Why Positionality Matters in Deaf Education Research

An Insider Ethnographic Perspective

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Abstract and Keywords

The positionality of any researcher influences the data collection of their research directly or indirectly, which in turn has an impact on the research being conducted. This chapter discusses the importance of reflecting on one's own insider and outsider positionality and how they contribute to the study design, research measures, and dynamics of the research team. Positionality and intersectional perspectives are also examined as important elements of the research. Using examples from international research experiences, this chapter offers examples of how positionality concerns arose in our research. Finally, this chapter outlines different approaches and solutions that our research team used to address the complexities that arose surrounding positionalities, which become possible strategies for any researcher wanting to study deaf education.

Keywords: ethnography, future strategies, intersectionality, insider/outsider perspectives, positionality

Our life circumstances can define and construct our ideological beliefs and positions on a variety of social issues when it comes to conducting research, including within deaf education. There have been major shifts in the research on deaf education regarding what, how, where, and by whom deaf children should be taught, and these shifts have followed changing careers of divergent ideologies about embodied and linguistic diversity as complementary or

threatening to society. In our own experiences, by locating our intersectionalities of difference, we self-examine the different tangents of our positional differences into a shared understanding of the social world that we live in. In this chapter, we introduce positionality and discuss how this concept can influence the research agenda, especially during fieldwork and collection of data. We offer authentic examples from our collaborative research activities. Finally, we discuss the important and exacting role researchers and their positionality play in the construction of these diverse ideologies in deaf education.

This chapter starts by defining positionality mainly from feminist and critical theory frameworks (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002) that emphasize the important contributions of intersectional perspectives, which in turn shape researchers' identities and thought processes both from the inside looking out and the outside looking in. We (the authors) were involved with several other colleagues on a project entitled, *Kindergartens for the Deaf in Three Countries,*[1] an international project studying how children take on their national identity and acquire a deaf culture while attending kindergarten. Through our work, we realized that researchers needed to acknowledge the critical connection between their personal and social experiences (emic) as observers and participants in the research on deafness (etic) to reveal social constructions within the realm of deaf education. We raise the concern that researchers with no affiliation with the Deaf community or knowledge of sign language **(p.56)** may frame deaf education in a deficit-based model, where deafness is seen as essentially a medical condition because these researchers' dominant perceptions of deafness come from a one-sided etic framework that does not recognize differences, diversity of language, culture, and positive constructions of deafness. For example, in 2009, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) listed as second in a list of 100 top priorities for research on deafness:

> *Compare* the *effectiveness* of the *different treatments* [emphasis added] (e.g., assistive listening devices, cochlear implants, electric-acoustic devices, habilitation and rehabilitation methods [auditory/auditory verbal, sign language, and total communication]) for hearing loss in children and adults, especially individuals with diverse cultural, language, medical, and developmental backgrounds. (Institute of Medicine, 2009)

Although this call by the primary funder of medical research in the United States highlights diverse cultural, language, medical, and developmental backgrounds of deafness, it immediately frames the notion of deafness as a "hearing loss." This may be viewed acceptable in the medical framework of deafness, but certainly not in the social, political, or cultural framework present in research in deaf education. In addition, this comparative effectiveness research is designed to measure the "effectiveness" of different treatments, which, depending on the target of that treatment, seems to suggest that there is a clinical problem within deaf people (or hearing loss, as they would state) and the only solution to this

problem is a scientific answer (Fjord, 2003). Because scientific discourse, questions, labeling, and methods are peculiar cultural artifacts, we must ask ourselves, "In what other areas of research would deaf education be considered a *clinical problem*, other than from within a medical framework?" Certainly not in the realm of a culturally driven deaf education framework—yet, where is the contribution to this important research? The medical and deficit-based framework and wording of the NIH provides a clue to the much-needed contribution of alternative ways to conduct research in deaf education.

Divergent ideologies in deaf education and their attendant ethical imperatives continue to fuel heated contests over best practices to create positive outcomes for deaf children in education, including their social and psychological well-being. Many scholars have raised concerns with the divergent pedagogical traditions that still limit the important emic aspects of deaf education (Branson & Miller, 2002; Erting, 1985; Horejes, 2014; Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989; Markowitz & Woodward, 1978; Stokoe, 2005). As Moores (2010) notes:

(p.57)

> After more than 200 years, the methods controversy is nowhere near resolution. The intractable nature of the conflict may be due in part to differing opinions about deafness, the goals of education, and the requirements for leading a full and rich life (p. 29).

Pedagogical divergences must be considered on several grounds. First are differences in language modality, whether based on American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken/written English bilingualism or in spoken/written English using auditory-verbal training and proscriptions of signing. Each language denotes an entirely different cultural framework and ethos about who deaf children are in relation to hearing majorities: whether their deafness signals a complementary form of human diversity or a potential threat to mainstream culture. These pedagogical divergences in deaf education are further complicated by the unique positionality that each deaf education researcher brings to the study of deaf children. It is not our goal in this chapter to contribute to the current literature on linguistic, philosophical, and ideological divergences of deaf education (Horejes, 2014). Rather, our purpose in this chapter is to educate future researchers on the importance of acknowledging that their positionality does and will influence their ideological beliefs on what deaf education ought to look like. Moreover, our goal is to provide strategies for examining one's positionality in deaf education research, and to show how this process can contribute positively to the existing literature on deaf education and its praxis.

Defining Positionality

Our positionalities as educators, researchers, and community members can have an impact on the community as a whole. The concept of positionality comes from feminist and critical theory (Butler, 2004; Crenshaw, 1991). As Butler (2004) explains, we "cannot be who [we] are without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed [us]" (p. 32). How we see the world is influenced by how we exist in the world. This is a very important concept to consider while working in deaf education. This field is already diverse and politically charged; we depend on each other to keep the community safe and viable.

People are born in cultural groups and have specific racial, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We gather our experiences by watching the world around us while we are growing up. The lessons we learn become a part of who we are, and we establish our positions on specific ideas. We are constantly learning and evolving throughout our lives, and our positionalities change over time. We can become aware of how we become positioned in binary terms; it becomes a "we and them" type of relationship. Examples of this are male/female, student/ **(p.58)** teacher, and deaf/hearing. Horejes (2014) further raises the notion of binary terms by suggesting the following:

> If you ask any American to describe men, you are likely to get responses such as "masculine, strong, athletic, aggressive, breadwinner" as descriptions of the "normal" male. But if you add the word gay to the question, you are likely to get answers that describe a "gay male" with words completely the opposite of the traditional perception of a man and, instead, resemble descriptions of females such as "feminine, sensitive, emotional, and non-athletic" as the "normal gay male. (p. 54)

Other writers have discussed positionality in their own cultures. Milner (2007) talks about his experiences as a white researcher, studying people of color. He encourages people to reflect on their own research and to question whether their positionality is filtering the data they gather. To be specific, he talks about his research with racial profiling, and whether it "enables or disables that researcher's efforts to understand and to interpret the particulars of a situation with research participants in a way that is quite different than that of a researcher outside the group" (Milner, 2007, p. 396). He goes on to suggest that researchers should "think about themselves in relations to others, work through the commonalities and tensions that emerge from this reflection, and negotiate their ways of knowing with that of the community or people under study" (Milner, 2007, p. 396). When we constantly consider our place in the community and remember not to assume that we know everything about our community, we may learn something new.

Another researcher, bell hooks (1994) encourages people to consider their own positionalities while confronting topics such as race, gender, and class. She

acknowledges that people can be fearful of their own positionalities and intersectionalities while discussing these topics. She encourages researchers and educators to talk about these topics and to challenge people's thinking on these topics to raise critical consciousness about how these topics can affect their positions in communities. When we research these topics, we open new dialogue, and in turn, we learn and "receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world" (hooks, 1994, p. 40). We have to be careful of tokenism; we cannot assume that one deaf person represents the entire community. Even though the authors of this chapter are both culturally deaf, we have learned through our research that there are many different layers when it comes to deaf education, and there are many different approaches to teaching deaf children that have been successful and unsuccessful.

To understand positionality in research, we need to include the power component of our contributing role in society to avoid the ideological labeling of others in binary terms, and "[w]e must understand **(p.59)** how we are positioned in relation to others, as dominant/subordinate, marginal/center, empowered, powerless" (Takacs, 2002, p. 169). Another way to explain positionality is the process of knowing where you stand in the community in which you reside. When we consider binaries, we acknowledge that in every community, there is the other—someone who may not be a complete member of the community. In the case of the Deaf community, many members consider hearing people to be the *other* even if they are fluent in sign language, or have deaf parents. Deaf people may say that to be a complete member of this group, you need to have similar experiences of oppression from a majority group. Understanding your own positionality and how you align with others can encourage multiple perspectives and can encourage people to use their lived experiences to gain new teaching lessons. When we consider our positionalities, we in turn will consider the positionalities of the people we interact with in our and other communities. This can cause a powerful realization that everyone has something to offer, if we would just sit back and listen. We need to be aware "of the conceptual shackles imposed by [our] own identities and experiences" (Takacs, 2002, p. 170).

At the same time, it is relevant to understand the danger of *othering*. Often people of color, women, the poor, individuals with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ community are considered outside of the mainstream of *normal* and thus categorized as *other*, even if subliminally: a type of second-class citizen, one who is without privileges, rights, or deserving of individual recognition. It is within this very system of *othering* that cultural biases develop that can weigh heavily on formation of individual identity (Butler, 1986). Additionally, in educational discourse, the negotiation of knowledge is an ongoing process, with procedures of inclusion of the norm and exclusion of the *other* (Lykke, 2010; McCall, 2005). These discourses surrounding intersectionality have directly

shaped the educational and legal systems in the United States and the way people think about law, policy, and social representation of groups outside of the social norm (Feagin, 2006, 2010).

For the *Three Countries* project, our positionality is noteworthy to mention because it offers a unique level of research framework toward our work on deaf education. We had five main core members and numerous research staff. The research team was very diverse and came from various intersectional identities. Chiefly among these differences are the linguistic variation (American Sign Language—ASL, French Sign Language/Langue des Signes Française—LSF, Spoken Japanese, Spoken English, Spoken French), audiological variation (deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing), nationalist variation (Japanese, French, English), academia variation (Early Childhood Education, International Education, Sociology), and education background variation (oral, **(p.60)** signed, mainstreaming, hearing school, Japanese, French schools). The diversity among the research team was critical to maintaining not only certain insider status to gain access to information but also outsider status to gain access to information that may have been overlooked by an insider. Some information by insiders might be seen as common sense and taken for granted; however, from an outside perspective, the information needs to be made explicit and is important to inquire about when conducting research.

Ethnographic Research

When Malinowski (1916) published his first study on the people who lived in the Trobriand Islands, it started a whole discipline on ethnographic research. Preissle and Grant (2004) define *ethnography* as "a student of the culture of a group, usually as that culture is revealed, again through the course of ongoing events" (p. 164). Since 1916, people have been doing research and writing narratives about cultural groups. "Ethnography in it's classical form foregrounds the culture of the participants, their perspectives of the world, and backgrounds those of the researchers" (Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 165). Other examples of the earliest people to study behaviors as ethnographers are George Mead (1934), who observed his own children playing. Margaret Mead (Mead & Boas, 1973) wrote about children coming of age in Samoa, and she wrote about this ritualistic experience from her outsider perspective. She collected stories and videos from Samoa and weaved a story documenting the experiences of these young Samoan children. Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) who discussed different preschool experiences in Japan, China, and the United States, highlighted the stories of the teachers and the children. He used the technique of multivocal ethnography by using the videos as cues to elicit data. Thomas Horejes (2014) conducted ethnographic work on two deaf kindergarten classroom experiences: one orally oriented and the other conducted using sign language. His research approach connected his personal experience as a deaf student (emic) to academic research on deafness (etic), to bring understanding to the multidimensional aspects of his own negotiated identities and raise inquiry of

the myriad challenges educators face in defining appropriate linguistic and cultural pedagogy for deaf children in schools. Paddy Ladd (2003) has written extensively on different perspective on deaf education and culture. Carol Erting (1985) wrote one of the first ethnographic studies on deaf children in schools, noting the cultural conflicts in schools. The *Three Countries* project would be considered an ethnographic study that examined how deaf children become socially constructed in their national cultures and their deaf cultures.

(p.61) Ethnographic research depends on the five "W" questions. Hoey (2014) outlines the following questions that ethnographers should ask themselves:

- Who are the key actors in a given context? What is your defined group, your site, within a putative culture?

- What happens in a given place and time? What catches your attention? Often we tend to notice what seems *unusual* or *different*.

- Where do you find the subjects of your study?

- When do things happen?

- How do things appear to work?

- Why did this happen? (pp. 6–7)

While doing ethnographic work, it is always paramount to consider how our positionalities can affect the research and data collection. We cannot avoid our positions in the communities we live and work in, but we can remain vigilant of our subjectivities and how they can influence our research. It is important to constantly take a step back and consider the big picture. When researchers share the same cultural circles, they may be able to interact with them using culturally appropriate approaches to elicit richer data, and they also may be able to use probes to gain more information. That familiarity can be a concern in leading the informant toward preconceived understandings of the phenomena under study. If the researchers are aware of their subjectivities and maintain careful inquiries, they can avoid tampering with the data.

When making inferences about data, researchers must strive to ensure that their interpretation of the stories they tell is accurate, which may eliminate the feelings of being oppressed through research (see chapter 4; also, Singleton, Jones, & Hanumantha, 2014; Baker-Shenk & Kyle, 1990). Prasad (2005) reminds us that ethnographies are built from interviews and participant observation, and it is imperative that the researchers develop a strong understanding of the culture being studied and provide an accurate representation in their writing. Also, when researchers are writing their narratives, remaining open and honest about their positionalities and subjectivities with their participants can lead to a healthy dialogue between colleagues, which can lead to shared meaning. Involving participants in every step of the research can only improve the

accuracy and legitimacy of the subject being studied. By providing a platform for the subjects to be participants in inquiry, the research becomes leveraged whereby the power of the researcher becomes vertically distributed to allow these participants a level playing field when it comes to researching the issues on hand. A collaborative approach also can lead to stronger relationships and trust for future research. Bourke (2014) paraphrased from England (1994) that **(p.62)** "research represents a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants" (p. 1). He goes on to clarify that

> identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process. Identities come into play via our perceptions, not only of others, but of the ways in which we expect others will perceive us. Our own biases shape the research process, serving as checkpoints along the way. Through recognition of our biases, we presume to gain insights of how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants (Bourke, 2014, p. 1).

Understanding Positionality in Ethnographic Research

When people enter deaf education research, they enter a vast and complex social landscape intertwined with identity politics on deafness, language pedagogy, social pedagogy, and policy implications, to name a few. There are some researchers who study deaf education from a "macro" view, such as legal and institutional policy work, advocating for change in deaf education and providing instructional strategies in working with deaf children. There are also "micro" level studies, such as working with teachers and community leaders to understand how deaf education can make an impact on their community groups.

When conducting research at either a macro or micro level, we need to remain mindful of emic and etic perspectives of certain cultural groups. The terms *emic* and *etic* were coined by a linguist named Kenneth Pike (1954). He explained that emic perspectives happen when people share a common idea of why a behavior happens in the culture, for example, our personal and social experiences. Etic perspectives occur when we are learning about an observable behavior that may happen in our culture so that we can inquire about it and learn from it, for example, the perspectives of other people. Harris (1976) clarifies that if "behavioral events are described in terms of categories and relationships that arise from the observer's strategic criteria of similarity, difference and significance, they are etic; if they are describe in terms of criteria elicited from an informant, they are emic" (p. 340). In the case of deaf education, when we collect reflections and narratives from informants such as teachers, children, and administrators in our study, we are gathering emic accounts. When we are gathering quantitative data, we analyze the collected data through the use of statistics. We then make conclusions to show how specific cases support differing perspectives in deaf education. That is what we call "gathering etic sources." Both emic and etic accounts can be influenced by our positionality on

the subject, so **(p.63)** we need to attempt to maintain a neutral stance while collecting data, to preserve the integrity of the data.

When we consider our positionalities and understand how they can be viewed as a leverage of power, we can acknowledge these concepts and accept our place in the community in order to open the gates for deeper understanding. There have been situations in which we as authors have learned new things about deaf education, through emic accounts by community members who felt comfortable with us and did not feel like they were oppressed by our positionalities. In fact, they felt comfortable because of our position as members of the Deaf community. This could go the opposite direction: people may feel our position as Deaf community members could sabotage their membership in the same community, especially while talking about specific topics that can be politically charged.

During our study, we came across multiple emic and etic data collections. We provide several examples of our study design, measures, and dynamics of the research team. All of these components can either make or break the process of collecting data.

Study Design

We encourage all research projects to employ both insider and outsider perspectives while forming research questions, choosing test measures, and conducting interviews because different probes may gather more data. Such was the case when Dr. Tobin and Dr. Horejes met for 2 full days to finalize the coding framework of the *Three Countries* research. Dr. Horejes, being a deaf native and product of the deaf education system, and Dr. Tobin, being a student of multicultural education with little understanding of deaf education, met to hammer out a coding framework of the 3-year research that would serve as the foundation of how data would become analytical information and which data would be overlooked or not considered significant. This coding framework would establish themes for the qualitative software (HyperResearch) to mine relevant words and data based on the themes that we constructed. Dr. Horejes developed coding themes that may not have been made available or understood by a nondeaf person, such as "deaf space," whereby the school's architecture and classroom arrangement allows for "deaf gain," and "deaf bodily techniques" such as tapping, eye gazes, and scrunches, which are techniques that deaf teachers use to get a deaf student's attention (Graham, 2014). Equally as important, Dr. Tobin included coding themes that Dr. Horejes would have omitted, such as the profession of teacher training, including the types of teacher mentorships, pre/in-service types of requirements for teaching pedagogy, and teaching philosophies such as Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches—important aspects of education that Dr. Horejes did not attend to. However, by working together as researchers, Dr. Tobin and **(p.64)** Dr. Horejes were able to examine their own positionalities, what they saw as relevant in deaf education, and more important, what they did not know to be used as a

symbiotic effort of working together in the shared pursuit of ensuring that the coding framework was inclusive to different perspectives and positionality.

Measures

To conduct the *Three Countries* study, we developed modifications of research methods and protocols that can be useful to other researchers who study deafness. These include the development of a video, signed version of human subjects' assent and consent forms, strategies for interpreting among signed and spoken languages, and approaches that maximize the advantages of a heterogeneous research team that includes deaf and hearing members.

Even though we advocate for both insider and outsider perspectives, we encourage an emphasis on cultural awareness when conducting reflexive interviews (Roulston, 2010). Singleton, Jones and Hanumantha (2014) noted in their research that participants expressed distrust toward those who could not communicate effectively with them. They worried this could increase "the potential for misrepresentation of data, which they felt could lead to a negative outcome, such as perpetuating pathological views towards individuals who are Deaf" (p. 61). Trust was established and determined by the level of ASL fluency by the researchers. In our own work, we found it extremely useful to translate the consent forms into ASL (this was also video-recorded) before each focus group discussion. After explaining the study in ASL, almost all focus group members had questions for clarification as to the purpose of the study, how the data from the focus group will be used, and whether their information would be confidential or public. Had we not provided an ASL translation to the written text of the consent forms, it would have jeopardized the trust level between the researchers and participants. This was prevalent during Dr. Horejes' travels to the US schools as a part of the larger *Three Countries* study. Dr. Horejes' affiliation with Gallaudet and his ASL fluency was a strong precursor to elicit more trust among the participants from these deaf schools in the United States. As a result, we believe we were able to access much more insider information that may otherwise not have been made available.

Research Team Dynamics

When researchers are clear with their own positionality and are transparent about the research process, it can create collaboration between the researcher and the participants. In the *Three Countries* project, we found that for focus group interviews, it was important to have several interviews with insiders only, outsiders only, and then a combination of both. This combination led to rich data because insiders were too close **(p.65)** to the research to understand the significance of such phenomena being highlighted, and outsiders overlook specific cultural perspectives that may be implicitly important to the insiders. When insiders and outsiders make up a single research group, it can have a large impact on the quality of the research process and its findings.

In Japan, we did have an experience in which we were reminded of our positionalities in our research team. Our research team traveled to Tokyo, Japan to conduct research in one of the elementary schools there. We were there for a week, filming in the school and doing several interviews with teachers and administrators at the school. While we were concluding our research visit, one of the teachers at the school approached us, and said the children were putting on a performance at the school and wanted us to be there. She explicitly said that only the people who could sign were invited. This meant that half of our research team could not attend this event. The hearing status of our research team was not considered because one of the members had typical hearing and could sign. Reflecting back on this experience, *linguistic status* could be one of the indicators of how someone would position themselves in the community. The more fluent the person is in the language may be a predictor of how much information they would get through one-on-one interaction rather than through an interpreter. The invited guests to the ceremony all agreed that it would have been difficult to interpret the performance, and cultural knowledge was needed to completely understand the students. Positioning yourself as a member of the culture can truly have a big impact on the research because if you understand the stories and the perspectives, then it becomes easier to explain these stories to outsiders.

Hoey (2014) also reminds us to be explicit about our insider and outsider status within our research. This is important to keep in mind because there are many people who consider themselves experts in deaf education; however, much of their research may be consider etic, not emic, in perspective. This is why during the coding component of our research, we utilized many people from different cultures in our research, and were mindful of our insider and outsider status during the coding process. We constantly checked in with each other about the local culture and the deaf culture to ensure validity of the data. We also checked in with our participants, including school administrators, teachers, and parents of the deaf children that were being studied to ensure that their positionalities were included and that the transparency of our research allowed for power to be distributed vertically when it comes to interpretations of what was happening within their contexts.

While considering our positionalities, we must also consider the seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers of our stance in the world (Milner, 2007). We often need to anticipate dangers that may result from our decisions while conducting research. A good example is our decision **(p.66)** not to discuss anything from our social interactions with our participants without permission. For example, when we were in France, we had a chance to socialize with educators and the community members. During one of these social interactions, a lot of conversation centered around the history of the school, teacher philosophies, and how teachers had to constantly negotiate between their roles as educators and their roles as community members. There were many examples that we felt

could strongly contribute to our research, but we again had to think about our positions during that specific moment. These participants were not discussing these situations as research subjects, but as community members. Our shared perspectives as belonging to the Deaf community allowed them to open the gates for free discussions. We knew at that moment that what was discussed during nonresearch hours was considered private, and our community trusted us to distinguish the difference between when they were sharing their thoughts or confiding in us. We knew that bringing these social experiences into the research discussions could betray the trust in our informants, and we wanted to remain honest with them in order to maintain comfortable dialogue with them. Of course, we could inquire on these topics during our next interview, but we must always ask our informants if they are comfortable with discussing such topics on record.

Our research team found that sometimes there is such a thing as getting too close to the research. A heated dialogue came about during one research meeting, when a member who is an insider to the deaf culture wanted to make sure there was a deaf person at every interview. The researcher who did not have insider status felt offended by this, thinking that his interviewing abilities and collection of data were questioned. It was not the intention at all. It was a case of gatekeeping in research: sometimes informants will consider the needs of the research community members first, and those of the researchers second. Our research members had a meeting during which we were open and honest with each other and discussed our perspectives. We were able to understand each other and continue that open dialogue. We also recognized that in order to do research on a team of varying insider and outsider perspectives, we needed to have trust. Trust is essential for any research team to collect optimal data.

In another example from our research study, we had one deaf teacher whose primary language was ASL being interviewed by a hearing researcher, through an interpreter. The interview lasted about 30 minutes, but when a deaf member of the research team decided to have a follow-up with the same teacher using ASL, the interview lasted 3 hours. The first hour was devoted to her personal thoughts about deaf education and the political tensions on the future state of deaf education. After the "interview" was over, the teacher shared her appreciation for our research and that she hoped her contribution would make **(p.67)** a positive impact on the future of our research. During this extended conversation, she was able to provide a thick description of some of the pedagogical practices of her teaching that helped clear up some misassumptions by the researchers. For instance, there was one exercise in which we thought she knew that she was clearly employing a common teaching tool to scaffold the student's knowledge on a certain subject, but after talking about that particular activity, she indicated that she had different intentions and that it was not designed to be a "teaching moment." Had we not had the 3-hour interview, this critical piece of information would have been missing. We did not realize this

until we went back to watch the videos. We brought this up during our research meeting, and realized that people who are insiders to a culture have a shared meaning, which leads to mutual understanding because of community.

Although having insider status can elicit more access to information, we need to be careful because having insider status can cause us to be even closer to the research participants, especially when the research can have unforeseen dangers.

Many people assume that having community membership within the group being researched makes it easier for the researcher because insider status can lead to greater access. Johnson-Bailey (2004) warns that insiders may create a form of internalized oppression when insisting on researching their own cultural groups, even if they are trying to protect their group members. Yet, when we prevent outsiders from conducting research, it can be perceived as if we are embarrassed of our own cultural groups. It can be helpful to remember that most research is conducted because of researchers' personal and professional agenda with the cultural group, and most of the time, they are not unethical in their research. Through our research, we learned that group trust and flexibility are important in the collection of data. Some interaction requires only the insiders, and some requires only the outsiders. Although the objective is to have both the insider and outsider conduct research together, it may be a good idea to consider having multiple research visits with different combinations of single interviews and team interviews with people who carry different statuses.

Positionality as Community Members in Research

It is important to be transparent about our intentions in the research with our participants and the larger research community. When we are clear about where we stand in our research, remain open to the opinions and perspectives of other people we work with, and collaborate with our participants, we can create a safe zone where all participants feels like their perspectives and voices are valued. As we have learned in our research over the years, member checking is a very important **(p.68)** tool in ensuring accuracy of findings. When we involve the participants in editing their own narratives, we support the integrity of the research. This approach can neutralize the unequal power dynamics that can arise in the research process. One example of what happened during our research is having the teachers work with us to ensure the children's language was being documented accurately. Even though the researchers and participants were deaf and shared many of the commonalities of being deaf, we did not share a similar signed language. On top of that challenge was acknowledging that children are still developing their sign language, and may not sign similarly to an adult. We wanted to make sure our interpretation of the signs the children were making were accurate. We worked closely with the teachers we interviewed to make sure that we were able to capture the right words and inferences that the children were making. Often, we would ask the educators to

watch the signs with us and caption these signs correctly. The teachers were willing because they were concerned about being accurate and making sure that the children were not portrayed in a negative light. One educator also worked around the clock, giving up her personal time, because she wanted to make sure that everything was done correctly.

Milner (2007) explains that it is essential for the researcher to "listen to the voices and perspectives of those under study to provide compelling, fair evidence. In situations where the researcher and participant disagree, it is critical for the researcher to report both the narrative and the counter-narrative or vice-versa" (p. 396). An example of a *narrative* in this context would be the researcher's explanation of what went on during classroom observations, and a *counter-narrative* would be the teacher's explanation of why such interaction went on in the classroom. We do not always know what teachers are thinking when they are participating in such action, and we cannot always assume that they are thinking the same thing we are, even if we have a shared community membership as teachers. This is also true in the case of the Deaf community. We cannot always assume that we have the same thought process because of our shared membership in the Deaf community. We must be careful not to quickly assume meaning and intention behind observed behaviors because it could skew the data collection process.

Embracing Multiple Roles
We encourage researchers in deaf education to be aware of the multiple positions we can hold both as researchers and as members of the community. Particularly, but not limited to, qualitative research, positionality will constantly pop up during data collection, challenging researchers to constantly mediate multiple hats. This can be a challenge when you are an insider to specific cultures being studied. We **(p.69)** encourage all researchers to be honest about their positionalities and always to reflect on how their positionalities can contribute to the data in their research. As Bourke (2014) reminds us, our

> positionality is not a limitation. [Our] positionalities [meet] the positionalities of participants, they do not rest in juxtaposition to each other. The research in which we engage in is shaped by who [we] are, and as long as [we] remain reflective throughout the process, [we] will be shaped by it, and by those with whom [we] interact. (p. 7)

The Deaf community, like any minority culture, is very small. Our involvement with this community encourages us to continually reflect on our position in it. Although it is important for insiders to encourage more conversation and comfort levels during the interview process, it is important to have outsiders to the culture to act as checks and balances, ensuring that the data remain unbiased.

The concept of multiple roles extends to participants in deaf education research. Deaf educators can have multiple viewpoints: as a deaf person, as an educator, and possibly as a parent. These positions can add layers to these individuals and how they approach deaf education. People who have specific educational experiences may have different stances on how to approach deaf education, and they all may feel that their way is the optimal method for educating deaf children. As researchers, it is important to consider all data, and to consider cultural positionality. It is especially imperative for researchers who share the same community to be aware that we should not consider ourselves as representative of the culture while collecting research data. When we are ethical and avoid filtering the data with our perspectives, then we can say the research is untainted. Through numerous interviews and observations, we have realized that there is no one viewpoint that encompasses the entire Deaf community. In fact, within the *Three Countries* study, we realized that the richness of deaf education comes from the multiple viewpoints, which are continually changing and evolving. Deaf education today is different than it was 50 years ago, and it will be different 50 years from now. What can influence these changes is the combination of community awareness, educational advancement, and the voices of the participants.

Multiple roles can also be reflected in the dual use of both emic and etic perspectives. For example, using both emic and etic constructions of positionality in our fieldwork can increase the collection of data and create more knowledge in the field. When we include the perspectives of insiders and outsiders in the field of deaf education, we can strive to balance the medical perspectives with the social perspectives. Currently, the research on deaf education may be viewed as heavily influenced by outsider perspectives, which concerns Singleton, Jones, and Hanumantha (2014), to the point at which they advocate for balance **(p.70)** in fieldwork by both insiders and outsiders to the culture. Ladd (2003) echoes the concerns by saying, "because of the dominance of the medical model of deafness, only the barest minimum of resources have been made available to examine deaf communities as communities" (p. 268).

We need to value positionality in deaf education research to allow different perspectives to be recognized and understood, which in turn will allow a deeper understanding of the research. This is especially critical when considering the perspective of research participants. As Singleton, Jones, and Hanumantha (2014) note, informants are often reluctant to communicate with people who may not share a common language. They may be concerned that the points may not be getting across, or the data they give could be misinterpreted. To solve this concern, all interviews in our *Three Countries* project were videotaped, and viewed countless times, to maintain accuracy. We also had multiple people on our research team who were fluent in ASL watch the videos and triangulate the statements with each other, to make sure the statements were clear. If we were not sure, we returned back to the research site, showed our participants the

videos, and asked for clarification. This ensured the validity of the research. Even with our position as members of the Deaf community and native users of ASL, we were not native to that school culture, and to their most commonly used signs. We were careful not to make generalized assumptions about specific communities within the culture, and we remained mindful that even though we interacted with the community as a whole, there were still some variations in how they approached deaf education.

Conclusion

Sometimes we need to consider our positions while making choices about whether information from our research can help or harm the Deaf community. People may consider making such choices as a power move. As Johnson-Bailey (2004) explains, there are people who may believe that only the insiders can eloquently explain the struggles and achievements of their minority group, and there are others who may feel that their perspectives may not fit the majority of the members inside their minority groups. Johnson-Bailey goes on to caution about several viewpoints of positionality in research. She encourages researchers to "remain vigilantly aware of power issues, the balance of voices, competing political agendas and the societal hierarchies enveloping the process. Each story and the accompany data collection and analytic process is a balancing act" (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 138).

Specific examples we utilized during the *Three Countries* project include member-checking with subtitles, reading between the lines, reclarifying statements, doing cultural check-ins, providing assent videos, and unpacking the content in dialogue. During our research, **(p.71)** we worked with not only three different spoken languages but also three different signed languages. On top of the linguistic variation, we worked with different cultural backgrounds as well. When we subtitled our videos, we depended on the teachers to translate what was signed into print. Even though half of the research team was fluent in ASL, we still knew we were not fluent in the other signed languages, and wanted to ensure the authenticity of the words used in the videos. In France, the main teacher worked long hours to make sure that the videos were exact and the words were used correctly. Previously, we had obtained subtitles from a French-English sign language interpreter who had worked with the teacher in ensuring the accuracy of the videos. When we went back to show her the subtitles, she was still concerned with the clarity of the dialogue in the video, and requested permission to work on the subtitles with the researcher before the video could be shown to the general public.

Deaf children are unconcerned with politics and ideology, but they do grow into members of state apparatuses embedded within their specific histories and cultures that are further reinforced by researchers. These deaf children will be shaped by ideological beliefs from researchers that will influence them in constructing and organizing their lives and its meanings. Therefore, the

importance of recognizing the researcher's own positionality in the ethnographic fieldwork of deaf education can challenge the researcher to recognize the potentiality of shifting the construction of the deaf child away from the deficit notions of needing a *fix* based one one's own ideological beliefs and toward notions that embrace and celebrate deafness as a deaf gain (Horejes, 2009). By locating the contributions of insider perspective and positionality, researchers may recognize important emic constructions of deaf education such as the needs of deaf children for visual languages and connections to long-standing deaf cultures and communities as human rights issues and as "a form of human diversity capable of making vital contributions to the greater good of society" (Bauman & Murray 2010, p. 212).

Finally, we need to recognize the other perspectives in the research of deaf education because people have many different layers that influence each other. No one human being is the same as another. Our viewpoints are influenced not only by our positionalities as deaf and hearing people but also by our gender, race, class, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. There are many overlapping identities we all must mediate on a daily basis, and although some may come to the forefront at certain times, others will make an appearance at other times. In this case, we need to broaden the understanding of what it means to be deaf in today's world, especially with the focus on education. Our positionalities as deaf researchers in education are definitely shaped by the educational experiences we had while growing up. It is important **(p.72)** for deaf researchers to keep researching because it brings recognition and awareness of the community. When we provide a neutral stance and maintain awareness of how we position ourselves in our cultures, we can continue to research in our minority cultures, and add to the academic literature, which in turn will contribute to the body of research.

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Notes:

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