



The Teachers' Tribe

S1 Ep007: Cultural Connections with the Deaf Community

Special Guests: Jamie Smith & Cameron Hogan

Introduction

TTT: Hello and welcome to the Teachers' Tribe Podcast. I'm your host, Maxine McFarlane. I am very excited about today's episode because it provides a wonderful opportunity for us to learn and be supportive of a community that I previously knew very little about. I am joined by two guests this week who are connected with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community in different capacities. It is my pleasure to welcome my colleague, Jamie Smith, who is a media specialist; and Cameron Hogan, a college student, ASL signer and also avid supporter of the community. Ladies, welcome!

Let's begin by finding out more about each of you, and how you are connected to the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community. Cameron, I will begin with you.

Cameron: Hey! So thank you for having us! So, I've been signing for a really long time. I started signing pretty young and I don't really know exactly what age. But I took formal ASL classes in High School, and now as a college student it's actually one of my minors at Appalachian State University (WOOH!). My field kinda goes into that as well with what I'm studying. I'm an Audiology major with a minor in ASL. So, yeah.

TTT: Good, but I'm kind of curious now, Cammie. I didn't think of this before. What caused you to start signing at such a young age? Was it somebody in your family or something...

Cameron: Yeah, so I have some family history of hearing loss and there are people in my family (not direct family), but just some people in my family that do have some hearing loss; and so a lot of my family does know sign language and I just thought that it was really cool as a kid. So, I just picked it up.

TTT: OK. Alright, Ms. Smith, tell us about you.

Jamie: OK. Thank you for having us! I have been a member of the deaf community - I was diagnosed when I was two years old because of hearing loss. I've been told that my mother was speaking to me as I was watching TV and I didn't hear her, but I could hear my father. So they noticed right away, they noticed then that I had some hearing loss. So I have been wearing hearing aids ever since I was two years old. And, initially, I went to a deaf school; but because the deaf school was too far away from home, they brought me back home to start at a

school that is mainstream. So I'd be going... went to a school with hearing students. So... and during school (in the mainstream school) I grew up with an auditory trainer. I was embarrassed to wear it because it was a big, bulky device on my chest, and I had to wear it where everyone could see that I had this trainer. The auditory trainer connects to the teacher's microphone and... so that's my biggest memory of that. Further along, my first librarian job was at Gallaudet University, and Gallaudet University is a school for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing. That's where I became more involved in the Deaf community.

TTT: Where is this school, Ms. Smith?

Jamie: This school is in Washington, D.C.

TTT: OK. So we have two people who are involved in the deaf community in different capacities - one with firsthand experience and one who just has a strong interest in that work. The main purpose of this podcast episode is to heighten awareness of the general public especially during this time when we are not functioning in the way we would normally do in society. As someone who is not directly involved in the community (like Miss Smith and Cammie are), there are several misconceptions that I am becoming aware of as well as things that I have not personally... previously considered. For example, in a recent conversation with Ms Smith, I realized how challenging things have become as a result of wearing masks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Let's talk about the distinctions within the community so that the listeners can be more aware of how people have varying needs. I'm going to ask you to talk about that, Ms. Smith.

Jamie: Yes, so communication has gotten more difficult for me as the result of wearing masks due to the pandemic. I am a lip reader. A lip reader visually interprets the movements of lips to understand speech. Without that visual presentation, it has been very difficult to communicate with others, without using ASL (American Sign Language). For example, I went shopping at the grocery store a couple days ago. I went to check out to purchase my groceries. I knew the cashier had spoken to me. But it was difficult to understand her because she had on a mask. She pointed to the bag and I knew right away what she was saying. I answered back that I prefer paper bag for my groceries. Thankfully, most people are friendly and understanding. This is just one example. I do have some degree of hearing. However, there are varying degrees of deafness. There are some who are totally deaf, and have no hearing at all. There are some, like me, who have little to some hearing loss. Sometimes, they rely on hearing aids (like myself) or some sort of assistive devices. I am so grateful for today's technology. There have been incredible advances to technology for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I personally rely on closed captioning when watching TV or movies. There are also flashing light devices for doorbells and fire alarms to alert the person. And also, there is CART, which stands for

Communication Access Realtime Translation, realtime captioning. Of course, there is American Sign Language (ASL). There are ASL interpreters that can be requested.

TTT: OK, so we have made significant strides in devices and technology that are being used to support this community, and you don't have to walk around with that big thing around your neck. I found an interesting poster - a sign that says, "Signs are to eyes what words are to ears". Let's talk about ASL. HBoth of you have mentioned that in your introduction. How is it used mainstream and in education? Let me start with you, Cameron.

Cameron: So, I guess it's a little different because I'm an outsider kind of looking in; but who's also involved with signing, and who uses sign a lot. But, for me... I don't know... unless... the easiest way to explain this is to interpret the quote that you have.

TTT: OK, you can speak on that.

Cameron: So, for that "Signs are to eyes what words are to ears" - if you close your eyes you stop communication, for someone that uses ASL. Like, I've been in ASL class, and when no one... like if you don't want to pay attention, you can close your eyes. Then you don't know what's going on.

TTT: So, can you talk about some of the assistive devices that are available for people with these varying degrees of deafness? I know Ms. Smith mentioned a few but since you're studying audiology, can you speak some more about that?

Cameron: And there are definitely some that even people that aren't involved in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community or that know sign language often know about. So these are typically like hearing aids, which they know of as like the behind the ears hearing aids. But there is a whole array of different types of hearing aids. There is like in the ear, in the ear canal, behind the ear, and cochlear implants - which is actually a very specific field and a lot of people think they're the same as hearing aids, which they have two totally different jobs. I think the easiest way to think about them is a hearing aid is like talking into a microphone. You can hear it louder, but you're not going to hear it clearer. So, if your head's under water and someone's speaking into a microphone, you can hear that they are talking louder but it will still be very muffled. If that's the type of hearing loss that is there. A cochlear implant stimulates the auditory nerve in the cochlea, like the hairs in the cochlea that sends the signals we interpret as sound. And a cochlear implant kind of replicates that - not identical to how we hear normally (I put "normally" in quotes there), but it does do that job instead.

TTT: And I really like the illustration. It helped me to figure it out a lot easier... that under water illustration.

Cameron: A lot of people that don't have any sort of hearing loss or don't know anybody that has hearing loss or that's not studying it, basically, people that don't have any interaction with it, really do struggle with those two main concepts. And there's a ton of different types of devices as well. I know Ms. Smith previously mentioned some. Generally, like the two biggest ones are amplification devices and alert devices. So these can be things like when their telephone rings, a light flashes or their doorbell rings, a light flashes. Where amplification can be hearing aids. They can be similar to what Ms. Smith had growing up - the auditory box, that's basically just a speaker that is connected directly into their hearing aids.

TTT: I was just thinking about that device, though. So, I know, Ms. Smith, you said that there was a ... the sound would be transmitted to the teacher, but could other people hear it as well?

Jamie: No. No, it's just between myself and the teacher. But I do hear the sounds that the teacher gets on her microphone.

TTT: So if you were talking to a classmate, for example, who is not connected to your device as the teacher is, was that ... would you now have to rely on your hearing aids to help you with that?

Jamie: Yes, I would have to rely on my hearing aids. So, that is completely different from the auditory trainer that I would have.

TTT: And I understand, even as a teacher, why that would be important because you... to support the instruction that the teacher is delivering, to ensure that you are capturing what the teacher is saying.

Cameron: My ASL teacher really harped on each individual type of assistive listening device, and for that one, how she kind of described it was, basically, it's a microphone for one person.

TTT: Apart from the assistive devices, what are some things that can be done to support people in the deaf and hard of hearing community? Since you started on it, Cammie, why don't you continue.

Cameron: OK. So, I guess this kind of goes back to the original how is ASL used in mainstream and education. I did... kind of pass that a little bit earlier. To where... in mainstream, at least in my experience, it's not really used. It's not really used. So you will see people with hearing loss that could be severe or... to mild, they have these assistive listening devices. Some have interpreters that basically go from class to class to class with them interpreting everything the teacher says. But you only see that here and there. It's not heavily used in mainstream education, unless you're taking a specific American Sign Language course.

Jamie: Yeah, I agree. They... typically ASL is widely used in deaf schools. There are other deaf students that they can sign with and it gets difficult when you are in mainstream where you could be the only deaf student in that school or one or just a handful of students. So it's difficult to find other students that may have... that may have skills in ASL. So that's why you don't see ASL as much in mainstream education. So... but now the deaf schools are closing. There are not that many deaf schools, so deaf students are going to mainstream schools. It is important to teach ASL (you know) in schools and other people can learn ASL, because that's our mode of communication especially for someone who grew up knowing ASL.

TTT: Was that very common for you in your elementary years, Ms. Smith, where maybe you were the only student in your class or grade level who needed that kind of support?

Jamie: Yes, it was myself and one other male student who was there and we would communicate all the time. Outside of him, I'd have to talk or use my hearing aids or auditory trainer.

Cameron: So, I think kind of with the "what other people can do" definitely one thing is have patience, on both ends. For people that are trying to learn and for people that are trying to communicate. I mean, I would love to say just everyone know ASL and all of that; but understand that that's not really practical. I think it would be great if everyone knew a little bit of ASL, even if it's just finger spelling. Just knowing your alphabet. It helps some, actually it helps more than you think. But, just being patient. So I know, especially from personal experience, one thing that some of my friends or my professor (who is deaf) does is they write down or type out their order when going to a restaurant. And, as a hearing person, I can stand in line, not really decide until I get up to that cash register, up to the waitress or waiter or I can ask them a bunch of different questions. But, just imagine having to type out or write out all of those questions or telling if you have some sort of food allergy or certain accommodations that you may want. So just have patience with people in any situation, honestly, anywhere. But, especially in these incidents.

TTT: And I'm now thinking, as you said that... You know sometimes you may go to order something and they're out. You had your typed up list to show. So that's a whole other scenario where they're going to have to adjust; and it may be commonplace for me to just say, "OK, since you don't have that (and I'd look on the menu board) I'll take that instead." But now a person in the deaf community will now have to figure out how am I going to explain all of this and change my order in the moment.

Cameron: Exactly; and I have food allergies (you know I have pretty severe food allergies) to where I have to ask what is in every single dish. What are the ingredients? Because I don't

want to have an allergic reaction. And, if you could put yourself in their shoes and understand some of the stress that they may be under to do something so simple to you (like ordering a meal) maybe, I honestly feel that would help a lot. Just have patience; and if you can learn a few basic signs, it really goes a long way.

TTT: A few weeks ago, Ms. Smith was offering some ASL classes and I jumped in towards the tail end; and it was just so freeing when we had a conversation and I was saying, “I don’t want to say the wrong thing. I don’t want to sign the wrong thing.” Just to hear you encouraging me to learn a few signs here or there. The perfect example she gave was it’s just like speaking another language. So, I remember when we went to Cuba and I was walking around with my pocket dictionary all the time and people were very patient and understanding because it was clear to them that I’m not from Cuba. I’m not a native Spanish speaker; and I think it’s the same kind of situation with the... with ASL.

Cameron: Yeah, and like I said I’ve been signing for years. I’ve had now (I don’t know) twelve formal years of teaching and schooling of ASL. I’ve taught some, I’ve learned a lot, I’m still learning (I’m always learning) and at times I mess up. And when I’m communicating in ASL, people are always super receptive to it - even when I mess up. They’re like, “Wait, did you mean this?” and I’m like, “Yeah, that’s what I meant!”

TTT: That’s good to know because sometimes I’m unsure of what to do when interacting with people who have challenges because I do not want to offend anybody or make them uncomfortable. That is why our conversation today is very meaningful for me. It is always my goal to make everyone feel included and supported; and I have a desire to make cultural connections. So, even having this conversation with you, Ms. Smith, I’m thinking of if and when we get back into the building, and I’m dropping off my students in the media center and I’m saying something to you, I’m more mindful now that I can’t be just handing you my bag and turning away; but I want to make sure I’m maintaining eye contact. Not because I want to stare you down, but I want to support you because you’re a lip reader. I would probably say that I am striving to make people with “disabilities” feel comfortable around me.

Do you consider deafness to be a disability? Why or why not?

Jamie: Around 30 million people in the United States have hearing difficulty or some degree of deafness. I struggle with the word “disability” because it implies that Deaf people are not able to do something. When in truth, we are very capable of many various things. Personally speaking, I cannot hear to some degree. In Americans with Disabilities Act, deafness is considered a disability. Because of ADA, many public places such as schools, libraries and even restaurants must accommodate those with disabilities.

TTT: As with most communities, I guess that there may be stigma associated with the people who are deaf. Cameron, what are some of the things that you have seen working with this community, even though you are not officially a member of the community so to speak?

Cameron: Definitely, one thing that I always see is they are always excited when you do try to communicate with them. That's totally understandable. Somebody... like for you, when you see another Jamaican you get so excited. I know this from personal experience too!

TTT: I just need to see the black, green and gold and I'm all excited. Could that person be a Jamaican?

Cameron: Yes. I know that from personal experience. But, they're always looking for and wanting to communicate with people, wanting people to try to communicate with them even if it's not grand. Even if it's not great.

TTT: Or perfect.

Cameron: Or perfect. They just want somebody to try, and a lot of people don't. Simple as that. A lot of people don't. Often they are ignored and shut out in public, especially mainstream public. This can be mainstream education or just like going to the mall. Like, just out and about sort of thing. So, most people, and hearing people really don't think about. And this is typically because they don't know how or they just don't care to try. Both of those are really ... (*inaudible*) I don't know (*chuckling*). They just don't know how or they just don't care to try. And I guess the other thing is hearing people definitely do not give the deaf and hard of hearing community enough credit. They are able to do so many things that people don't realize. One of the biggest stigmas is that deaf people can't drive.

Jamie: That is absolutely not true. That's a big misconception.

Cameron: Yeah. So, things like that, where people believe these stigmas and these misconceptions and that's all they believe and they don't try to do anything else with them, but they only believe that's what the deaf and hard of hearing community is a little circle of "I can't". And really the only thing they can do is hear at what would be considered a normal level.

TTT: Now you have me thinking, Cameron, because it's a fallacy -- Deaf people can drive; but makes me start to think (and you mentioned patience earlier). As a member of the general public, we need to be mindful of some things and be more patient. For example, you as a driver, Ms. Smith, what are some of the things that you have to deal with people who don't have the hearing loss you have?

Jamie: Remember, we want to be included. We want to be included in the conversation! Or anything. So when people attempt to speak with a deaf person, they should speak in a clear voice, without any obstruction around the mouth in case the deaf person is a lip reader (like myself). Please don't talk loudly, we still cannot hear you.

TTT: You know the media doesn't help with that because, haven't you watched SITCOMS or TV shows and somebody may have hearing loss or something and people start yelling. Or if they speak another language you figure if you speak louder then ...

Jamie: No, no. We absolutely hate that because we cannot hear you. But it's simple if you speak in a clear voice and respectfully, I would refrain calling Deaf people "hearing impaired" because the word impaired implies that we can't do something -- we can't do this or we can't do that. The correct term is "deaf" or "hard of hearing" and I know from the National Association for the Deaf, we prefer to use that term. And it's slowly but surely moving to that term - deaf or hard of hearing. Some people who are not part of the deaf community may be considered people with some hearing loss.

TTT: OK. That's good to know, because I have used the term before - "hearing impaired" not thinking, I mean, I thought I was being ... fine in using it. I didn't think it was something that was frowned upon, so I'm really glad for this awareness that you are bringing to me today.

Cameron: I mean, even as a student that's studying not only ASL but a preMed student, in all of our medical papers that we have to read it's stated as "hearing impaired". Occasionally, you'll get some level of severity and then "deaf"... like the word "deaf" -- whether it's like mild, mildly deaf, severely, or profound deafness like things like that. But nine times out of ten, it's hearing impaired.

TTT: And these publications have been in more recent years.

Cameron: Yes. Yes. These are like.... Both going from medical levels of... you have this percent of hearing loss and even just talking about culturally. So even as a student who is actively studying this I still see these in papers, in documents that we're continuously reading.

TTT: I just purchased my first deaf related book, thanks to Ms. Smith's recommendation - El Deafo. It was written by Cece Bell. As a librarian, I'm sure you have other books in mind that my listeners could use to bring more awareness to themselves and to others just like I'm learning today. What are some books that you would recommend and for what target audience? Because I think it would be good, not just for me as an adult to read, but I'm even thinking as a teacher in the classroom if there's a book that my second graders could read; or my teenage boys could read. So if you have a few recommendations, I'd love to hear them.

Jamie: Sure! In addition to *El Deafo* by Cece Bell, which I highly recommend - *El Deafo*. I relate to that book so much. The part in the book where she explains the auditory trainer and there's a section where the teacher had on the microphone and she went to the bathroom and she heard the teacher using the bathroom. I had that experience myself, so I could totally relate to that book. Another book that I recommend for children specifically is the *Moses* series written by Isaac Millman. It's an early chapter book series which includes illustrations of American Sign Language. This would be a great introduction for children to learn more about deafness. Also, for the older population, I recommend the Gallaudet University Dictionary of American Sign Language. There are two editions: there's one for children and one for adults. Of course you can search Gallaudet University's dictionary and a regular ASL dictionary. In all seriousness, Gallaudet University has done a ton of research in American Sign Language and it prides itself on having the largest collection of deaf materials at Gallaudet University. This is in Washington D.C. And also, there are many, many books out there on deafness -- for babies, for children, all the way up to adults. So, I just recommend just picking up a book.

TTT: Yes, definitely, and now we can just go online and do a quick search and I'm sure we'll get a ton of recommendations as well. I'm thinking about something else in our experience that we haven't explored too much before we wrap this up, Ms. Smith. You said you were in a deaf school for a while, but then you were mainstreamed. I want you to talk with me a little bit about the benefits of maybe being a lip reader; because I'm guessing that because you were mainstreamed that's a skill that you developed. Tell me some more about that part of your life.

Jamie: Yes, so I do.... Like I said, I have some degree of hearing and even for a deaf person, I guess it's just a skill that I picked up. I did not even recognize that it's a skill for lip reading. It just helped me with understanding what they're speaking and, even hearing children have the skill of lip reading -- especially in Kindergarten, first grade, second grade because when they read they have to enunciate their words. And so, that is... lip reading is definitely a skill to have... a great skill to have and it does help me especially if my hearing aids can't pick up the sound, then I can still lip read to understand the person.

TTT: Yeah, so you have both ASL and lip reading to assist you. That's good. So, before we wrap up this episode, I have 3 questions that I always like to ask my guests. I'm going to go back and forth between both of you answering the same question. So the first one, since I'm with you right now, Ms. Smith, what are you passionate about?

Jamie: I am passionate about a lot of things but I can tell you my latest passion is quilting. Because of the pandemic, I started sewing masks. It gradually sparked my interest in quilting and actually I just literally finished my first quilt. So that's exciting.

TTT: Really? You've got to show it to me!

Jamie: I will. I will.

TTT: Good, quilting. Alright, Cameron, what about you?

Cameron: So, I mean, besides generally the obvious with ASL, I mean, I do try to teach as many people as possible; 'cause everyone's like, "Wow, that's so cool! Teach me how to sign this." I'm like, "Do you want to learn anything else?" But I do love ASL, I love teaching people to sign, I love using it. Sometimes I can feel like I can express myself more in sign than I can in English. (*whispers*) It happens. But I am passionate about school, which is such a strange way to phrase that. I am premed; so I am working on a lot all the time. But I try to advocate for not only what I'm learning but what I'm trying to do.

TTT: I could have guessed ASL was the one. She saw my book, my book that's over 20 years old - The Joy of Signing and she... "If you want me to help you I'd be happy to do it.", so she really is passionate.

Alright, back to you, Ms. Smith. What greatness do you believe you bring to this world? I love what you said earlier about not focusing on the one thing that you are unable to do, but you are able to do so much more. So tap into what do you consider to be the greatness that you bring to this world?

Jamie: Yeah, being able to do multiple things because I am not my deafness. I'm not my hearing loss. So, in middle school I started playing the clarinet and I guess it's unheard of for someone in the deaf community to play music but, yes we do play music. And so I continued to play the clarinet and the oboe and different instruments and I also marched in the band in college... high school and college. Another thing that's great about me is that I have empathy. I think that comes from my ability because of my hearing loss. I am more aware of other people; because I do have situations where people can't understand me or I can't understand them. So, I'm always willing to help other people, and I think that's my greatness.

TTT: Definitely. Empathy is not something that you see a lot of in the world because we're so self-centered and selfish a lot of the times; so that is a gift to the world if we can show empathy. So Cammie, what greatness do you believe you bring to the world?

Cameron: Even now I'm still trying to answer this question. I think I just try to learn as much as possible and be as open-minded as possible. To where if somebody is struggling with how to learn something, or if they are from a different culture, or if they have different learning abilities,

or if they have some sort of hearing loss. Being able to just accept and help them as much as possible to my ability.

TTT: Alright. Final question, back to you Ms. Smith. Who/what inspires/motivates you?

Jamie: My mother and my sister are the two people who motivate me. They are the two closest people in my life and they inspire me to be the best person that I can be.

TTT: OK. By the way, are you the only person in your immediate family who has any form of hearing loss?

Jamie: I am. I am, yes. My sister is hearing and she has the most knowledge of ASL so we talk in ASL sometimes.

TTT: Did your parents ever learn ASL?

Jamie: My mom, a little bit; my dad, not so much.

TTT: Maybe that was a good thing, so you got both, the best of both worlds. You could sign and you could develop your lip reading skills.

Jamie: Right. Exactly. That's the way I see it.

TTT: Yes. What about you, Cameron?

Cameron: I'm very motivated by myself. I'm very intrinsically motivated - wanting to do better for myself; but at the same time I, kind of am motivated by (this is a weird way to phrase it) bringing a collective group of what I embody forward. So, being a female that's premed. Things like that. Even though I'm not a person of color, and there definitely should be more people of color in the medical field, there're still lacking women in the medical field as well. So, just that motivates me to continue on and do more for that.

TTT: Definitely, and now we can (not just you who are directly involved in the deaf and hard of hearing community) but all of us can even advocate for the needs, because, you know, I've

been watching the press conferences. There have been so many news briefings with COVID and all that's happening around the world, and I am pleased to see that (maybe 9 times out of 10) they have ASL interpreters there on stage. Whether the Governor is making an announcement or even George Floyd's funeral. I was pleasantly surprised to see that there was someone signing throughout that whole church service. So, there's a... there's still more room for improvement, but I'm hoping that the awareness will continue to grow.

It is my hope that our conversation today has piqued the interest of listeners and brought some more awareness to the needs of deaf people in our society and will hopefully lead to more of us doing our part to provide support. Thank you so much, ladies, for joining me today.

Cameron: Thank you for having us.

Jamie: Thank you.

TTT: Until the next episode, as I always say, walk good and one love.

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