



# The Power of Transformation in Deaf Education

By Andrea Sonnier

**Andrea Sonnier, EdS,** is the founder of Critical Consciousness School, a form of critical self-reflection that unlocks one's fullest potential in promoting healing, transformation, and freedom in their classroom, school, or community. She earned her education specialist degree in deaf education from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Previously, Sonnier taught English to middle school and high school deaf and hard of hearing students in Louisiana, Washington, D.C., and Maryland. She has presented at local, regional, and national conferences on critical consciousness, the experiences of Black Deaf families, protecting deaf children of color, and the principles of social justice among other topics. Learn more about Critical Consciousness School at [www.andreasonnierbabin.com](http://www.andreasonnierbabin.com).

While growing up, I dreamed of becoming a teacher. Now, as an adult with the opportunity to grow and transform myself every day by facing inevitable and challenging changes within and beyond the field of education, I am living that dream—not only as a teacher but also as a Critical Consciousness School consultant for teachers, administrators, and other leaders with a passion for deaf education and for creating equitable educational experiences for their students. It is through this lens that I look at this year's *Odyssey* issue, which truly reflects the time in which we are living.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world overnight and required each person to transform in order to survive and thrive. This is especially true in the context of deaf education. Practices in instruction, collaboration, and administration are effective only when they are truly relevant to students, teachers, staff, and administrators within a school. What's relevant to these

individuals is also connected to what's going on in their lives and in their communities. Therefore, it stands to reason that practices will change—as they should—as the world evolves ... locally, regionally, nationally, and even globally.

While change is unavoidable and far from easy, transformation is a choice. For instance, isolation and anxiety as a result of a global pandemic—that is change. On the other hand, expanding one's perception of music? A shared innovative and adventurous Deaf Ed Road Trip? Building compassion satisfaction? Addressing non-academic needs, such as teacher burnout in school weekly newsletters? Incorporating self-determination skills into teaching plans? All of these are what I call transformative.

And why are transformative practices in education important for deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, and deafdisabled students? I believe that, as educators commonly find

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in research and practice, multiple communities of students experience oppression in different forms within the field of education. To truly care for the students we know and love, it is important that we transform their educational experiences in ways that are not oppressive. It is only then that these students begin walking on paths that are designed to build up their individual well-being and agency as well as the well-being and agency of the communities of which they are a part. For instance, the merging of functional skills (such as cooking and self-advocacy) and academic skills (such as algebra and writing) in settings that serve all students rather than a select few on the basis of ability, race, class, gender, etc., is a transformative action in response to inevitable change that has helped expose disparities between student populations that are

considered to be advantaged and those that are considered to be disadvantaged. This type of change is an important step in helping students gain equity not only in education but in preparation for life after graduation.

Additionally, to experience and create real joy for ourselves as teachers, staff, administrators, etc., and for students and their families, we must do away with operating on autopilot and find out what truly works best for those we care about in these current times. To address these issues often requires a process of self-transformation. However, while the transformation of self in this context is both a difficult yet joyous journey, it is nearly impossible without a community of support from other teachers, staff, administrators, families, etc. Community support may look like this: teachers bringing the world to students when

students can't go out into the world (e.g., due to a pandemic); abled folks, including home health aides, providing companionship, meal preparation and support, assistance, etc., to disabled folks; and individuals bringing family gatherings to their homes (via Zoom) instead of heading out to gather with family. Connecting school and community (e.g., classroom lessons that intentionally reflect real life as it is and/or as it can be) in ways that transform the world as it changes is the common theme throughout the articles in this magazine issue.

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