



Recruiting And Retaining Underrepresented Students In Communication Sciences And Disorders: A Community Based Participatory Research Approach

By: Dr. Joseph Klein, Dr. Jennifer Buff, Ms. Lucy Comello, and Ms. Hana Gobran

Abstract

The field of communication sciences and disorders has a diversity problem that has not changed since the profession began in the 1920s. Currently, only 8.3% of American-Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, 2019) members identify as racial minorities, and only 5.8% identify as Hispanic or Latin. The time has come to make changes in the diversity in our field. This study seeks perspectives from underrepresented practicing speech-language pathologists and audiologists about their own journey to the field and how best to help future practitioners during their pre-clinical academic training. (ASHA) first made a commitment to diversity and inclusion in 1969, but little has been accomplished since that time. Available studies have focused on increasing diversity in the field of speech-language pathology by surveying undergraduate students (Fuse, 2018) or examining university-wide efforts (Woods, et al., 2015). We have selected a novel approach by inviting practicing clinicians as research team members to better inform the authenticity of the projected outcomes to increase diversity and inclusion in our field.

Klein, J., Buff, J., Comello, L., & Gobran, H. (2021). Recruiting and Retaining Underrepresented Students in Communication Sciences and Disorders: A Community Based Participatory Research Approach. RECAPP 2021, The Office of Research, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC. NC Docks permission granted by author(s).

Recruiting and retaining underrepresented students in Communication Sciences and Disorders:

A community based participatory research approach

Dr. Joseph Klein, Dr. Jennifer Buff, Ms. Lucy Comello, and Ms. Hana Gobran
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Beaver College of Health Sciences

BACKGROUND

The field of communication sciences and disorders has a diversity problem that has not changed since the profession began in the 1920s. Currently, only 8.3% of American-Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, 2019) members identify as racial minorities, and only 5.8% identify as Hispanic or Latin. The time has come to make changes in the diversity in our field.

This study seeks perspectives from underrepresented practicing speech-language pathologists and audiologists about their own journey to the field and how best to help future practitioners during their pre-clinical academic training. (ASHA) first made a commitment to diversity and inclusion in 1969, but little has been accomplished since that time. Available studies have focused on increasing diversity in the field of speech-language pathology by surveying undergraduate students (Fuse, 2018) or examining university-wide efforts (Woods, et al., 2015).

We have selected a novel approach by inviting practicing clinicians as research team members to better inform the authenticity of the projected outcomes to increase diversity and inclusion in our field.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) According to current speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and audiologists who identify as racial and ethnic minorities, what changes would lead to our field being more representative of the general population that we treat, and
- (2) Can a community-based participatory research (CBPR) team comprised of researchers, students, and practicing clinicians, a majority of whom will identify as racial and ethnic minorities, work together to solve this problem?

METHODS

We will specifically be utilizing community-driven research, in which there is shared power and decision making, the focus area is generated by the community, and it is fully participatory. The five members of the original research team (who are applying for this grant) will then be joined by the eight to ten participants who will become equal members of the new research team.

The first part of the study is a phenomenological interview followed by long-term community-based participatory research. To date, we have recruited 9 participants who:

- (1) Identify themselves as being members of a racial or ethnic group that has been historically underrepresented in our field;
- (2) Are willing and able to participate in a one to two hour phenomenological interview to discuss:
 - (a) How and why they decided to major in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD),
 - (b) Their undergraduate and graduate school experiences,
 - (c) What their CSD departments, faculty, and staff could have done to improve their experiences, and
 - (d) How they believe our field could attract more members like themselves; and
- (3) Are willing to become part of our research team.



COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The goal of this project is to create a community-based participatory research (CBPR) team focused on increasing diversity in communication sciences and disorders. CBPR is a partnership approach to research that includes (for example) consumers, organizational representatives, therapists, and researchers in all aspects of the research process. Importantly, all partners contribute expertise and share decision making and responsibilities. The purpose of CBPR is to increase understanding of a phenomenon and use that knowledge to improve the quality of life of community members (Israel, et al., 2003 & 2005). Successful outcomes of the first year of this project will provide a foundation to sustain progress and continued improvement towards the goal of increasing practitioner diversity in the discipline of Communication Sciences & Disorders (CSD).



INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

"I remember walking in and it was a big lecture hall of 80 students and it was almost entirely white women. I sat in the front again I didn't have friends, but somehow like all the other students who are underrepresented just sort of clustered in the corner with me. We had a male Cuban student two female Cuban students and an African American Girl and somehow we were all sitting together in the front right corner of the lecture hall."

"I was kind of explaining to [supervisor] that I think this is more of a cultural difference than a personality difference and I think another thing is I get a lot for my supervisors to be more assertive. It's not that I'm not being assertive. I think it's, again, a cultural difference where I'm, even though I don't say that I agree or disagree with you, you know, I am respecting your input by just being quiet. Faculty and staff need to be a little bit more sensitive because it's kind of like saying "but your culture doesn't matter", because of Western culture."

"I almost just felt like the field was so stuck in its ways I was like, what's the plan with me staying and like, trying to like change everyone's mind, you know?"

REFERENCES

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2020). Profile of ASHA members and affiliates, *year-end 2019*.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fuse, A. (2018). Needs of students seeking careers in communication sciences and disorders and barriers to their success. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 72, 40-53.
- Israel, B.A., Parker, E.A., Rowe, Z., Salvatore, A., Minkler, M., López, J., ... & Potito, P.A. (2005). Community-based participatory research: lessons learned from the Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research. *Environmental health perspectives*, 113(10), 1463.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Office of Research and their Scholarship of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Grants (SDEI) program for funding this research work.

This poster was presented at RECAPP: Research and Creative Endeavors at Appalachian, September 13-17, 2021. For more information, please contact the first author via email at kleinjf@appstate.edu