

4.2.1. Reducating classmates about deaf people

One TC said during the second discussion, "I think maybe we should talk about it with ignorant hearing America. Because we're hearing America, and we didn't know these things." This acknowledgement of her own ignorance provided motivation to educate their classmates about deaf life and deaf education. They themselves had learned quite a bit of new information through both Heuer's book and through additional research they conducted in relation to their reading and discussions. They felt frustrated that they'd never had to learn about Deaf culture before, and felt they needed to bring their classmates up to speed just on knowing the issues. They assembled a lot of statistics about deafness, which they planned to share during the whole-class discussion.

4.2.2. Creating inclusive environments for deaf people

One theme characterizing their discussion concerned the environments for deafness. One TC noted that her aunt, a disability activist, had a t-shirt that carried the slogan "Attitudes are the real disability," a theme of Vygotsky's (1993) defectological perspective. These attitudes tend to diminish deaf people, such as when hearing people make deafness their sole lens for viewing someone, rather than seeing deafness as one part of a greater whole. How, they wondered, would they teach a class that included deaf students? These discussions implied a recognition of their privileged status as members of the dominant culture. They acknowledged the subordinate status of people considered disabled, deaf, and otherwise marginalized, and learned to try to take others' perspective on how they live and are treated in society.

4.2.3. Empathic framing of deaf people

We identified four ways in which the group engaged in empathic framing. Most frequently, they made connections with deaf people through shared feelings rather than shared disability. In these discussions the group sought pathways to emotional connectivity that weren't immediately evident to them, given their general lack of awareness of the deaf experience. They related, for instance, to Heuer's embarrassment about having to wear a cumbersome, noticeable hearing aid in school. They had all felt adolescent shame for being singled out, which provided an empathic bridge to the feelings experienced by many deaf and disabled people.

The group tried to take the perspective of a young person who relies on lip-reading, but can't see the speaker's face and so cannot "hear" the words, a condition they had never experienced but found worth their sympathy. One TC wondered, "Can you imagine if like

your success in your class depended on your ability to see your teacher's mouth, like how much do you actually see that, like how much is your like teacher turned away from you writing on the board?"

4.2.4. Cochlear implants

Prior to reading Heuer, they had never considered Deaf culture's resistance to cochlear implants and had to adjust their perspective to understand why a deaf person would choose not to hear through an amplifying device. Among other things, they learned through their reading that a cochlear implant does not produce sounds that resemble those heard by hearing people. Rather, they found, as one implant recipient said, like "Darth Vader talking underwater" (reported in Nelson, 2022, n. p.). They also, through reading Heuer's account of his strategy of communicating through written notes, began to understand the communication difficulties facing deaf people and the need to change the setting of deafness to make deaf people's lives more satisfying.

Their discussion led them to consider both how Heuer humanizes deaf people to make them more sympathetic, and in turn how to teach these challenging issues in ways that their classmates would find neither overwhelming nor overly critical of themselves as agents of the oppressive hearing culture. They felt these issues were important because, as one said, "We need to talk about cochlear implants and like benefits and disadvantages because a lot of people aren't really aware like, or at least I wasn't like just how controversial it is." Their own lack of awareness informed their choice of what to discuss with their classmates, who no doubt fit with their observation that "We also need to talk about the ignorance of the average American in regard to deaf people." They acknowledged their own obliviousness frequently in the discussions as being part of their misunderstandings prior to reading and discussing *Bug*, and planned to help classmates learn about facts and attitudes that would increase their chances of creating environments that normalized deafness and included deaf people without calling attention to them.

4.2.5. Projected teacher identities

During their discussions the group engaged in projecting their future teacher identities. These images at times followed from their empathic framing and concomitant disposition to be inclusive educators. They needed to develop an awareness of how different sorts of students experience their classes, to step out of their own comfort zones and work harder and understanding people classified as disabled. Their disposition to be empathic and inclusive led them to reconsider their approach to embrace the full range of students they might teach. Toward this end they felt that as teachers, they would make themselves responsible for student failure, a move that required them to take their students' perspectives on their response to the curriculum. In leading their discussion, they intended to ask their classmates, "As teachers, what strategies would you use with deaf students?" They hoped to educate their classmates about the most critical issues they found in their reading, because "There's so many aspects of like our daily lives that we don't think about that probably, if you were deaf, would be so hard."

Their planning included the question of "When you have a deaf kid in your class, how do you cope, like do you employ any of these strategies?" They discussed potential teaching identities, generally agreeing with the TC who said, "As a teacher, sometimes you have to step outside of your comfort zone and work a little harder, because I mean it's not easy to just write notes back and forth to each other at the dinner table [as Heuer had done as a child], but when you have a kid who needs that, that's what you have to do."

4.2.6. Summary and transition to Discussion #3

This exploration and planning session covered far more territory than they would be able to address in a single discussion, and so produced attention to many ideas ultimately not included in the third session in which they would lead their classmates on the book's most salient points, as they understood them. We next describe the discussion they led in an attempt to help their classmates begin a conceptual journey of their own toward greater understanding of deafness.

4.3. Discussion #3

In this meeting the book club group led their classmates in a discussion of *Bug*. Their task was to provide information about deafness and deaf experiences, to acquaint their classmates with issues surrounding American Sign Language, discuss the role of assistive technology (especially cochlear implants), promote empathy for deaf people among their classmates, and consider what they would do in their future teaching if they had deaf students in their classes.

4.3.1. Deafness and deaf experiences

The main thrust of their discussion concerned helping their classmates learn about deafness, and as a result understand the deaf experience better in school and society, including how hearing people, through ignorance, often diminish deaf people's lives.

4.3.1.1. Basic information. The discussion leaders felt it important to educate their classmates, few of whom had more than brief encounters with deaf people, about the experience of being deaf as presented by Heuer. The class explored a variety of issues needing clarity and better knowledge, including reports by the group on statistics about deafness in the population. Definitional issues included whether or not milder hearing losses were included in deaf populations, and which terms (e.g., hearing impaired) are considered acceptable. They further noted that deafness can't be viewed as a singular trait, but must be understood in terms of its intersections with other social and biological factors. Deafness both defines a person and creates misunderstandings among hearing people who only see the deafness, as one TC from the book club told her classmates:

He's trying to get you to see he's a person, you know? He doesn't want to be defined by being deaf. Even though if he wants to be part of the Deaf culture that's fine. He's just saying you know, when these kids like when they're in their classroom, try to see them as a person who can't hear. ... He doesn't want to be just another category. And he says I don't think I'm better than everyone else, I don't think I deserve special treatment, but I am also not a piece of paper, nor am I somebody else's preconceived answer. So he's just trying to say that you know he's, everybody is their own person. And people should respect that and not just [see his] disability.

Their attention to Heuer here went beyond basic information. Rather, they viewed Heuer as more than the sum of his statistical parts, as a human being with every capacity but hearing. This image ran counter to their entering limited, debilitating assumptions, which they acknowledged needed reformation; and served as a crucial point in their effort to educate their classmates into new understandings.

4.3.1.2. Autonomy and agency. The discussion included attention to the problem of who has the authority to determine the best approach to addressing deafness. Deaf people have often been subjected to the ableist assumption that they should prefer hearing, a hierarchical assumption that may occur both within Deaf culture, and within families with deaf children. There's a tension, the class agreed, between deciding what's best for a child, and letting the child decide whether to assimilate and normalize toward hearing culture, or gravitate toward the values and identity of Deaf culture. This discussion was particularly acute in the area of cochlear implants, which we treat separately.

4.3.1.3. Effects on hearing people. Relationships arose in other areas as well. The class wondered if serving deaf students with special accommodations might make other students resentful because of the adaptations they would have to make; at the same time, deaf people don't want pity, they want acceptance and respect. They agreed that both deaf people and the hearing people around them have the responsibility to adjust to one another.

4.3.1.4. Pathologizing deafness. The TCs discussed the manner in which deafness is pathologized by hearing people, a consequence of their ignorance and lack of sensitivity to the experience of being deaf. Some classmates assumed that life as a deaf person is difficult, and thought that they might need to be "put in an institution completely." Others, particularly the book club members who organized and led the discussion, asserted that it is not the problem of the "disabled" deaf person, but of the people who surround them, a perspective available through Heuer. These exchanges suggested that some classmates began the session with disabling assumptions of the sort that had characterized the book club members themselves. The re-educational dimension of the discussion pointed to the need to emphasize inclusive environments for deaf people among hearing people, to shift the focus from the deaf person to the hearing people surrounding them.

Deaf people may be marginalized for their use of SL, with hearing people assuming that their use of SL is indicative of a disability. One of the two male students in the class made frequent comments, including his oft-repeated contention that an inclusive environment does not change the fact that a person can't hear. At the end of the day, he said several times, the person still can't hear. This belief suggested a lack of sensitivity and concurrent lack of feeling of responsibility for creating an inclusive environment, of locating deafness as a problem of the deaf. The student's persistence with this perspective indicates that there was no collective conception available, but rather a set of possibilities for each member of the class to appropriate in light of prior understandings, and misunderstandings.

Ultimately, the book club members told their classmates, deaf people don't want special treatment, just everyday respect:

A lot of deaf kids even as they get older they remain at a fourth grade reading level due to the fact that the teachers either are poorly schooled in sign language, or because of their really low expectations. Because [the teachers will] be like, "Oh, they're deaf. They're probably not going to get that far. Oh, they don't have to try that hard. I'm not going to you know, hold them up to these high expectations." So what do guys think of that?

The group, in this fashion, would pose a problem and ask class members to respond to it. In leading their classmates in a discussion about deafness, then, they both provided information, and promoted an inquiry into difficult questions that had perplexed them in their two prior discussions. They felt the other TCs would benefit from talking about and integrating these issues into their own projected teacher identities.

4.3.1.5. Marginalization. Marginalization occurred also within the class in classmates' questions about the origins of deafness and what a deaf person might do to overcome deafness. If it is solely interpreted as a biological issue, then one can ignore the social problems created through marginalization and ignorance and try to repair the hearing deficiency. One student wondered if, given that God created deaf people as deaf, efforts to normalize them might go against God's plan. Another student invoked the "grit" argument (Duckworth, 2016) that exceptional people overcome disabilities without excuses and then serve as inspirations to others, which suggests that those who do not are not tough—that is, gritty—enough.

Their discussion revealed the rocky road to concept development for people newly exposed to ideas that challenge their prior assumptions, a problem that the discussion leaders hoped to address through their exploration of *Bug*. The struggles of their classmates to engage with new ideas mirrored the TCs' own work at the complex and pseudoconcept levels that characterized their own earlier attempts to integrate radical new knowledge into existing frameworks reliant on different, poorly-informed, more debilitating belief systems.

4.3.2. American Sign Language

A second area of informational clarity came in the class's discussion of American Sign Language, which was not well known to their classmates, and had been a new area of learning among the book club members in their reading of *Bug*. They agreed that ASL is a legitimate language that is offered in some schools, and that learning ASL is much like learning a foreign language. The group conducted a briefer, related discussion of lip reading, which amplified the issue that engaging with deaf people requires adaptations, intentionality, and effort. The TCs leading the discussion grounded their attention to sign languages in terms of the assimilative approach often taken in school to force marginalized students to take up the practices of dominant groups, "When really they're normal people speaking a different language."

The cochlear implant issue embodied many of these themes, requiring information, shifts in understanding based in empathy, projections of future teaching identities, and understandings of how many deaf people feel colonized by hearing people who try to determine what's best for them. Apart from more extensive discussions on cochlear implants, the class discussed various technologies designed to assist deaf and hard of hearing people, such as translation programs and audio receivers serving as assistive listening systems. Aside from this factual background, matters of agency surfaced in the TCs' efforts to educate their classmates:

What do you do? Do you go ahead and allow them to have implants to make their life easier? ... Do you do all these things to make your child feel as normal as possible? And embrace their disabilities so that one day they have the option to decide themselves. So I mean, what do you all think about that?

The first two discussions revealed how the TCs entered this question with ambivalence, but had become persuaded that the person best suited to decide about a cochlear implant is the deaf child. They concluded that adults—especially those who are not deaf—should respect their autonomy and leave the decision to those most greatly impacted by the decision.

4.3.3. Empathy

The students posed questions about the difference between deafness and other issues of language learning. Their discussion of deafness led them to wonder if English as a Second Language (ESL) students speak in their national languages, or in English in school. Should, they asked, Black students learn textbook English (a.k.a. "Standard English"), and if they do, will it make their lives easier? How does deafness compare to the alternative school students whom they tutored in terms of communication barriers, often from their use of Black English, Spanglish, or Spanish for new immigrants?

The book club group made the case that simply learning about Deaf Culture can promote empathy from both Deaf and hearing cultures by creating the conditions for better understanding across the boundaries of kinship groups. For example, understanding that deaf students are fully capable of learning, yet have those potentials underdeveloped as a result of low expectations, can promote empathy that creates more supportive environments. Heuer was very helpful for the book club members in developing their understanding of how to "deal with" deaf people and become more sympathetic toward them without condescension or marginalization.

Their own empathic framing through their prior reading and discussion of Heuer's book led them to include teaching simulations designed to shift their classmates' perspectives to better understand the world through the senses of deaf people. They tried to promote empathy by simulating the experience of deafness, such as writing down what they wanted to say rather communicating through spoken speech, a method they adapted from Heuer; or attempting to engage in lipreading. These simulations helped their classmates understand, as well as possible, the everyday struggles of deaf people in hearing communities. They attempted to model the process of wrestling with new and challenging assumptions and ideas so their classmates could experience the book club members' process of learning to be empathic toward deaf people. They read from Heuer, then asked their classmates to respond:

"Being black is a biological condition. So is being a woman. Therefore, the term pathological is actually a negative, social value. But guess what? From society's point of view, yes still the word black carries a negative social value and so does the word woman. Funny how [inaudible] of calling a black man boy, or a woman a bitch. But will ship a deaf child off to the hospital for his cochlear implant without even batting an eye." So how do you all feel about that?

The twisting path of concept development was evident throughout the discussion, with classmates struggling to integrate new understandings with prior schemata that were grounded in different conceptions of humanity. At times classmates expressed *noblesse oblige* to characterize feelings of charity extended toward deaf people, which stood in contrast to Heuer's contention that deaf people resent being pitied (cf. Vygotsky, 1993). The class referred to sincere efforts among hearing people to connect with deaf people through ASL, which some deaf people might interpret as trivializing their culture. One class member related an incident of a person who went out of their way to be friendly to a deaf person in a restaurant, but raised the question of whether this act might diminish the deaf person and patronize them through charitable friendliness.

Not all classmates took on the mindset that Heuer and the book club group hoped to promote among hearing people. The same vocal male referred to previously persistently argued against the empathic approach available from Heuer, reiterating that deaf people, in spite of all the attitudinal shifts available, still can't hear:

There are just certain things that I mean, yes it is, people who stigmatize things. People who make things, but I mean it seems to me there are just inherent differences, and I mean, and even if the world was completely accepting, completely open to doing everything they could to, to hang out and be cool with deaf people, or whatever. There would still be certain occasions, and it's like, well you didn't hear me when I said that car is coming down the road. You got hit. ... You have to understand when you're speaking that not everybody is going to understand you. And it's not just the deaf person's fault that he can't hear. I mean you as a responsible person have to meet that deaf person halfway.

This comment indicates the uneven path of concept development. The final comments about meeting people halfway is undermined by a concurrent assertion that deaf is deaf, and that's non-negotiable. His remarks were not taken up by the students in the class, suggesting that the other students were less conflicted about taking up an empathic and understanding relationship with deaf people that required them to meet them more than halfway. To Heuer, they need to meet them all the way, to engage with deaf people on deaf people's terms and not view them as victims of their own deafness.

4.3.4. Projected teacher identity

We identified a number of occasions during the discussion when the class members projected how they would act as teachers. Given Heuer's major theme that deaf people often experience societal marginalization, these discussions often centered on how they would teach inclusively so as not to make deaf students feel excluded from the social life of the classroom.

The TCs discussed their responsibilities as teachers in relation to students from outside the dominant culture, wondering if students are served better when their existing cultures are supported, or when they learn to assimilate toward dominant norms. In terms of "disability" generally speaking, they felt that they needed to be attentive to whether a disabled student wants to be included or otherwise treated as different and in need of special treatment, and whether or not that would draw attention to the point of difference and possibly cause feelings of awkwardness through uninvited attention. Hard and fast rules, they felt, should yield to more flexible social arrangement in which situations call for appropriate responses to human difference. The following excerpt illustrates how they took their own knowledge based on their prior discussions and used these new understandings to prompt their classmates to take a more empathic stance as teachers:

Speaker #1: How would you incorporate this if you had a deaf child in your class that did use, to communicate with American Sign Language? ... How would you get the class to interact with this person? And like for that person not to feel so isolated, like everyone kind of just naturally develop a relationship with each other and including this student?

Speaker #2: I think it depends if they want to be involved, you know? Like some students really don't want to be like, they don't want to draw attention to their disability. You know, if they're deaf [inaudible] disability or if they don't speak English well, I mean I think it definitely depends on if they want help.

Speaker #3: So you have a deaf child in class, that you know uses sign language. So how are you going approach them? I mean I would definitely I mean, take the initiative to learn the signs that I'm needed to in order to connect with them.

Speaker #4: I feel like as a teacher I would make it, this person is deaf so we're going to cater to them, every single day, you know? I feel like I would personally learn the signs that I needed to learn to help them but I wouldn't be like okay, well everyone needs to learn this sign. Because this is what we're doing today. You know? But like accommodate them, but not make it where it's like a big deal for the entire class.

The TCs leading the discussion saw their role as raising issues, then asking class members to respond by projecting how they would manage a situation as a teacher. No one in the class testified to having been in classrooms with deaf students, and few of them had ever, according to their remarks, known a deaf person beyond elderly relatives. The class thus went through a guided exploration of new issues that have long confounded educators. The discussion provided a portal into a diversity issue that extended their knowledge of multicultural education beyond the typical emphasis on race and gender, and did so with compassion and, for many, sincerity. This positive disposition provided this class of prospective teachers with the beginnings of a trajectory toward the goal of being not only inclusive, but knowledgeably so. They expressed a goal of providing the sort of facilitative environment that legitimizes deaf people as whole humans whose lack of hearing is not an impediment when the surrounding social setting treats it as a condition to be addressed supportively through alternative means.

5. Discussion

Although the TCs never read [Vygotsky's \(1993\)](#) work in defectology, their takeaway was very similar to what Vygotsky would surely hope to find. They saw deafness as a social problem, and not a problem of deaf people. They explored ways to create more compassionate settings for deaf people in school and society, and took on a mission to educate their classmates about what they had learned when they led them in discussion. They made themselves accountable for promoting the quality of life in others. Prior to their discussions, they appeared to have developed pathologizing views of deaf people that were revised over the month of their discussions.

The learning they experienced in this service-learning class included several dimensions. Although the service component was designed to help the TCs integrate their book club discussions with their work at the alternative school, the school did not enroll deaf students. As a result, this connection was less available than it was for the other two books they selected, which treated issues that fit the school's demographics better. They thus tied their understandings to a variety of other examples from their experiences. Some of these came from their few encounters with deaf people; others were efforts to connect emotionally to how deaf people feel about feeling embarrassed about wearing hearing aids, being treated dismissively, being ostracized, and having their access to the world limited by uncaring hearing people. Their empathic framing thus contributed to their learning as they examined their own affective experiences to understand a condition beyond their capacity to understand directly.

The students' choice of books was volitional. They did not have the option of not choosing books, so this choice came within a broader course design that constrained their free will. Within this parameter, they exercised choice on topic and author, presumably creating a level of interest to drive their investigations and motivate them to learn from them. This self-directed aspect of the course

appeared to work in favor of engagement with topics.

Their projected teacher identities further provided a conceptual pathway to point toward. The goal of becoming a teacher who tries to understand students' life experiences emerged through their discussions, rather than being set beforehand. There was thus a dialectic between their entering assumptions and the perspective available through Heuer, one that required a synthesis, a unity of opposites in Hegelian-Marxist terms. This synthesis was at once collective—they exhibited consensus on the issues—and personal as they took on the imperative in their own ways. Once they introduced the issues to their classmates, they encountered some resistance, indicating that some in their class were committed to their assumptions in ways that went against the thrust of Heuer's points and the TCs' developing beliefs.

Their learning was conceptual, and followed the twisting path described by Vygotsky (1987). Their entering assumptions tended toward pathology, although in different ways. Some drew on their Christian backgrounds to wonder if earthly people should interfere with God's plan, manifested in the creation of deaf individuals. All shared the view that cochlear implants would be preferable to deafness, and that deaf people await technologies created by hearing people to cure them of their condition. These views, developed over years of habituation, were not always easy to challenge, but over the month of reading, discussion, and reflection became better integrated into their discourse by the time they led their classmates in an exploration of Heuer's themes.

More broadly, the service-learning course was situated within a program in a College of Education where themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion were central to the discourse, if not always the practice. Presumably, the students understood that an open mind was valued in classes conducted in the education building, creating a culture of acceptance for preservice teachers in their engagement with students. Furthermore, the course, as a “foundations” course, was designed to provide TCs with understandings that undergirded their whole teaching approach; and the book club menu of selections promoted cross-cultural understandings, with TCs encouraged to choose topics that took them outside their comfort zones. Their learning was thus embedded in a cultural context in which gravitation toward multicultural appreciation was an expectation, and was promoted through the social interaction of the book club setting.

We cannot say how the majority of class members applied these lessons beyond the bounds of these discussions. One of the members of the featured TC book club did participate in a longitudinal study (Smagorinsky & Long, manuscript under review). She never had any deaf students in either student teaching or positions in three additional schools, covering nine years of longitudinal research. Nonetheless, she routinely exhibited a compassionate stance toward human difference, a willingness to learn about people from outside her kinship groups, and a dedication to equity evident in their discussions. These dispositions cannot be attributed solely to the book club course design, yet are consistent with the themes that emerged from their discussions.

The education of the hearing is among the most critical challenges facing deaf educators. This study demonstrates how one initiative—a book club setting in which TCs select their own texts for discussion—provided a fertile ground for prospective teachers to learn about deaf life and think about matters of equity and inclusion from an empathic perspective. We do not see it as solving the challenges of deaf education. But we do offer it as one possibility with promise for preparing teachers of all students to teach diverse populations by understanding the cultures from which they emerge.

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