Social Capital for Deaf Children and their Families: The role of Summer Programs

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Social Capital Defined – Why we need to be concerned

  - Networks of reciprocity and trust
  - Family, friends, classmates (any kind of class),
  - commuter train seatmates, bowling league
  - Tripoly group, various groups of co-workers, etc.

- Two kinds:
  - **Bonding social capital** - links people who are share some important characteristic “Sociological super glue”
  - **Bridging social capital** – links across differences “Sociological WD -40”

- Tweens (and teens) need: “Bonding Social Capital”
  - Where will HOH and Deaf Tweens and teens get it?
Bonding Social Capital and developmental theories

- Classical psychology (Maslow and Erikson)
  - Belongingness, Psychosocial mutuality

- Identity Development: “Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?” (Tatum, 1997)
  - Middle School Transition

- “4th Environment” – Kleiber
  - Beyond home, school, and work
  - The cafeteria, hallways, locker rooms, malls, street corners
  - Absence of adults a necessary factor
Social Capital Needs of Hard of Hearing and Deaf Children

- Of course, young HOH and Deaf Children need to bond with their families.
- As they grow older, they need bonding social capital with peers and role models.
- Where will they get this opportunity to bond with similar peers and role models?
- Thus, the importance of “immersion” summer and weekend programs.
“Immersion Programs” – recognized by the ACA

- The American Camping Association recognizes the need for “immersion” as well as “inclusion” opportunities
- Commonly accepted Immersion Programs
  - Diabetes, Autism,
  - Cancer, Obesity, Behavioral Issues
- Clerc Center List
Social Capital and Young Adults’ retrospect:

- “It was great to be involved (I raced on the swim team and played lacrosse and volleyball), but with this involvement came a lot of stress.

- I always... missed out on team gossip in between drills (particularly in the pool when I couldn't wear my hearing aids),

- [I] always dreaded the team bus rides to meets because I could never follow all the chatter with all the noise on the bus (I would sit very quiet and feel invisible!).” (Oliva, Alone in the Mainstream, 2004)
Summer Crider - K-12 background and early summer camps

- Self Contained Classroom, Waldorf School, Lab School (UF), FSDB (high school)
- Public School Summer Day Camp
  - Focus on Art, the Art Teacher, “fantasy animals” (my “secret place”)
- Cochlear Implant Family Retreat
  - Begged my mom to drive me to [one girl’s] home to visit. She was the only peer I knew who was deaf and smart like me
  - She was oral, but knew sign language. Her parents were really strict about not signing (we “sneaked signing” in her room)
- Week long Basketball Camp at UF
  - “Hearing Impaired”
  - Good for Basketball, no social recollections
Many adolescents my age, who shared my interest in theatre - fascinating, cool, funny!

- unlike many of the deaf kids I was exposed to earlier

Confidence and self-esteem increased immediately!

Totally New Experience!

- transformed from a shy, reserved girl to an outgoing, funny, and eager-to-become-best-friends-with-everybody kind of girl.
- Recorded every laugh, every moment in my journal/scrapbook
- brought with me to school everyday in the following fall to show my interpreter – EVERY DAY!

Even at only age 14, I knew this was about “belonging” and I didn’t “belong” as a shy, reserved girl “in the mainstream” only.

Thus my decision to transfer to Florida School for the Deaf and Blind for my high school years.
In the public school, my hearing classmates knew me as the quiet deaf girl. At FSDB, I transformed because there were no communication barriers.

Before attending YSP, I would work so hard trying to “fit in”. I always pretended laughing at jokes I didn’t understand. After YSP, I didn’t do that anymore because I knew that in the YSP environment, I had “social capital” with people who shared the same sense of humor.

At my hearing schools, I’d run for officer positions just to be noticed or to prove that I could be a leader. After YSP, I knew what my passions were and focused my energies in those areas. If not for YSP, I would still be focused on “proving myself.”
Mainstreamed all my life as “the only one”
- Many extra curricular activities
- Middle school – started feeling communication barriers

Clarke School Summer Program – Mom’s idea
- “peers like me” (oral) -An “equal playing field”
- Still connected to some of the people I met there; not connected to any kids from my public school years
- Always sad to leave at end of session!!!

Aspen Camp for the Deaf
- Signing camp “Let me outa here!”
- Deep self understanding – My life changed!!!

Today: VP of GSA
- I DO have leadership ability (never thought I did)!!
Rachel Berman – Social Capital

- The social capital that came from being surrounded by deaf role models during my camp years led me to this point.

- I truly believe that the best way to grow and find your identity is by being with others like you
  - it gives us the coping skills needed to get through our frustrations of being the "only one"
  - And a sense of comfort that you have a place and support system to fall back

- Social Capital – a “place” where there is no need to "explain" your “limitations”
Research Study on Summer and Weekend Programs – 2005 - 2008

- Survey of Summer Camps
- Observation at 12 summer and weekend programs
- Interviews with more than 50 managers/counselors
- Interviews with 14 former campers (retrospect)

- Half founded prior 1976; Half after 1995
- About 75% of the responding camps were “strong ASL camps” who advertised mostly within the signing community
- All of the former campers expressed great regard for their experiences
Most important (general) findings:

- All are Labors of Love (more than half founded since 1995)
- Most are so busy just keeping the programs alive that they have no time for evaluation, training, networking, be more intentional
- Are a drop in the bucket
- But the children (now adults) will attest to their value in no uncertain terms
What can you do?

- Educate families early – learn more yourself about the struggles of the adolescent years esp for hard of hearing youngsters
- Encourage them to plan to involve their family in planning for many summers
- Develop programs for families (summer, weekend, after school)
  - Educational
  - Recreational
  - Get them started early with family programs
- Plan for local, regional, and statewide funding
- Get these programs on the IEPs routinely
- If you are affiliated with an academic institution, encourage more research
Summer Camp references

- Clerc Center list of summer camps

- American Camping Association
  - www.acacamps.org
References and Suggested Reading


