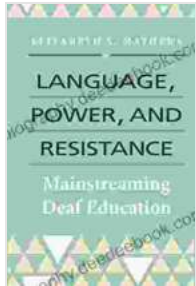


Language Power and Resistance: Mainstreaming Deaf Education



Language, Power, and Resistance: Mainstreaming Deaf Education by Elizabeth S. Mathews

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Language is a powerful tool that can both empower and oppress. For deaf students, language is essential for access to education, employment, and full participation in society. However, the history of deaf education is replete with examples of language discrimination and oppression, as hearing educators have often sought to impose their own language and culture on deaf students.

In recent decades, there has been a growing movement towards mainstreaming deaf education, with the goal of providing deaf students with access to the same educational opportunities as hearing students. However, mainstreaming has also presented new challenges for deaf students, as they must now navigate a world that is often hostile to their language and culture.

This article will explore the complex interplay between language power and resistance in the context of mainstreaming deaf education. We will examine the historical, social, and political factors that have shaped the education of deaf students, and we will discuss the ongoing struggle for language rights and equity.

Historical Overview

The history of deaf education is marked by a series of pendulum swings between oralism and sign language. Oralism, the belief that deaf students should be taught to speak and lip-read, was the dominant approach to deaf education for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, in the late 20th century, there was a growing backlash against oralism, as deaf activists and educators began to argue for the importance of sign language in the education of deaf students.

The first school for the deaf in the United States was founded in 1817 by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. Gallaudet, a hearing man, was inspired to start the school after meeting a young deaf woman named Alice Cogswell. Gallaudet developed a method of teaching deaf students to communicate using sign language, and his school quickly became a model for other schools for the deaf around the country.

However, in the late 19th century, there was a growing backlash against sign language in the deaf education community. Oralists argued that sign language was a hindrance to deaf students' ability to learn to speak and lip-read. In 1880, the Milan Conference on the Education of the Deaf passed a resolution banning the use of sign language in schools for the deaf.

The ban on sign language had a devastating impact on deaf education. Deaf students were forced to learn in a language that they did not understand, and their academic achievement suffered. In addition, the ban on sign language led to the isolation of deaf students from the deaf community.

In the late 20th century, there was a growing backlash against oralism. Deaf activists and educators began to argue for the importance of sign language in the education of deaf students. In 1975, the United States Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which guaranteed deaf students the right to an education in their native language.

Today, sign language is widely recognized as the native language of deaf students. However, there are still many challenges facing deaf students in the mainstream education system. Deaf students often have to navigate a world that is hostile to their language and culture, and they may face discrimination and prejudice from hearing teachers and classmates.

Social and Political Factors

The education of deaf students is shaped by a complex interplay of social and political factors. These factors include:

- **The medical model of disability.** This model views deafness as a deficit that needs to be fixed. As a result, deaf students have often been subjected to harmful and ineffective treatments, such as surgery and hearing aids.
- **The social model of disability.** This model views deafness as a social construct that is created by the way that society disables deaf people. As a result, the social model argues that the focus of deaf

education should be on changing society, rather than on changing deaf students.

- **The ideology of normalcy.** This ideology values hearing and speech as the norm, and it devalues sign language and deaf culture. As a result, deaf students have often been pressured to conform to hearing norms, even when it is not in their best interests.

These social and political factors have a significant impact on the education of deaf students. They can lead to discrimination and prejudice, and they can make it difficult for deaf students to access the same educational opportunities as hearing students.

Resistance and Empowerment

Despite the challenges they face, deaf students have a long history of resistance and empowerment. Deaf activists and educators have fought for the right to use sign language, and they have challenged the medical model of disability.

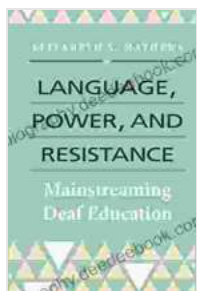
One of the most important forms of resistance is the use of sign language. Sign language is a rich and expressive language that allows deaf people to communicate fully and equally with each other. Deaf students who are fluent in sign language have higher academic achievement, better social skills, and a stronger sense of self-esteem than deaf students who are not fluent in sign language.

Another important form of resistance is the development of deaf culture. Deaf culture is a unique and vibrant culture that is shared by deaf people around the world. Deaf culture includes its own language, art, music, and social norms.

Deaf culture is a source of strength and pride for deaf people. It provides a sense of community and belonging, and it helps deaf people to resist the oppression of the hearing world.

The education of deaf students is a complex and challenging issue. Deaf students face a number of barriers, including discrimination, prejudice, and a lack of access to qualified teachers and resources. However, deaf students have a long history of resistance and empowerment, and they continue to fight for their rights.

The future of deaf education is bright. With the continued support of deaf activists and educators, deaf students can achieve their full potential and participate fully in society.



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