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ABSTRACT

The move toward inclusive education potentially threatens the very heart of the Deaf cultural community, and may be an example of "epistemic violence" where the dominant ideology of equality of access to educational resources actually serves to reproduce structured inequalities. Deaf education has been moving away from a view of deafness as a disability and deaf individuals as deficient, toward a view of the Deaf as a sociocultural minority group characterized by a distinctive language, cultural behaviors and artifacts, and a network of formal and informal organizations. In constructing the Deaf worldview, American Sign Language (ASL) serves as linguistic mediator and as an identifying facet of cultural identity. Adoption of the sociocultural model of deafness as the foundation for the education of deaf children would result in instruction taking place through ASL, a goal for all students of functional bilingualism in ASL and English, Deaf students studying together in a setting similar to residential schools, use of Deaf teachers, and control of education in the hands of the local Deaf community. Inclusion efforts entail the implicit rejection of the epistemological (as well as cultural and linguistic) world of the Deaf. The "most enabling environment" is proposed as the appropriate educational placement for Deaf students. (Contains 39 references.) (JDD)

# Inclusion and the Deaf:

# Toward an Analysis of "Epistemic Violence"

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**Inclusion and the Deaf:**

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The movement toward "inclusive education" in special education presents educators of the Deaf with special and, indeed, unique challenges. During the past thirty years, deaf education has been gradually moving away from a view of deafness as a disability and the deaf themselves as limited by a physiological deficiency toward a view of the Deaf as a sociocultural minority group, characterized by a distinctive language, cultural behaviors and artifacts, and a sophisticated network of both formal and informal organizations (see Johnson, Liddell & Erting, 1989; Lane, 1992; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Reagan, 1992; Sacks, 1989; Wilcox, 1989). Central to this later view of the Deaf as a cultural group is the role played by the language of that community, American Sign Language (ASL), and the institutions in which that language is most commonly learned by Deaf children, the residential schools for the deaf (see Schein, 1989, pp. 135-159). The mainstreaming movement, and more recently, the move toward "inclusive education," thus potentially threatens the very heart of the Deaf cultural community. In a recent article, Branson and Miller have argued that, at least in the Australian context, in the case of mainstreaming, "such a policy is oriented not towards the educational needs of the Deaf but towards the reinforcement of the dominant ideology of equality of access to educational resources, an ideology which is in fact the foundation for the reproduction of structured inequalities" (1993, p. 21). In short, what Branson and Miller describe is what they term the "epistemic violence of mainstreaming."

In this paper, the framework provided by Branson and Miller will be applied to more recent developments in the United States; specifically, the question of whether "inclusive education" is in fact, in the case of the Deaf, actually another example of epistemic violence will be addressed. The topic is an important one in that it raises issues of access, equity and fairness, as well as of the cultural and linguistic rights of members of subcultures in our society, as we shall see.

## The World of the Deaf: An Overview

The world of the Deaf[1] remains a profoundly alien and hidden one for the vast majority of the hearing population. Indeed, for most hearing people deafness is understood solely as a disabling condition that involves an inability -- specifically, the inability to function audiologically as do "normal" people. However, for many Deaf people, deafness is defined not so much in terms of audiological issues, but rather, with respect to linguistic, social and cultural issues. As Carol Padden and Tom Humphries wrote in ***Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture,***

> The traditional way of writing about Deaf people is to focus on the fact of their condition -- that they do not hear -- and to interpret all other aspects of their lives as consequences of this fact . . . In contrast to the long history of writings that treat them as medical cases, or as people with "disabilities," who "compensate" for the deafness by using sign language, we want to portray the lives they live, their art and performances, their everyday talk, their shared myths, and the lessons they teach one another. We have always felt that the attention given to the physical condition of not hearing has obscured far more interesting facets of Deaf people's lives. (Padden & Humphries, 1988, p. 1)

In a recent essay published in ***The Atlantic,*** Edward Dolnick wrote that:

> Lately . . . the deaf community has begun to speak for itself. To the surprise and bewilderment of outsiders, its message is utterly contrary to the wisdom of centuries: Deaf people, far from groaning under a heavy yoke, are not handicapped at all. Deafness is not a disability. Instead, many deaf people now proclaim, they are a subculture like any other. They are simply a linguistic minority (speaking American Sign Language) and are no more in need of a cure than are Haitians or Hispanics. (Dolnick, 1993, p. 37)

This passage makes clear that a revolution has been taking place in recent years within the Deaf community in the United States. At stake in this revolution in the Deaf community is the status of Deaf people, their language, and what many believe to be a distinct and valuable cultural heritage. Also at stake are the way in which hearing people in general, and the hearing professionals who interact with Deaf people in particular, view and understand deafness, sign language, and the other components of the Deaf world. Characteristic of this revolution was the "Deaf President Now" movement at Gallaudet University

during the spring of 1988, in which Deaf students and faculty, along with hearing supporters, successfully rejected the selection of a new hearing president for the University (see Sacks, 1989). Central to the "Deaf President Now" movement was the contention that the Deaf community should be viewed as comparable to any other dominated cultural and linguistic community in American society. The debate was, and is, an important one, because it touches on matters of human rights, appropriate education and medical care, and the way in which individuals and groups in our society interact with one another.

**Competing Conceptions of Deafness**

There are, broadly speaking, two quite different ways to view deafness. The dominant perspective in our society is grounded in the view that deafness is essentially a medical condition, characterized by an auditory deficit -- that is, deaf people are people who cannot hear. Such a perspective, which has been labelled the "pathological" view of deafness, leads naturally to efforts to try to remediate the deficit. In short, the pathological view is premised on the idea that deaf people are not only different from hearing people, but that they are, at least in a physiological sense, **inferior** to hearing people, in that hearing people can hear while deaf people cannot. If one accepts the pathological view of deafness, and the myriad assumptions which undergird it, then the only reasonable approach to dealing with deafness is indeed to attempt to remediate the problem -- which is, of course, precisely what is done when one focuses on the teaching of speech and lip-reading in education, relies on hearing aids to maximize whatever residual hearing a deaf individual may possess, and seeks to develop medical solutions to hearing impairment (such as cochlear implants, etc.). In other words, the pathological view of deafness inevitably leads to efforts to try to help the deaf individual to become as like a hearing person as possible.

The alternative perspective for understanding deafness, which has been advocated by a growing number of Deaf people as well as by small groups of hearing teachers, linguists, anthropologists, and others involved with the Deaf, has been termed the "sociocultural" perspective on deafness (see Baker & Battison, 1980; Lane, 1984; Mather, 1992; Neisser, 1983; Reagan, 1990; Stokoe, 1980; Wilcox, 1989).

Basically, the sociocultural view of deafness suggests that for some Deaf people, it makes far more sense to understand deafness not as a handicapping condition, let alone as a deficit, but rather, as an essentially cultural condition. Thus, on the account of advocates of this sociocultural view of deafness, the appropriate comparison group for the Deaf is not individuals with physical disabilities, etc., but rather, would be individuals who are members of other non-dominant cultural and linguistic groups. In short, while the pathological view of deafness would lead us to try to "correct" a deficit, the sociocultural view would lead us to efforts to fight for civil rights (see Shapiro, 1993, pp. 74-104).

It is important to emphasize at the outset, however, that the sociocultural perspective of deafness is by no means intended to apply to all persons with hearing loss. As Harlan Lane has cogently explained in his book ***The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community,***

> Most Americans who have impaired hearing are not members of the American deaf community. They were acculturated to hearing society, their first language was a spoken one, and they became hard of hearing or deaf in the course of their lives, often late in life. This book is not about them; it is about people who grow up deaf, acculturated to the manual language and society of the deaf community. (1992, p. xi)

With this caveat in mind, we turn now to a discussion of the nature of contemporary Deaf culture in American society.

**The Case for Deaf Culture**

The Deaf cultural community is, from the perspective of the sociocultural model of deafness, characterized by the same kinds of elements that characterize any other cultural community, including:

- a common, shared language (ASL)
- a shared awareness of Deaf cultural identity
- distinctive behavioral norms and patterns
- cultural artifacts
- endogamous marital patterns

- a shared historical knowledge and awareness
- a network of voluntary, in-group social organizations.

Let me briefly discuss each of these cultural components of Deaf identity at this point.

**Language**

The single most significant element of Deaf cultural identity is, without question, competence in ASL (see Baker & Cokely, 1980; Erting, 1978, Kannapell, 1993; Padden, 1980). ASL in fact serves multiple functions within the Deaf community, functioning not only as the community's vernacular language, but also as a marker of "group solidarity" and a means of identification of group members. It is important to note here, though, that this applies only to ASL; other types of signing commonly used in North America (including both the pidgin sign language normally employed by hearing signers and the artificially constructed manual sign codes for English) fulfill very different functions and are viewed very differently by the Deaf community (see Lucas, 1989; Lucas & Valli, 1992).

**Cultural Identity**

Members of the Deaf cultural community identify themselves as socially and culturally Deaf -- maintaining a clear-cut distinction between audiological deafness and sociocultural deafness (see Janesick & Moores, 1992). Thus, from the perspective of the culturally Deaf, the fact of audiological deafness is actually neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for cultural deafness. Hearing children of Deaf people, who grow up with ASL as their first language, are (at least in some significant ways) potential members of the Deaf culture, just as older hearing people who lose their hearing are, under normal circumstances, not Deaf -- they are, rather, hearing people who can no longer hear. It is interesting to note that in ASL there is actually a sign used to denigrate a Deaf person who "thinks like a hearing person," roughly comparable in use to the term "Uncle Tom" among African Americans.

### Behavioral Norms

There are also differences with respect to behavioral norms between the hearing world and the Deaf culture. Most notable here would be differences in eye contact patterns, rules governing the permissibility of physical contact of various sorts (including touching to gain attention), the use of facial expressions, gesturing, and so on (see Padden & Markowicz, 1976).

### Cultural Artifacts

The artifacts of the Deaf cultural community are primarily technological devices designed in recent years to facilitate the ability of the deaf to function in the hearing world. Included as examples of such cultural artifacts are TDD/TTYs, which allow the deaf to use the telephone, television decoders for closed-captioned programs, doorbells and alarms tied to lights, and so on. Of course, while these devices are widely and commonly used within the Deaf culture, they are equally widely used by those who are audiologically but not culturally deaf. The key difference between the audiologically and culturally deaf with respect to the use of such technologies may be that there is a reluctance on the part of many culturally Deaf people to utilize technological devices (such as hearing aids) that focus primarily on hearing.

### Endogamous Marital Patterns

A common facet of cultural identity for many ethnic groups is the presence and maintenance of endogamous marital patterns, and the same is true in the case of the Deaf. Indeed, estimates of the rate of in-group marriage in the Deaf community range from 86 to over 90 percent -- a remarkably high rate in contemporary American society (see Reagan, 1990). This high rate of in-group marriage is certainly facilitated by the role of the residential schools for the deaf, but is also tied to the common, shared language of Deaf people.

### Historical Knowledge and Awareness

Members of the Deaf community have a strong sense of the history of their community, and this awareness has been passed from generation to generation largely through "oral" (i.e., signed, through the medium of ASL) means in the past. However, the 1981 publication of Jack Gannon's ***Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America,*** has contributed to a broader access to the historical awareness of the Deaf community.

### Organizational Network

Finally, there is an extensive voluntary network of social organizations serving the Deaf, which effectively maintains the cohesiveness of the Deaf community and provides, to a very significant extent, for the companionship needs of group members. This network includes local deaf clubs, the state and national organizations of the deaf (such as the National Association of the Deaf), sports associations, the National Theatre of the Deaf, and so on.

### Issues of Domination, Power and Paternalism

The American Deaf community is by far among the most organized and successful in the world, but it is by no means unique in either its fundamental nature nor in its objectives. Comparable Deaf cultural communities exist throughout the world, distinguished both from one another by their respective languages and cultural contexts and from the surrounding hearing communities with which they interact (see Kyle & Woll, 1985; Fischer & Lane, 1993). Both in North America and elsewhere, an extensive, and rapidly growing, literature has not only documented but begun analyzing each of the elements of the Deaf cultural community identified above (see, e.g., Penn, 1993). Although this growth in our knowledge about the culture of the Deaf is certainly both impressive and valuable, it is perhaps less significant than the themes which underlie it. Central to these themes has been the concern with the role of language in domination and power relations as these relate to deaf-hearing interaction (see Foucault, 1972; Ball, 1990).

As Harlan Lane, speaking not only for himself but for many scholars concerned with the Deaf as a cultural community, has argued:

> I maintain that the vocabulary and conceptual framework our society has customarily used with regard to deaf people, based as it is on infirmity, serves us and the members of the deaf community less well than a vocabulary and framework of cultural relativity. I want to replace the normativeness of medicine with the curiosity of ethnography. (Lane, 1992, p. 19)

Also of significance in understanding the sociocultural model of deafness is the rejection by advocates of this view of the paternalism that has tended to characterize discussions which take place within the pathological model. As Harlan Hahn has compellingly argued with respect to paternalism toward disabled people in general,

> Paternalism enables the dominant elements of a society to express profound and sincere sympathy for the members of a minority group while, at the same time, keeping them in a position of social and economic subordination. It has allowed the nondisabled to act as the protectors, guides, leaders, role-models, and intermediaries for disabled individuals who, like children, are often assumed to be helpless, dependent, asexual, economically unproductive, physically limited, emotionally immature, and acceptable only when they are unobtrusive . . . Politically, disabled people usually have been neither seen nor heard. Paternalistic attitudes, therefore, may be primarily responsible both for the ironic invisibility of disabled persons and for the prior tendency to ignore this important area of public policy. (Hahn, 1986, p. 130)

Applying this concern with paternalism to the specific case of the deaf, we find that:

> Like the paternalism of the colonizers, hearing paternalism begins with defective perception, because it superimposes its image of the familiar world of hearing people on the unfamiliar world of deaf people. Hearing paternalism likewise sees its task as "civilizing" its charges: restoring deaf people to society. And hearing paternalism fails to understand the structure and values of deaf society. The hearing people who control the affairs of deaf children and adults commonly do not know deaf people and do not want to. Since they cannot see deaf people as they really are, they make up imaginary deaf people of their own, in accord with their own experiences and needs. Paternalism deals in such stereotypes. (Lane, 1992, p. 37)

Finally, it is important to note that while the sociocultural model of deafness is currently in its ascendancy in a variety of disciplines, deaf education is, ironically, for the most part not one of these fields. Educators of the deaf continue to be overwhelmingly hearing, and their training tends to exclude or minimize their exposure to the deaf as a cultural and linguistic community. As Claire Ramsey has noted about the use of manual codes for English (MCEs) in the education of deaf children, "Unfortunately, the solution offered by MCEs serves the symbolic needs of the hearing society much better than it does the linguistic and educational needs of deaf children" (Ramsey, 1989, p. 146). The same can be said for much of the content of traditional training programs for teachers of the deaf, which have yet seriously to attempt to "depathologize" deafness (see Reagan, 1992; Woodward, 1982).

**The Worldview of the Culturally Deaf and Its Implications**

There can be no reasonable doubt about the connection between ASL, as the vernacular language of the Deaf community, and the culture of that community. Indeed, as we have seen, ASL is arguably the central, key characteristic of membership in and identification with the Deaf culture. Further, ASL plays an important role in the construction of what could be termed the "Deaf worldview" -- that is, the ways in which Deaf people make sense of the world around them. It does this in two distinct ways: first, through its role as linguistic mediator, and second, as an identifying facet of cultural identity. With respect to the former, ASL mediates experience in a unique way, as of course do all languages. The structures and vocabulary of ASL provide the framework within which experience is organized, and this framework is inevitably distinct from the frameworks employed by other languages. For example, in ASL if one describes a person as "VERY HARD-OF-HEARING," it means that the person has substantial residual hearing, while "A LITTLE HARD-OF-HEARING" would suggest far less residual hearing. In other words, the concepts themselves are based on different norms than would be the case in English (where the meanings of these two expressions would be reversed).

The second way in which ASL plays a role in constructing the "Deaf worldview" is as a component of the broader culture of Deafness. The resistance of Deaf people to cochlear implants, for instance, which has been well documented and explained by Harlan Lane (see Lane 1992, 1993a, 1993b), is typical here. As Lane notes, the perspective of the culturally Deaf toward such a "medicalization" of deafness is basically that:

> If the birth of a Deaf child is a priceless gift, then there is only cause for rejoicing, as at the birth of a black child, or an Indian one. Medical intervention is inappropriate, even if a perfect "cure" were available. Invasive surgery on healthy children is morally wrong. We know that, as members of a stigmatized minority, these children's lives will be full of challenge but, by the same token, they have a special contribution to make to their own community and the larger society. (Lane, 1993b, pp. 490-491)

This perspective is that of the Deaf cultural community, and is tied in innumerable ways to the commitment and attitudes toward ASL. Cochlear implants, from this vantage-point, make sense only if one rejects ASL as a legitimate language, and the culture of Deafness as a legitimate and viable culture. Thus, such attempts to medically "cure" or "remediate" audiological deafness are seen as not merely misguided, but culturally oppressive as well. The point was made quite vividly by I. King Jordan, the President of Gallaudet University and a Deaf man, in a recent interview. Jordan was asked by the interviewer whether he wouldn't like to have his hearing restored, to which Jordan replied:

> That's almost like asking a black person if he would rather be white . . . I don't think of myself as missing something or as incomplete . . . It's a common fallacy if you don't know deaf people or deaf issues. You think it's a limitation. (Quoted in Lane, 1993a, p. 288)

From within the Deaf culture, this response was appropriate, meaningful and indeed relatively uncontroversial; from outside the culture, it will no doubt strike many hearing people as somewhat bizarre. This is the reality of cultural Deafness.

Implications of the Sociocultural Model of Deafness

Were we to adopt the sociocultural model of deafness as a foundation for the education of deaf children, it is clear that such education would look very different than it does today. Perhaps the greatest change would be the altered status and role of ASL (see Johnson, Liddell & Erting, 1989; Stewart, 1992). Today, ASL is almost never used in formal educational settings; rather, where signing is employed, either Pidgin Sign English or one of the various artificially constructed manual sign codes for English will be used (see Bornstein, 1990; Reagan, 1992). In an educational environment based on the sociocultural model of deafness, instruction would take place through the medium of ASL, and the goal for all students would be functional bilingualism in both ASL and English (though there would probably be considerably greater emphasis on written English skills than on spoken skills). Students would study not only the common curriculum shared with their hearing peers, but would also study the history of the deaf cuiture and deaf communities in other parts of the world. Thus, the goal for such a program would be students who would truly be both bilingual and bicultural. Such a program, of course, would almost certainly entail Deaf students studying together, in a setting not unlike that provided by residential schools, rather than in mainstreamed settings. This is an important point, since mainstreaming is almost universally seen as a "good thing" in our society. The problem is that for Deaf students, mainstreaming almost inevitably means a lack of contact with other Deaf people. Instead of thinking about appropriate educational placement being based on the "least restrictive environment," we might be better off (at least in the case of the Deaf) favoring the "most enabling environment" -- a subtle distinction, but nevertheless an important one (see Reagan, 1988). Next, an educational program grounded in the sociocultural model of deafness would actively encourage Deaf children to be exposed to a wide variety of Deaf adults. In fact, given the importance attached to the use of ASL and familiarity with the Deaf culture, such an educational program would generally favor the use of Deaf teachers -- a radical departure from current educational practice.

Finally, control of the educational program would rest in the hands of the local Deaf community, rather than in the hands of hearing "experts" on deafness and deaf education (Lane, 1992).

At issue in the debate between the pathological and sociocultural models of deafness, ultimately, is the question of domination, power and empowerment. The choice is between the hegemony of the hearing educational establishment, with its well-established power base and competing methodologies firmly planted in a view of the deaf as deficient, and the Deaf community, with its pride in its own history, culture, language and accomplishments. Although perhaps in new bottles, the debate is nonetheless "old wine," as the following quote from a 1912 letter to the principal of the New York School for the Deaf makes clear:

> . . . it is a lamentable fact that, in matters relating to the deaf, their education and well-being, few if any take the trouble to get the opinion of the very people most concerned -- the deaf themselves. (Quoted in Gannon, 1981, p. 363)

## Inclusion and Epistemic Violence: Some Reflections

In a powerful critique of contemporary deaf education in Australia (and, by implication, elsewhere), Branson and Miller have argued that:

> If Bourdieu and Passeron's analysis of Western educational systems revealed the hollowness of the rhetoric of equality of opportunity, revealing a hidden agenda, the reproduction of structured inequalities in terms of class, the power of the establishment in its most effective forms a symbolic power exercised through symbolic violence, such an analysis becomes even more devastating when applied to the hidden agenda shaping the education of the Deaf. The ideological denial of the structural importance of cultural difference serves to reproduce those differences as inequalities based in cultural and linguistic deprivation. (Branson & Miller, 1993, pp. 37-38)

In essence, what Branson and Miller suggest is that the pathological view of deafness and the Deaf is a kind of symbolic violence which denies personhood to the individual deaf person, as well as delegitimates the culture and language of the Deaf community. Insofar as this is true, efforts to address the educational needs of Deaf children that presuppose a hearing "norm" (whether linguistic or cultural in nature),

especially by fully integrating such children in hearing environments separated from the culture and language of the Deaf community (whether through mainstreaming or "inclusion"), are not only inappropriate, but are demonstrably harmful. It is in this sense that one can speak of "epistemic violence" against the Deaf, in that such efforts entail the implicit rejection of the epistemological (as well as cultural and linguistic) world of the Deaf. In short, to return to Branson and Miller's argument, what such programs involve is a "distinctly imperial orientation, [in which] teachers, linguists and policy makers become the unwitting agents of an 'epistemic violence' that 'effaces the subject' . . . 'insidiously objectifying' the 'colonized' through a conceptual apparatus which robs them of their individual and cultural integrity, devaluing and distorting their differences" (1993, p. 23).

It is important to note that this critique of mainstreaming and inclusion in the case of the Deaf is not merely hypothetical in nature -- Jeri Banks (1994) has recently published a book entitled, ***All of Us Together: The Story of Inclusion at the Kinzie School,*** in which she describes what she takes to be a highly successful effort to provide inclusive education in a setting in which Deaf and hearing students are integrated into a single school in Chicago. To be sure, the story of the Kinzie School is in many ways an inspiring one, but from the perspective of the sociocultural view of deafness, it is also disheartening. The successes of which Banks seems to be most proud include such noteworthy events as Robert, a deaf student selected -- based on his "very intelligible" speech -- to speak over the school's intercom (pp. 69-70), and Markeeta's "becoming the first deaf student accepted into the Kinzie School Band" (p. 89). The maximal use of residual hearing, amplification technology, emphasis on speech and lip-reading, and an assumed view of deafness as a deficit permeate ***All of Us Together,*** in short, and provide vivid evidence that Banks' claim that "there is already acceptance of deaf culture and sign language at Kinzie" (p. 191) is at best debatable. Indeed, the lack of a significant number of Deaf faculty members at Kinzie, the very limited use of ASL, coupled with the lack of ASL competence by nearly all of the adults with whom the

deaf children have contact, all point to a far more traditional, and in fact pathological, view of the Deaf than Banks is willing to admit.

Inclusive education, in short, whatever its benefits for many children (and it does have many benefits), is no more a panacea than was mainstreaming -- and, like mainstreaming before it, potentially poses quite serious threats to the education of the Deaf as a cultural and linguistic minority.

## Note

1. A common distinction made in writing about deafness is between "deaf" and "Deaf"; the former refers to deafness solely as an audiological condition, the latter to deafness as a cultural condition. The basic idea underlying this distinction is that when writing about cultural groups in general, capital letters are employed ("African American," "Hispanic," and so on). Thus, a person can be "deaf" without being "Deaf" (as in the case of an older person who gradually loses his/her hearing).

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