SURVEY OF LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS: VALUED CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE DEAF COMMUNITY

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VALUED CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP
WITHIN THE DEAF COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This study surveyed leadership programs operating for and by the Deaf community through questionnaire and interview data. Three categories of leadership development were identified as currently operating in the United States for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing: youth leadership programs, special interest mentoring groups, and formal leadership training programs focused on professional development and leadership skills. In addition, this study identified common leadership traits and training methods within these programs. Using a randomized list of leadership traits, valued characteristics were identified. The traits chosen most often were empowerment, advocacy, and decision making skills.

Keywords: deaf, deafness, leadership, youth, women, identity

Introduction

Tracing History

The construct of leadership by and for the Deaf community has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. Reminiscent of the evangelical missionaries (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003), hearing professionals in the 1960s wrote grants, researched, and implemented training programs to teach hearing people ways to teach and lead deaf people. In many of these programs, including leadership training in Deaf education, Deaf individuals were not considered even to be admissible until the mid to late 1960s (D. Moores, personal communication, November 7, 2007). Even though the hearing community dominated formal leadership of Deaf education, there was still a strong movement of organizations operating for and by Deaf individuals, such as the National Association for the Deaf and the World Federation of the Deaf (Moores, 2007). Yet the occurrence of Deaf leaders in mainstream leadership was rare.

At a time when society valued spoken language and discouraged a national Deaf community (Best, 1943; Buchanan, 1999), rarely did a person
who was Deaf have a place in leadership in the field of Deaf education that it appeared significant enough to mention in the textbooks. Best stated, “There are in the United States several different bodies interested in the education of the deaf, and composed in large part of those directly connected with the work of education (in one or two there being included deaf persons as well)” (p. 365).

Today, leadership training in Deaf education is far from its rudimentary beginnings. Great strides have taken place since that awkward hearing-hegemonic attempt to implement leadership in Deaf education from a dominant hearing perspective. This study sought to identify those leadership programs currently operating within the Deaf community and to understand the construct of leadership valued within those programs.

**Construct of Leadership: The Debate**

Davis (2007) asserted

Over the past 30 or so years, the status of deaf people has changed in important ways, as deaf activists and scholars have reshaped the idea of deafness, using the civil-rights movement as a model for the struggle to form deaf identity. (p. B6)

Davis (2007) sorted through various models of the construct of Deaf identity, examining the deficits of the linguistic models, the ethnic, and the cultural models. Even the familial model of Deaf identity (Deaf –of- Deaf) was rejected, citing that “the vast majority of Deaf people do not come from deaf families” (Davis, p. B6).

Instead, Davis (2007) pointed to the fact that most of the previously identified models of Deaf identity have been rooted in a hearing hegemonic world view. “In the past it was the hearing people who [set up the barriers and checkpoints]; now segments of the deaf community have declared themselves the gatekeepers” (Davis, p. B6). There are calls for a new definition for the skills required to lead within the Deaf community. In fact, the search to find a successor for Dr. I. King Jordan, President Emeritus at Gallaudet University, has emphasized the need for a Deaf-identity construct of leadership (Jordan, 2007; Schema, 2006). Davis (2007) called for a new definition:
We need not be defined in advance by an oppressor. We are not an ethnic or minority group, but something new and different, emerging from the smoke of identity politics and rising like a phoenix of the postmodern age. (p. B6)

Not all would agree with Davis. In fact, some equate the new definition of Deaf identity to neo-Nazism (Malzkuhn, 2006). Some reject the move towards a more inclusive definition of Deaf culture and debate the skills that are required to be an effective leader within that changing culture. From an editorial in the independent student newspaper at Gallaudet University, Malzkuhn made the case for rejecting the leader who “announce[d] that those students and people from different backgrounds (less deaf) will influence and change the current deaf culture” (p. 23). Malzkuhn continued

Deaf people are an endangered species, threatened by the technology available to fix what was not broken in the first place. They already have their own language, culture, and traditions. Only if they could hear and speak, they would be respected and apologized to, such as Native Americans, Aborigines, and even the Black people who were brought to America on slave ships. (p. 23)

The meaning of leadership within the Deaf community is open for debate and discussion. It is not a simple definition. In fact, the very issue that stands poised to raise new leadership from within the Deaf community and for the Deaf community also stands poised to divide. “The complexity increases exponentially when we try to analyze and comprehend the interactions of these forces, some of which tend to draw us together and some of which tend to move us apart” (Moores, 2007, p. 3).

Review of Literature

The Gatekeeper and Deaf Identity

Buchanan (1999) examined the barriers faced by Deaf workers and educators from 1850-1950 and attributed the success or failure of Deaf individuals to be “inextricably linked to language, identity, schooling, and general status of deaf adults” (p. xiii). The gatekeepers of identity and
leadership tended to be the dominant hearing society. This influence created a hearing-normative concept of deficit in the Deaf identity often resulting in identity confusion for many deaf individuals (Breivik, 2005). In reality, however, the deficit view is a construct of a hearing normative society. The true barriers are socially constructed. “It appears that being deaf is in and of itself enough to create barriers to achievement of educational and vocational goals. Some Deaf advocates would argue that it is not the deafness but society which reduces opportunity” (Doe, 1999, p. 283).

Research and curriculum in Deaf education have reinforced this deficit view (Barton, 2005; Luckner & Stewart, 2003). “Unfortunately, literature in the fields of education and rehabilitation on individuals who are deaf is replete with references to their putatively maladaptive development” (Luckner & Stewart, p. 244). Research has begun to emphasize leadership and success in the Deaf community (Luckner & Stewart, Mangrubang, 1993, Moores, 2001), thereby deemphasizing the pathological hearing view and putting the impetus for leadership of the Deaf community into the hands of Deaf leaders.

**Emancipatory Research on Leadership**

When a river or stream is dammed, its water seeks a new path; it carves out a new direction in which to flow. In the same way, research within the field has begun to reject the deficit view and to carve out a new path, to take up an emancipatory, post-positivist perspective. The call has been made for a new definition (Davis, 2007; Jordan, 2006; Schemo, 2006) of the meaning of leadership in the Deaf community. Just as feminist research challenges the assumptions associated with gender (Lather, 1991), research on leadership and identity within Deaf education has rejected the dominant culture’s hearing-privilege and labels and sought to construct the way that a Deaf identity impacts the meaning of leadership.

Buchanan (1999) posited that a Deaf individual’s perception of identity, leadership, and success is tied to his or her language and education. Bat-Chava (2000) likewise asserted that role models impact the identity of deaf children. “The degree to which a deaf child is exposed to other deaf children and adults in the family and school is likely to have an effect on the identity he or she will develop as an adult” (Bat-Chava, p. 421). Qualls-Mitchell (2002) advocated for a multicultural approach to increase literacy skills and social interaction between Deaf and hearing students to combat
deficit hegemonic messages. "Deaf or hard-of-hearing students juggle their own ethnic culture, the Deaf community, and the dominant culture daily" (Qualls-Mitchell, p. 78).

With accusations of ableism, education and language have been used as a "tool of exclusion" against the Deaf community (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Lather, 1991). Ferri and Connor rejected the labels placed on children as forms of segregation and an issue of power. "Many unarticulated assumptions undergird thinking about desegregation and inclusion. Implicit in the discourse of exclusion are perceptions of Black and disabled people as equivocally inferior" (Ferri & Connor, 2005, p. 469). Kiyaga and Moores (2003) in a qualitative study of Deaf education in sub-Saharan Africa examined the ways that the dominant, colonial-hegemonic assumptions influenced cultural views on Deaf children and their ability to participate in education and society. Kiyaga and Moores stated

> Many traditional beliefs characterize deafness as a manifestation of a mysterious fate, perhaps God's will. Some societies pity children who are deaf and see them as burdens, dependent on their families and lacking the ability to be independent. This type of belief in the lack of capability of deaf children may by itself impede access to education. (p. 21)

As education and research begin to move from this deficit view and focus on the success of leadership for and by Deaf individuals, that leadership trend increases (Buchanan, 1999; Luckner & Stewart, 2003). The interwoven issues of Deaf identity, language, and educational opportunities have tremendous impact on leadership potential and development (Andrews & Covell, 2006; Bat-Chava, 2000; Buchanan, 1999; Luckner & Stewart, 2003).

**Conceptual Framework**

This paper is written from a proactive approach to research in an emancipatory design (Barton, 2005; Jordan, 2004; Stone & Priestly, 1996). The emancipatory research design is committed to the basic principles that the construct of disability is a socially constructed barrier and rejects the medical, deficit model (Stone & Priestly).
This research study was conducted from a post-modern, neo-feminist approach that examined the construct of leadership within the deaf community from the tradition of community stories and input (Lather, 1991; Stone & Priestly, 1996), inviting the input and collaboration of individuals and leaders in the Deaf Leadership programs and the Deaf community.

Limitations

Three limitations of this study were identified. First was the challenge of defining the term Deaf. This study intends the term to be inclusive as it includes any who choose to identify themselves with the Deaf community. This definition may encompass those who are also hard-of-hearing, culturally Deaf, late Deaf, Deafened, Deaf-Blind, pre-lingual and post-lingual deaf. The term is intended to be construed in the broadest meaning of the word.

The second limitation was the low number of respondents to the initial survey. Even with numerous personal recommendation and snowball sampling, responses from formal organizations were low ($N < 30$). However, the depth of the responses and the corroboration of multiple sources eliminate response bias (Creswell, 2005). The qualitative nature of many responses also adds significant depth and candor.

Lastly, to identify all the leadership training, formal or informal, operating in the Deaf community in the United States is a daunting task. It is beyond the purview of this study to be able to claim that all leadership training in the Deaf community is included in these results. This study is intended to be a beginning work in the process of understanding the swell of leadership that is moving through the Deaf community and to understand the characteristics of leadership promoted.

Methodology

This qualitative research identified and surveyed current programs and organizations operating in the United States that exist primarily to further leadership within the Deaf community and sought to understand the construct of leadership within those programs. The project was intended to systematically research the characteristics of leadership which are reportedly valued and encouraged within the Deaf community. However, as an art critic examines a familiar masterpiece but finds greater depth and beauty with each new look, so this study revealed deeper meaning and beauty in a
seemingly familiar piece. It illuminates a ground swell of the autonomous actions taken by the Deaf community over the past 40 years in order to clarify identity and determine autonomous and meaningful leadership.

**Design**

The study was conducted in two phases: An Internet and personal cascading search to identify leadership programs currently operating for and by deaf people in the United States, and an on-line survey of those programs. The survey sought to identify the nature of those programs and to understand the characteristics of leadership valued within the Deaf community.

The initial survey consisted of 10 multi-layered questions ranging from demographic make-up of the program, leadership concepts being espoused, pedagogical methodology, and questions which invited participants to share success stories from their leadership programs. Response to the survey was initially very slow (eight responses in the first month of survey). Only after meetings and email correspondence with individuals active in these programs, were more responses received.

**Validity**

In order to respect cross-cultural ethics and validity Pollard (1992) recommended that researchers seek input from the Deaf community. Pollard stated

> The opinions of Deaf community leaders do not necessarily represent the opinions of the majority of the Deaf community...Various combinations of: conversations with colleagues and Deaf community leaders, readings in Deaf culture and cross-cultural research ethics, and temporary or regular consultation and feedback meetings with constituencies of deaf or hard-of-hearing persons may be needed to fulfill this ethical responsibility. (p. 91)

This study has been guided by that philosophy and many leaders in the field have contributed. With much encouragement and guidance, people in the Deaf community have referred programs, leaders, and new ideas. This
approach takes up the post-modern, post-positivist perspective that only through an open dialogue can new knowledge be discovered. According to Kvale (1996),

The conception that knowledge as a mirror of reality is replaced by knowledge as a social construction of reality. Truth is constituted through a dialogue; valid knowledge claims emerge as conflicting interpretations and action possibilities are discussed and negotiated among members of a community. (p. 239)

In that spirit, this study offers one interpretation to contribute to the community discussion.

**Sample**

The index of leadership programs was developed initially through an Internet keyword search (leadership, program, training, deaf). The search grew through references and recommendations from respondents in the Deaf community. Snowball sampling (Creswell, 2005) is advantageous because it emphasizes those organizations prominent within the community. Thus, when members within the Deaf community reported a program to be one of leadership training, it was included. For example, the Intertribal Deaf Council is not advertised as providing leadership training. However, through snowball sampling, it was included in the index of leadership programs.

The search process that began with a simple attempt to identify the leadership programs operating for and by Deaf individuals grew into a picture of the nature of leadership training in the Deaf Community. There emerged three categories of leadership programming: youth leadership training programs, such as the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Youth Leadership Camp; special-interest-group mentoring programs, examples of which include National Black Deaf Advocates and the Intertribal Deaf Council; and formal leadership training resulting in degrees, certificates, or educational credits, such as the Gallaudet Leadership Institute.

**Focus on Youth**

There was an inexhaustible number of youth leadership camps, from Associations of the Deaf such as Michigan Association Ralph Lyman
Leadership Camp Chris, which accepts early teens who are Deaf/ Hard of Hearing along with hearing siblings and children of Deaf adults (CODAs) to the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Youth Leadership Camp, which boasts of 38 years of leadership training on their website. According to their website (www.nad.org), the NAD Youth Leadership Camp advocates for “scholarship, leadership and citizenship” and reports to provide campers with opportunity to “discover self-identity, develop self-esteem and confidence, and build leadership and teamwork skills through hands-on activities.”

Similarly, the Alexander Graham Bell Association (A.G. Bell) had a listing of youth camps including those that targeted leadership skills. One of the past participants of the A.G. Bell youth camp, an organization with a strong oral communication emphasis, identified the characteristics taught as teamwork, conflict resolution, and interpersonal skills. The A.G. Bell camps emphasized strong work ethics, assertiveness, and group development using various activities including the ropes course to build these skills (A. Hogue, personal communication, October 25, 2007).

One of these programs, Discovery Retreat (formally known as Youth Leadership Retreat) sponsored by the Texas Schools for the Deaf, emphasized the impact of the program on its participants:

Many of our students are very isolated when they come to their first retreat and they often meet their first deaf role model and friends at the retreat. We get calls that after the retreat they spend large amounts of time on their pagers keeping in contact with their new retreat friends. Sometimes the teachers tell us that the “person who came back is not the one we sent” - and they notice a profound change in personality.

Discovery Retreat’s David Coco identified one such leader and role model – Frank Turk. The characteristics that made him a leader were his “selfless dedication to deaf youth” and “willingness to work with different (youth) programs”

Other characteristics participants used to identify current leaders within the Deaf community were “teamwork, advocacy, empowerment, role model.” The Deaf Teen Leadership Camp, at the Washington School for the Deaf, now in its third year, also cited empowerment, integrity, vision,
persistence, and decision making as characteristics of leadership. The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Youth Leadership Camp spotlighted role models from the Deaf Community (Ortiz, 2007). The keynote speaker, Frank Turk, “told the campers that they have the responsibility to encourage the development of other leaders by building a group of leaders around each one of ourselves” (Ortiz, 2007, p. 9).

Table 1 provides a sampling of the available youth leadership programs, although clearly not comprehensive. Seemingly more and more state schools for the deaf and vocational rehabilitation services seek to empower students through teamwork, decision-making skills, role models, and advocacy.

Focus on Special Identity Groups

In developing the index of leadership programs, this search was initially restricted to programs whose titles included the word leadership. Within the course of the search, it became evident that, within the Deaf community, leadership training seemed to take place within the context of role models and empowerment through identity association with special interest groups. Some of these are ethnicity based, such as the National Black Deaf Advocates organization, which hosts leadership training at its biannual conferences. Another is the Deaf People of Color, which exists to dispel the hearing hegemonic misconceptions and provide role models to underserved Deaf individuals. The Deaf People of Color website reads

We hope to inform the dominant culture about the struggles and strengths of Deaf People of Color. We wish to show the similarities of the various cultures, but also to cherish our differences and diversities. Another important goal is that we include individuals who are not in influential positions, so that they might also reap the benefits and personal empowerment that we hope to model.

One leader identified in the survey, Marilyn Smith, is the Executive Director of Abused Women’s Advocacy Services in Seattle, Washington. She was described as “visionary, passionate, and persistent.” Further research into Ms. Smith’s passionate and persistent vision revealed a woman who was once a victim herself yet turned that into a determination to help other
Deaf women who were victims of crime and domestic abuse. In 2003, she was awarded the “Leadership for a Changing World” grant to fund “A Place of Our Own, the nation’s first shelter for deaf domestic-violence victims” (Bartley, 2005, p. B1).

This shelter might not be designated as a leadership program, but it appeared that leadership development might be taking place within these identity groups. There emerged a trend of leadership initiatives based on subcultures within the deaf community. One such group is the National Deaf Black Advocates (NBDA); with its Youth Empowerment Summit and Black Deaf Senior Citizens and Family Network programs, this organization provides leadership and support to a wide range of those whose identities intertwine with its own.

This study of leadership training and programming within the Deaf community revealed less formal leadership training and more emphasis on special identity groups or subcultures. The published mission of the NBDA exemplified that trend. According to the NBDA website (www.nbda.org), the Mission of the National Black Deaf Advocates is to promote the leadership development, economic and educational opportunities, social equality, and to safeguard the general health and welfare of Black deaf and hard of hearing people. There are also professional and social networks whose chief mission is to provide mentoring to those with similar identities. One such example is the Deaf Attorney Network (www.deafattorneys.com). There were also several organizations that involved Deaf people and various religions and denominations. These were not included in the study as their primary intent appeared to spirituality rather than the promotion of leadership.

Other special identity leadership groups are gender based, such as the Deaf Women’s Leadership Program. The Deaf Women’s Leadership Program appeared to be unique as this program still emphasized empowerment through professional advancement and development. However, it also reported the strong use of formal assessments, group building, and team building activities, as well as role models and leadership theory. Very focused on empowerment through professional achievement and social action, this respondent exemplified leadership as the first Deaf woman president of a Deaf club, Sally Auerbach. Survey respondents reported her to be “very confident and intelligent.” She “portrayed leadership qualities and set a good role model for many Deaf Women in her community.” These, and
many more organizations, have pulled together to promote leadership in a way that may be unique to the Deaf community. The common characteristic among these programs and organizations continues to be empowerment and advocacy for those whose identities coincide with their own and are detailed in Table 2.

**Focus on Adult Leadership Training**

The search for adult leadership training yielded only four adult programs, and one reported that it had had to close due to a lack of response. Two of the three remaining programs, Gallaudet Leadership Institute and the Pennsylvania Society of the Advancement for the Deaf, reported emphasis on professional development, empowerment, and social justice.

Arguably the hub of formal leadership training in the Deaf community is the Gallaudet Leadership Institute (GLI), housed on the campus of Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. Several of the above listed organizations are supported and hosted by the GLI, such as the National Black Deaf Advocates and the Deaf Women Leadership Organization. In operation since 2002, GLI programming was reported by a participant to emphasize advocacy, social justice, and professional advancement. According to the GLI website (http://gli.gallaudet.edu), GLI “exists to address acute leadership shortages in education and other social service professions, including deaf-centric for-profit and non-profit agencies and corporations.”

Another unique training program, Pennsylvania Society of Advancement for the Deaf (PSAD), also reported an emphasis on empowerment, professional development, and decision making skills. This program’s website (www.psadweb.org) explains the design for Deaf and hard-of-hearing leaders in state and local government and non-profit agencies. The PSAD also sometimes incorporates the use of role models and team building activities, in connection to the leadership theory.

**Leadership Characteristics**

**Shared Leadership Characteristics**

Given a randomized list of 12 leadership characteristics that best describe their programs, 75% of the respondents chose empowerment. Advocacy (50%) and decision making skills (37%) ranked second and third, with professional
development (25%) listed fourth. Surprisingly little emphasis was reported to stress honesty (0%), integrity (12.5%), and social justice (12.5%). The adult programs, Gallaudet Leadership Institute and Pennsylvania Society of Advancement for the Deaf, not surprisingly also listed professional development along with empowerment as did the Deaf Women’s Leadership Program (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of leadership characteristics reported

![Bar chart showing leadership characteristics](image)

**Training Methods**

Empowerment and advocacy were reportedly accomplished through role modeling, group development, and team building activities. Respondents reported that role models were used most often (75%) to promote leadership. Group development (71.4%) and team building (75%) were also highly utilized in the development of leaders within the Deaf community. Leadership theory and informal leadership assessments were utilized by 50% of the respondents, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Training methods used in leadership training

![Bar chart showing training methods](image)
Empowerment through advocacy

This survey study of leadership programs operating for and by Deaf people revealed a seismic shift from the hearing-hegemonic programming of the 60s, in which even a Deaf participant was the exception, to the current offering of leadership training for individuals who are Deaf and Hard-of-hearing established and operating by individuals who are Deaf and Hard-of-hearing. Deaf-led leadership programs have multiplied; they tend to fall into one or more of three categories: youth programming, special identity organizations, or formal adult leadership training.

Overwhelmingly, empowerment and advocacy were the identified focus of these programs. Techniques identified for leadership development strongly favored role models and team building exercises. Leadership training by and for individuals who are Deaf seek to empower and advocate for the community by providing positive role models and developing community. The overwhelming use of empowerment to build leadership in the Deaf community led to further research of the literature. Jankowski (1997) defined empowerment in terms of a social movement, a process through which a marginalized group alters the distribution of power between itself and the dominant culture. In order for a marginalized group to change the dynamics of power, it needs a strong community and a strong positive identity. Stam (2006) defined empowerment in terms of a connectedness, an attitude of competence:

Empowerment occurs when (a) people feel significant, at the center of things rather than at the periphery; (b) learning and competence matter - leaders make it clear that there is no failure, only mistakes that give us feedback and tell us what to do next; (c) people are a part of a community; and (d) work is exciting. (p. 252)

Cultural Rhetoric

Empowerment is found to have its roots in language and rhetoric (Jankowski, 1997). “Through rhetoric, those authorities [educators, administrators, medical personnel, and those in the helping professions] legitimize the ‘normal person’, leaving out countless groups of people, including Deaf people who deviate from the norm” (Jankowski, p. 13).
Taking back the tool of rhetoric, the Deaf social movement mounted a resistance against the subjugation of the dominant hearing culture (Jankowski, 1997) by building a strong community in which individuals could escape the deficit image and develop a more positive self image. Utilizing the assimilation research conducted by the African American community, Jankowski applied this theory to explain the empowerment rhetoric within the Deaf community. Jankowski argued that for assimilation to work, African Americans need to have a psychologically and mentally healthy regard for themselves so that white people will be dealing with people who have a positive sense of their history and of themselves as whole beings. This evaluation need not be restricted to African Americans. Such a diagnosis can extend to other cultural groups, including Deaf Americans.

The leadership programs researched in this study point to those strong community bonds. When asked how often specific strategies were utilized in their program, over 71% reported “always” to use team building and group development activities. Team building and group development are consistent with the rhetoric of empowerment, which seeks to promote leaders from within a strong community.

Discussion

While there were many newspaper and magazine articles relating stories of Deaf role models, this review of literature revealed little research on the effectiveness or even the degree to which role models are utilized in leadership programs. In this study, however, 75% of the respondents asserted that their program always utilized role models to promote leadership skills. This technique for empowerment is clearly widely accepted as an effective leadership training method. Research is needed to understand its effectiveness and so further to promote mentoring and role models.

Similarly, a search of the literature revealed several articles regarding advocating for the Deaf community but little research was found that investigated leadership self-advocacy from within the Deaf community. Empowerment through role models from within a strong cultural identity and advocacy for individual rights are widely used and celebrated in leadership programs for and by individuals who are Deaf and by Deaf Studies programs. However, to learn more about this trend in leadership in the Deaf community, research on empowerment, role models, group development, and self-advocacy should be pursued.
Conclusion

In this survey study of leadership programs operating for and by Deaf individuals in the United States, three categories were identified: youth leadership programs, special interest mentoring groups, and formal leadership training programs focused on professional development and leadership skills. Youth leadership programs were the most plentiful. This study could not identify all the programs stemming from residential deaf schools or state deaf associations. Special interest groups such as the National Black Deaf Advocates and Deaf Women Leadership programs also exemplified the strong emphasis on mentoring and role models valued within leadership training in the Deaf community. Finally, formal leadership programs such as the Gallaudet Leadership Institute and the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf promoted professional development and formalized training in leadership development.

The strongest leadership characteristic revealed in this study was empowerment, through the use of role models and self-advocacy skills. There exists a strong sense of empowerment from within the Deaf community through the establishment of strong cultural and community ties. This empowerment appeared to be the result of resistance to the dominant hearing-hegemonic oppressive discrimination that Deaf individuals have experienced over many decades. Throwing off the deficit views imposed by a socially constructed view of Deafness as a barrier, leadership programs have taken up the mantra of role modeling and advocacy.

It would be valuable to trace the history of empowerment, to follow the thread throughout the recent history of the Deaf community. In an interview with Dr. I. King Jordan, President Emeritus of Gallaudet University, he revealed his perception of empowering others. Dr. Jordan insisted it was simply modeling leadership:

Every time I was in a magazine or on TV or in an important place, hearing people were saying, ‘Hey, that’s a Deaf guy. Huh... wow that’s a Deaf guy.’ Deaf people were saying, ‘Here’s someone (like me). If King can do that, well, I can do that.’ So, it was
just modeling it. I think that was really important.
(Personal communication, June 29, 2007)

It appears that at least 75% of the leadership programs operating in the Deaf community would agree.

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Table 1. Identified Youth Leadership Programs

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Table 2.
Index of Special Identity Group Leadership Programs

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