

'Behind the teacher's back': an ethnographic study of deaf people's schooling experiences in the Republic of Ireland

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Historically, the valuing of deaf children's voices on their own schooling has been underrepresented in educational policies, curriculum frameworks and discursive practices and, in particular, in the debates and controversies surrounding oralism and Irish Sign Language in deaf education in Ireland. This article discusses children's everyday lived experiences of oralism and Irish Sign Language using ethnographic interviews and observational methods. The data yielded narrative understandings of how deaf children's schooling experiences served as a cauldron for the development of time, space and relational domains for individual and collective self-expression, cultural production and reproduction of the secret lore and understandings of Irish Sign Language and development of a hidden curriculum of sign language in a policy and practice context dominated by oralism. This paper concludes with recommendations for the development of a sign bilingual curriculum across the full scope and sequence of schooling in Ireland.

Keywords: deaf people; deaf schooling; oralism; sign language; ethnography

Introduction

We signed behind [our teacher's] back, but one of us got caught. She got very cross and told us to stop signing. She used a stick to slap me on the hand. It was very sore. I was shocked. She said this was to teach us not to sign. When we went back to the classroom she tried to stop us signing and hit a few of the girls. Some of the girls received punishment from her. Everyone started getting nervous. Punishment for signing was common. (Yvonne, Sixth

Class, St. Anne's School for Deaf Girls, Interview 15) In the interview data extract above, Yvonne, discusses the interplay of oralism – the education of deaf children based exclusively on spoken language, using lip reading, speech, mimicking mouth shapes and speech breathing patterns – which was designed to be practised 'in front of the teacher's face' and Irish Sign Language – the education of deaf children through simultaneous combinations of hand shapes, orientation and movement of the hands, arms or body and facial expressions – and practised 'behind the teacher's back' in schools for deaf children in the Republic of Ireland. What happened in front of the teacher's face or 'front regions' (Goffman 1959) was recognised, promoted and affirmed by school authorities. What happened behind the teacher's back or 'back regions' (Goffman 1959) was prohibited, corrected and punished. In this way, what happened in the particular ethnographic context and site in the present study was conceptually similar to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor where the 'performance of the self' takes place 'front stage', where the actors face an audience and 'back stage', where the actors can be themselves and not feel compelled to play public roles. The dominant language of English communicated through the vehicle of speech, listening and hearing was systematically produced and reproduced through oralism. Irish Sign Language was used by the children as a secret language and lore, with its own syntax, grammar and pragmatics (Leeson 1997; 2002; LeMaster 1990; McDonnell and Saunders 1993, 2004).

Yvonne's words remind us of the lived tensions between the 'official' practices of oralism and the 'unofficial' practices of Irish Sign Language in deaf education and schooling in Ireland. Like Yvonne, the other participants in this study experienced 'bellwether' or highly developed incidents of signing without the teacher's knowledge or permission and 'behind the teacher's back'. For Yvonne, Martin, Niamh, Ned, Anna, David, Mark, Eleanor, Frank and Celia, the politics of correction and punishment was swift, stinging and predictable. The

resulting outcome was that official policies and practices counter-culturally induced a responsive, resilient and idiomatic repertoire of children's secret actions. In this way children sustained their own lore and language which was produced and developed over many years, since the schools were founded in the mid-nineteenth century. What is more, the circulating regimes of deaf schooling in 'St. John's School for Deaf Boys' and 'St. Anne's School for Deaf Girls', which were located in a large metropolitan area, were analogous to what Ball (1998) describes as the enduring questions and perennial challenges for 'big policies' in 'small worlds'. A key assumption underpinning the present study is that deaf people offer meaningful and useful insights into their own schooling and in this way throw light on contemporary debates and controversies related to equality, equity, rights, social justice and educated citizenry in the Republic of Ireland. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. Participants' personal narratives are therefore significant in that they may go some way to help inform current policy.

While much of the literature on deaf education features the 'stories, storying, and storied' (Clandinin 2007) accounts of teachers, administrators and parents (Crean 1997; Griffey 1994; Mathews 2011), little empirical research has been devoted to deaf people's experience of schooling (Ladd 2003; Lane 1992; O'Connell 2013). The present study represents a significant departure from previous research undertaken in the field in that it creates a new discursive space for revealing the world views of deaf children. The focus here is on deaf children's experiences of schooling, particularly their perspectives about the nature of their own peer cultures, day-to-day school and classroom dynamics, lived and relived views about teaching, learning and assessment and their perspectives about the place of deaf education in the broader educational system, nationally and internationally. In order to yield data on the ethnographic context and site of deaf schooling, the present study was guided by an ethical,

anterior and anthropological question: Why is this (value, ritual, routine, event, relationship, action) the way it is, and not different?

Significant themes in deaf education language policy

Socio-political factors, controversies, decision making and curriculum design and development have been at the forefront of a long debate in deaf education policy in the Republic of Ireland (O'Dowd 1955; Crean 1997; Griffey 1994; Marschark and Spencer 2009; Mathews 2011; O'Connell 2013). Four dominant themes concerning policy emerging in deaf education literature are relevant in the Irish context: (1) the tradition of signed language curriculum; (2) the modern oral–aural approach to education; (3) mainstreaming initiatives and (4) sign-bilingual education.

Tradition of Irish Sign Language

A number of educational ethnographers argue that schools are sites of cultural transmission, cultural conflict and social change (Spindler 1988; Walford 2008). For 100 years, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and concluding in the 1940s, 'St. John's' and 'St. Anne's' schools served as critical sites in the evolution of Irish Sign Language and deaf culture (LeMaster 1990; Griffey 1994). During this long history, generations of children were immersed in ISL for the entire period of their schooling. A number of the school-leavers received in-house monitored-teacher training to prepare them for teaching in the school. The outcome was that ISL became an educational inheritance passed on from generation to generation (Griffey 1994). While the inculcation of Catholic religious beliefs and practices in deaf children was a priority of the schools, literacy was regarded as a pathway to salvation (Crean 1997). As Griffey (1994, 16) reports, teaching literacy and religion through ISL achieved the desired result. Many students gained a high level of functional literacy after completing their schooling. The results reflect the claims of Swanwick and Gregory (2007)

and Kyle and Woll (1988) that deaf children generally function capably in the classroom when conditions allow for the development of signed languages.

Oralism

Karacosta (1993) describes the key terms of 'oralism' and 'oral education', as a politically infused ideology that champions the superiority of oral–auditory culture and as an educational theory and practice based exclusively on spoken language. When oralism was introduced in Ireland in the late 1940s, the cultural landscape of St. John's and St. Anne's was dramatically altered, first, following the removal of Irish Sign Language from curriculum and, second, following the banning of signed languages from schools for deaf children around the world in the wake of resolutions passed at the International Congress of the Education of the Deaf in Milan in 1880. These changes heralded the introduction of a modern oral–auditory approach to teaching and learning involving the use of audio technologies to aid hearing and speech development for deaf children. Kealy (2007) suggests that the delay in making these changes could be explained by the cloistered lifestyles of the religious orders who did not get the opportunity to meet with international educators. An alternative perspective could hold that the schools were not influenced by international trends until Irish parents began sending their children to oral schools in Britain (Griffey 1994).

Griffey (1994) describes the extent to which school authorities changed curricula, introduced staff to replace existing ones, implemented modern audio technologies and developed a modern, systematic approach to oral–auditory methods of teaching and learning, creating a gradual transformation in the cultures of the schools. The introduction of 'technologies of normalization' (Lane 1992) – audiology, audiometric testing system in the 1950s made it possible to classify levels of hearing loss in the children (Griffey 1994). A Special Committee report recommending oralism, the establishment of a Visiting Teacher Service and greater

integration opportunities for deaf children was sanctioned in 1972 by the Minister for Education.

The interim period between the 1972 Report and the gradual shift towards mainstreaming in the 1990s was fraught with tension and controversies arising from conflicting and opposing views about how deaf children should be taught in the classroom (Crean 1997; Mathews 2011; O'Connell 2013). The situation was compounded by reports in the international literature suggesting that serious deficits in reading and writing ability occur in deaf school-leavers. Marschark and Harris (1996) reported that the majority of school-leavers were functionally illiterate. In counterpoint, Conrad (1979) indicated that while proficiency increased with age, the average school-leaver produced the same proportion of compound and complex sentences as 10-year-old hearing children. Crean (1997) asserts that the views of deaf adults with direct experience of educational failure were consistently discounted and ignored.

Mainstreaming

A paradigm shift in thinking at national level towards mainstream education for children with disabilities occurred in the 1990s. The shift derived from national legislative enactments has had implications for the future role of schools for deaf children in the Republic of Ireland (Mathews 2011). In considering the rights of children with disabilities to receive an education alongside children without special educational needs, national legislative changes brought the needs of deaf children into the equation. The establishment of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) in 1993 with the objective of promoting integration and mainstreaming and part of the Education Act 1998 legislating for ISL as a support tool for Deaf students in a learning environment were prime movers in the push for mainstreaming for deaf children (Mathews 2011; O'Connell 2013). The implication of this development was that education in segregated settings would give way to the impetus for inclusion whereby deaf children would

be placed in mainstream schools instead of residential institutions. Consequently St. Anne's and St. John's schools experienced a sea change in falling enrolment figures. Concerns about the future of these schools have led to calls for support to maintain its operation because Irish Sign Language is currently available to deaf children, and they benefit from peer interaction where 'a flexible and inclusive approach to communication; one that caters for the diverse communication needs of each student' is present (O'Connell 2013, 264).

In the context of mainstreaming of deaf children, policies on inclusion have emerged in recent years with the enactment of the 2004 Education of Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act and the subsequent establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). These moves have direct implications for the education of deaf children. Mathews (2011), for example, finds that placing deaf children in local schools presents significant challenges for hearing teachers and deaf children where conditions must be appropriate to cater for the linguistic and cultural needs of the students. For Marschark and Spencer (2009) teaching and learning of deaf children as if they were hearing does not work in practice because both groups of children have different ways of learning and comprehending. These considerations are particularly salient where mainstreaming initiatives at present continue to be guided by 'pathological views of disability driven by the medical model and its variations which continue to focus on curing disability and normalising difference' (Mathews 2010, 265). Ultimately, as Mathews (2011) suggests, success in mainstreaming deaf children is dependent on providing adequate access to education and on the provision of appropriate resources such as Irish Sign Language and ISL interpreters in situations where teachers do not have the required competency levels in the language.

Sign-bilingual education

The concerns highlighted in the studies of Marschark and Spencer (2009) and Mathews' (2010, 2011) are particularly significant in the context of discussions in the international literature on sign-bilingual education for deaf children (Baker 2011). In a study on sign bilingualism, involving the use of two languages, one of which is a signed language and the other a written/spoken language, researchers reported that teaching through signed languages was instrumental in the educational success of deaf children in Sweden and the UK (Swanwick and Gregory 2007; Svartholm 2010). The move towards sign-bilingual education in these countries emerged as a consequence of the failure of oralism and concerns about lack of appropriate resources in mainstream schools (Swanwick and Gregory 2007).

In the present context, Marschark and Spencer (2009) suggest that early signed language acquisition with or without accompanying spoken languages leads to successful educational outcomes. The authors find no evidence of negative implications arising from early Irish Sign Language acquisition. They recommend a programme designed to provide deaf children and their families with instruction in ISL. The case for sign bilingualism has been supported by findings in Doherty's (2012a, 2012b) comparative study of deaf education in Sweden and Northern Ireland. The legitimacy and linguistic validation of signed languages by linguists have been cited as a compelling argument in support for sign-bilingual education (Baker 2011). While Burns (1995), Leeson (1997, 2002) and LeMaster (1990) validate Irish Sign Language as a legitimate and legitimating language, containing all the grammatical and syntactical structures required for human languages, the Equal Status Act (2000; 2004) protects the right of deaf children to educational access in the republic of Ireland. If they are denied this right of access to ISL, for example, recourse could be sought through the Office of Equality Investigations dealing with discrimination cases (O'Connell 2013).

Modernity and Foucault's theories on discipline and punishment

Usher and Edwards (1994) claimed that education has traditionally privileged the discourse of modernity, a point which neatly reflects the character of deaf education under oralism (Lane 1992; O'Connell 2013). This idea links with Lane's (1992) discussion on apposite theoretical and conceptual links between oralism and modernism/modernity. He wrote that the campaign against signed languages is rooted in modernist notions of superiority and inferiority. Signed languages were regarded as 'primitive' in that they were not considered a legitimate language but rather a 'tool' that aided communication (Baynton 1996). The concept of 'progress', an important metaphor used by modernist writers, referred to the process of 'moving along' guided by interest in the development of science and technology and motivated by power or control through coercion, surveillance or control of information, industrialisation and capitalism (Giddens 1991). As Lane (1992) notes, ideas about progress based on 'technologies of normalization' – the use of audio technologies to 'normalise' children – have been the cornerstone of oralism. In line with modernity's notions of 'progress', oppositional binary relations were created on the basis of conceptual dichotomies such as normal/abnormal, same/different and homogeneous/diverse. Just as modernity create categories of human beings in terms of order/disorder (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2000), oralism categorises deaf children in oppositional and binary relations of normal/abnormal with the normal identified as superior to those who deviate from society's concept of 'normal' (Lane 1992).

Lane (1992, 83–84) holds that Michel Foucault's analysis of power which positions the body as subject 'has truly terrifying relevance for members of the deaf community who accept the rewards offered by the audist establishment in return for wearing the emblem of disability'. This perspective offers insights into the practices of oralism, the effects of power relations on the human body, its symbols of punishments and disciplined gestures and what Mills (2003)

described as 'political anatomy'. O'Connell (2008, 2013) and Mathews (2011) draw on Foucault's concepts of surveillance, dividing practices and classification within a study of deaf education in Ireland. Foucault highlights systems of power or operations of power within social practices and disciplinary institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals and asylums. He identifies the existence of a range of techniques used as part of disciplinary measures to control 'abnormal' beings and regulate their bodily movement.

Foucault's (1977) study of the systems of power or operations of power within social practices and disciplinary institutions, in the context of the present study, resonates with the experiences of 'institutionalised children' in deaf schools in Ireland. Institutions such as prisons, houses of detention, hospitals, asylums and schools decided to put away those who did not conform or comply with the rules of the dominant group members and to regularise oppositional and binary relations in these institutions (Foucault 1977, 1980; Rabinow 1984).

For Foucault dividing practices are rooted in the rise of modern psychiatry in institutions like hospitals, prisons and clinics and refer to how the body or the subject is objectified or treated as a thing through a process of distribution and a partitioning of space in which certain human beings live separate and apart from others (Rabinow 1984). According to Branson and Miller (2002), Foucault's ideas concerning dividing practices developed from a process of medicalisation, stigmatisation and normalisation of deviance in Modern Europe. Under oralism, the deaf body is objectified as a site where discourses are enacted by school authorities and contested and resisted by children. As Lane (1992,

205) argued:

[the] three-pronged endeavour takes control of the body of the child psychometrically, educationally, and surgically [...] Michel Foucault was right when he said that in such social struggles, bodies are the battlefield. Cochlear implantation requires that the child be defined as several sets of numbers and then categorized accordingly.

In McDonnell and Saunders (2004, 29–49) Saunders discussed her experiences of oralism as a child, raising the notion of panoptic surveillance that resonates with Foucault's (1977) theories of dividing practices: 'The pupils were under constant surveillance [...] older pupils were encouraged to report incidents of signing to the school authorities'. According to Saunders, the delivery of audiology services led to the creation of a system of segregation, a method of categorising groups based on various levels of hearing loss in deaf children. Foucault (1977) identified techniques of surveillance such as 'synoptic' and 'individualising'. 'Synoptic visibility' represented the way in which discipline and punishment worked in modern society. The effect of Bentham's Panopticon lies in the pressure of the 'gaze' on the individual, forcing the subject to self-regulate and conform to certain norms and standards. In this way, Foucault (1977, 200) argued that the individual is always 'the object of information, never a subject in communication'.

Design

This ethnographic study of the schooling experiences of 10 deaf participants who attended St. Anne's and St. John's schools was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of deaf education policy and practice? (2) What are the lived understandings and meanings of oralism and Irish Sign Language in deaf schooling? (3) What are the key pedagogical commonalities and differences between oralism and sign language? (4) What are the key policy implications for the renewal and reform of Irish Sign Language? This paper attempts to address these questions by exploring deaf people's experiences of oralism and sign through ethnographic interviews, field notes and ethnographic writing. The overall aim was to provide deaf people's perspective into the deep understandings and meanings of the structures and agencies of oralism and the improvisational repertoires of children using Irish Sign Language in the sample schools.

Participants

All 10 participants (5 male, 5 female) were deaf adults who participated in this study. The oldest was 64 years and the youngest was 30. All participants, Martin, Niamh, Ned, Anna, David, Yvonne, Mark, Eleanor, Frank and Celia had experiences of oralism. Frank was the only participant born to deaf parents. Anna, Yvonne, Frank, Niamh and Martin had a sibling or relative who was deaf. Mark, Ned, Eleanor, David and Celia were members of a hearing family. Pseudonyms were provided to protect the privacy of individuals.

The study used 'purposeful sampling' (Creswell 2007) in selecting participants in order to 'learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the evaluation' (Patton 1987, 51–52). To ensure maximum variation, participants were chosen on the basis of family, school, age and gender background. The schools were selected using 'reputational bias sampling' (Creswell 2007) and their status as the longest running educational establishments for deaf children in the Republic of Ireland and particularly because they provide a rich site for exploring pedagogical practices that might inform policy and improve educational achievement for all deaf children. Other categories of the deaf community, for example, hearing people of deaf parents, hearing friends, parents, siblings, spouses of deaf people do not fall within the scope of the research project.

These sampling criteria yielded indicative profiles of the deaf community in Ireland. During interviews the 'snowball sampling' technique (Noy 2008) was used, where participants recommended another potential participant. This method helped build 'trust and confidence' as contacts were known and trusted (Cohen and Arieli 2011; Lee 1993). In terms of kinds and degrees of hearing, all participants categorised themselves indifferent levels of hearing loss, ranging from partially, profoundly to severely deaf. A number of participants used hearing

aids and speech to communicate but others did not speak at all. While all participants displayed fluency in ISL, some showed literacy problems.

Procedure

Ethnographic interviewing was the chosen method of data collection because it is premised on exploring lived cultural experience (Creswell 2007). While ethnographic interviewing entails a face-to-face encounter between researcher and participant, it does not entail a simple question and answer routine in the conventional sense. Instead, it involves the collection of 'reports of behaviour, meanings, attitudes and feelings that are never directly observed in the face-to-face encounter of the interview but are the data the question is supposed to reveal' (Brewer 2000, 63). The overall aim is to encourage people to talk about their worlds in their own way, and on their own terms. A flexible approach was adopted through a combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviewing techniques (Creswell 2007). A formal list of closed and open-ended questions was drafted, for example, (1) How did you as a child communicate with people who had no knowledge of Irish Sign Language? (2) Tell me something about your family life? (3) Describe your experience of your first day in residential school?

Prior to the recording of interviews, participants were contacted by letter. The letter introduced the name and academic details of the researcher, the supervisor and place of study. It provided an outline of what the project was about, the reasons for doing the study and to whom it would benefit. Issues not found in traditional or mainstream ethnographic interviews were considered by the author. Some of the participants preferred to have the letter translated into Irish Sign Language. This was done in person or on recorded video which was sent by electronic mail. To ensure clarity and ease of access, the letter written in plain English avoided academic jargon. On the day of the interview, the consent form written in English

was translated into Irish Sign Language for participants before they signed it. Due to the visual nature of Irish Sign Language, seating arrangements were prepared to ensure face-to-face visibility between researcher and participant. Since the interviews were conducted in Irish Sign Language and recorded on camcorder, it was not necessary to engage an interpreter. The interview guide included topics such as family, schooling, language, culture, curriculum and communication.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) suggests engaging in fluid, open-ended processes of writing field notes to convey insights into a way of life. During interviews it was difficult to write and watch the participants sign simultaneously. Jotting during interviews was avoided as this was likely to strain relations with participants (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). During 10-minute breaks, mnemonic words and phrases concerning what participants said were noted in private. Key issues of interactions before, during and after interviews, casual conversations, body language and facial expression were also noted. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) points out, the ethnographer writes her or his own interpretation of what was meaningful and significant by observing with 'acuteness' and with 'new lens'. The aim was to write as much as possible to show how the author immersed himself in the life worlds of deaf people.

Before typing the verbatim transcripts, the first step was to watch each tape in order to gain a full understanding of context. On revisiting the recording, the meaning of the stories was noted on paper with a summary of the events added at the end. While this was time-consuming, it prepared the ethnographer for writing the full transcripts. Flick (2002: 173) proposes that researchers conduct a re-check of the transcript against the video-recording to ensure closeness and maximum exactness. He also warns against using the 'linguistic exchange' of data for exactness, as this actually absorbs time and energy. Instead of using this method, the 'interpretive approach' (Miles and Huberman 1994) was adopted for the

interpretation of meaning. Transcripts were returned to participants to give them an opportunity to make adjustments. On receipt of the returned transcripts, they were included as data collected. Themes developed were derived from the data sources to provide 'an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon' (Creswell 2005, 241). Data from interview transcripts and field notes were read as a complete corpus, taking the entire record of field experience and were coded on a line-by-line basis (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). The analytic process involved regular close reading, asking questions of specific pieces of data (What are people doing? Why did this happen? What is the meaning of what they said?), turning the responses into ethnographic writing and integrating them into memos that captured what went on before, during and after interviews (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). In each line questions were asked to help specify the meaning of participants' schooling experiences and frequent comparisons across data were made in order to develop theories. The final stage of data analysis involved comparing patterns of experiences and beliefs. These patterns were utilised across all categories in order to identify overlapping patterns of experiences. Thus the field notes, participants, events and categorised ideas and themes were all integrated as part of the final ethnographic writing.

Discussion

Yvonne's story concerning the act of signing 'behind the teacher's back' evidences elements of an anti-oralism resistance narrative. What her words illustrate is the various behavioural patterns of deaf students, how these words illuminated the impact of oralism for them and their responses to the force of dominant norms and values. In order to give meaning to their stories, the results of this research are discussed within and across six key themes that highlight: (1) the early stage in the introduction of oralism in the schools; (2) the schools' policy on Irish Sign Language; (3) key strategies used to prevent signing in the classrooms;

(4) resistance strategies to school policy on signing; (5) experiences of receiving speech lessons; and (6) problems associated with literacy.

Signs of change

The first theme is concerned with how the school began to implement changes in order to create an acoustic environment. This is underscored by Yvonne's comment that 'everyone started getting nervous'. Her eyewitness account suggests that in the early 1950s the school was in the throes of introducing oralism and links with the stories of how the girls in St. Anne's School witnessed the changes developing in their school. In line with these narrative accounts, both Martin and Frank remember having an increased awareness of the changes that occurred in St. John's in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Each of these participants presents a powerful resistance narrative about the world of oralism, starting with Yvonne whose story shines a light on the beginnings of segregation, a method of separating deaf children who 'could not speak' from the rest of the school.

Yvonne: After the summer holidays in 1951 everything had changed. The girls were divided into groups. Those who could not speak were transferred to a room upstairs. The room was for girls who were called 'deaf and dumb'.

As Yvonne observes, the 'deaf and dumb' were separated and sequestered away from the main school building and given the official category of 'oral failures', both for their inability to adapt to spoken or oral/auditory instructions and for their reliance on signing.

Meanwhile, Frank and Martin also testify to the changes that occurred in their school.

Frank: They began separating us in the 1970s, but it really began around 1968 or 1969. I'm not sure when but a new school was built outside of the main school. You know the house used to be called the 'deaf and dumb' house.

Martin: I remember it clearly. It was in 1971 when it happened. There was a new house built opposite the infirmary house on the side of the main [...] school building.

When asked why they were separated from the main school, Frank and Martin spoke to the circulating rumour that they were a 'bad influence' because they could 'not talk'.

Frank: They could not speak. Instead they signed. I didn't know it at the time but it was years later that I discovered it was because they were supposed to be a bad influence on the oral students.

Martin: They were picked because they could not talk. Instead they signed. I watched them all move out of the line and stand with the group. Three of them were my classmates. The manual school boys went to the main building to collect their books and bring them to the new building. I watched them come out of the building with their books and stuff and walk down the yard to the new house.

These segregation stories of children who 'could not talk or speak' showed themes of isolation, rejection and separation. Frank, Yvonne, Martin and Ned shared painful memories of seeing their close friends moved out of the main school. Participants report having remembered two further examples of environmental change within the school. They mentioned the presence of audio technologies and the availability of speech class. In the late 1950s Frank was sent to speech class for the first time. He recalled how his mother was anxious for him to invest time and energy in speech lessons.

Frank: Two separate classes were formed in [the school]: one was for signing pupils and the other was for oral pupils to learn speech and lip reading. One [teacher] explained to me in signs that my mother wanted me to learn how to speak. I did not believe him. At a parent- teacher meeting, he told my mother I should learn to speak. He told my mother he would have liked to try and help me learn to talk. My mother did not know what to say.

While Frank discussed his unsuccessful attempt at speech lessons, Yvonne explained how she discovered that a new class room has been set up for speech training when she returned to school after the summer holidays in September 1951. She was nine years of age when she

was sent to speech class later that year. The day she was to begin her first speech class, Yvonne explained why she became very nervous.

Yvonne: My hands were shaking and I resisted. A nun told me there was no choice. I had to learn to speak. They said I had to take the lessons. Headphones were put on my ears. The speech teacher spoke into the microphone. The other day I had my hearing tested. Again I had headphones on my ears but there was a very strange looking machine on my right. I had never seen it before. In speech class I became frustrated because the teacher kept telling me to repeat the same word over and over again.

The above passage illustrates the nuances of learning to speak, talk and lip read. Yvonne, who is married to a deaf man and has two deaf grown-up children, responded to the question of how she felt about the way the school culture was being transformed with modern technologies. When she described the audiometric machine as 'very strange', she was demonstrating the presence of something out of the ordinary in the school. Yvonne was disturbed by the experience of speech training, something she had never encountered previously.

One other prominent theme that emerged from the participants' narratives addresses the school policy on segregation. The following quotes from Ned and Yvonne illustrate how separation ruptured the children's opportunities for friendship and induced feelings of rivalry, enmity, rejection and separation.

Ned: Oralism caused the split and made us become rivals with each other. [...] the profoundly deaf boys rejected me because I was in the 'enemy' group.

Yvonne: At mass I saw my old friends from the manual school. The oral pupils sat at the front part of the chapel while the signing girls sat at the back. That meant we could not see them and weren't allowed to turn our heads.

In the warp and woof of these stories, lie the school policies and practices that fuelled the hegemonic status of oralism and rendered Irish Sign Language inferior and inappropriate. The next section of this paper focuses, more specifically, on the rule prohibiting the act of signing in the classrooms in St. Anne's and St. John's Schools.

School policy: oralism

Yvonne's narrative account considers the implications of the rule against Irish Sign Language. She was in 'shock' when she discovered in the early 1950s the school's decision to prohibit signing and punish language offenders. When Martin was asked about his memories of the new school policy, he responded by rendering an eyewitness account of his early schooling in the mid-1960s and the pressures he experienced to speak and lip read.

Martin: I realised things changed. We had to learn to speak and lip read our teachers. Many lay teachers arrived in St. Joseph's. They didn't know sign language.

Later, when he returned to the subject of the school policy on oralism, Martin recalled the first time he was given speech and music lessons and, on his first day at St. John's School, Frank was told by his father who was deaf that he was no longer allowed to sign in class.

Martin: The problem was we could not access education. [One of my teachers] gave speech lessons. I had to speak the words over and over again. [My teacher] taught us music and tried to get us to sing. I did not do well.

Frank: I remember wondering: talk? How? I asked my father these questions. He told me the boys were not allowed to sign that they had to speak. He said that was the rule but the boys usually signed in the school yard. I just had to be careful. I did not want to get caught.

The above examples show the development of a new schooling regime that had nothing to do with Irish Sign Language. They serve to deepen our understanding of how the children experienced schooling at a particular moment of policy renewal and reform in the schools for deaf children. The children remember the moment as laden with the heightened threat of physical and mental treatment, commensurate with increased tighter control over signing.

Discipline and punishment

Participants who as children were told by their teachers to 'stop signing' began to develop discourses of resistance. For these children, there was no alternative. Resistance for them, in turn, led to chastisement by the school authorities who began to use punishment as a way to control their behaviour. In the late 1960s, eight-year-old Ned was slapped with a bunch of keys on the hands after he was caught signing to other children. Niamh was 12 years old in the mid-1970s when she was forced to hand over a sum of her pocket money. Finally, in the early 1970s, Anna was five years old when she was reduced to tears after being physically beaten with a leather strap and humiliated in front of her classmates.

Ned: She used keys to slap my hand for signing. My hand was sore for hours I could not sign.

Niamh: I was fined for signing. [...] At the time I had little money. I gave whatever I had left to the teacher. It was a very silly idea to [impose a] fine as punishment for signing. The school was wrong to stop us signing.

Anna: I remember [...] when I was five years old I was excited about signing to the girls. [...] A nun spotted me signing to another girl. She pulled down my pants and slapped my bare bottom with a leather strap. I was in pain and very much upset. [...] She said 'stop signing, stop signing!' I could not understand what was wrong with signing. [...] Out of fear I tried to stop [...] especially when the nuns were around.

In addition to the use of physical violence, the school authorities used verbal threats as another form of discipline to control behaviour. Anna vividly recalls the experience of terror during a spell in first year that induced the threat of being transferred to the 'deaf and dumb' house. The idea of being housed in a 'dark and mysterious' building isolated and cut off from her friends with little prospect of getting a valuable education was frightening for her and for all the children in the main school.

Anna: There was a sign that means being transferred to the deaf and dumb unit. The exact translation reads: 'deaf-and-dumb, throw' with the finger pointing upwards to indicate the section where the other group was located. In my child's mind I imagined they were in a big place so far away from us [...] When any of us were caught signing we were given a warning that next time we signed we would be moved upstairs to the deaf and dumb section. We were terrified at the

thought of being transferred there. There was something dark and mysterious about the unit like
something you see in the Harry Potter stories.

These discipline and punishment regimes created a profound disconnection and discontinuity
between what was needed by the children and what the teachers wanted for them. These show
the children's refusal to comply with school rules and 'stop signing'. The way the children
described situations of getting 'slaps for signing', 'fined for signing' and 'warning[s] that
next time [they] signed [they] would be moved [...] to the deaf and dumb section' show how
the teachers' controlled spontaneous and disruptive uses of the 'forbidden language'. In the
following section, the potent theme of secrecy is prevalent within stories about classroom
interactions.

Resistance: signing in secret

Although a prevalent theme in the children's responses to the official regime is the notion of
resistance, secrecy represents a predominant sub-theme in the narrative. Whenever they
found themselves under threat of punishment, the children adopted strategies for 'signing in
secret'.

David: Sometimes I interpreted for the boys whenever the teacher had his back turned to us
as he wrote notes on the blackboard.

Anna: We signed in secret. Our eyes were sharp for we were watchful for teachers and nuns
and knew when to stop signing

Ned: In class a few pupils did not understand our teacher. Sometimes I was able to
understand instructions. When I did I translated for the class only when the teacher wasn't
looking.

There is clearly some level of resistance in the responses of the children. David, Anna and
Ned show how they created their own forms of self-expressive, albeit 'illegal', behaviours.
They performed these behaviors unselfconsciously within the 'back regions' of the classroom.
When supporting others in the classroom, some of the children displayed care, empathy and

solidarity as a way of surviving the regime. Although they displayed a strong affinity towards Irish Sign Language, they were not able to avoid compulsory speech and lip reading lessons.

Speech lessons: 'this is called oralism'

During interviews there was a discernable sense of anger and frustration in some participants' accounts of their experiences of taking compulsory speech lessons. What went on in the classroom and speech class were all part of the lives of children schooled in oralism. Participants gave examples of [recalled] how teachers took on the responsibility of providing speech lessons in class. David's account of his experiences of classes focused on pronunciation, drill and repetition is vivid.

David: Some teachers took on the role of speech therapist. In a biology class for example, our teacher wrote on the black board: 'digestive system'. She asked each one of us to pronounce the word 'digestive'. Each class was fifty-minute duration. There were nine of us in the class room and all of us took turns to say 'digestive' with each one getting corrected and told to repeat the word until we said it correctly. The whole process took up most of the class time. The exercise was also repeated for other subjects. This is called oralism because the emphasis was on speaking rather than signing [...] Speech lessons had priority over education.

The above narratives show speech and lip reading is replete with memories of experiencing frustration. Anna recounts her experiences of having to strain her vocalisations until her pallor turned 'purple' in order to achieve the desired result for her hearing teacher.

Anna: One of us took turns to use our vocals to make a sound: aaaaaahhhhhh. Our teacher drew a spiral shape on the blackboard. Each time we increased our vocals the spiral went up and up, the circles got larger and larger [...] we continued pushing our vocals without catching our breath until our face went purple.

While Niamh expresses gratitude for learning to speak, she laments the lost opportunity for a more democratic and inviting language curriculum.

Niamh: I am grateful I can talk. Sometimes I need to use my voice to express myself to a hearing person. However I still feel the school should have allowed sign language in the curriculum. Things would have been a lot easier for us.

Some of the significant challenges faced by the children illustrated their struggles to make sense of the lessons given to them in the classrooms in a context where purposeful statements about learning were absent. Another theme related to experiences of speech training was the idea that having good hearing and speech was equated with classic notions of linguistic intelligence and having poor hearing and speech with 'being stupid'.

Martin: He told us those boys who had gone to the new house could not talk. [He] told us we were clever boys because we could all talk. We watched him in surprise. We started to believe we were cleverer than the other boys in the new house.

Anna: [She] asked each one of us to speak out our names one by one. When I spoke my name she looked at me pityingly shaking her head. 'You are very, very stupid! You can't talk. You have no speech. You are very stupid'.

While children who could not adapt to speech training and oral education were generally regarded as 'stupid' or having inferior intelligence, one wonders how did this and the experience of receiving intensive speech training at the expense of a broader curriculum affect the lives of the children in the present study? Many of the participants reported experiencing literacy problems which may have had a detrimental effect on their self-esteem and beliefs about their level of intelligence.

The problem with literacy

The problem with literacy was probably not realised until participants had left school. Some of the stories focused on the children's own cultural experiences of second chance education. For Yvonne, Frank and Ned, the memory of their own cruel schooling never left them.

Yvonne: My English was good before [my new teacher] arrived [in school] but when I started in the oral class I fell behind in standard.

Frank: Many of them are angry for missing out on education and that is [why] they do not have faith in the education system.

Ned: The majority of the deaf population in the country is affected by literacy problems due to the education system of oralism.

It is noteworthy from the above passages that Frank and Ned discussed the literacy problems affecting the deaf population while Yvonne revealed the extent of her educational underperformance. Furthermore, there was some discussion about teacher perspectives on children's intelligence and general cognitive development and their low expectations for the educational achievements of deaf children.

Anna: I told him 'I decided on teaching'. He laughed at me and said, 'No, you can't be a teacher!' 'I can't?' I asked feeling shocked. 'No, deaf people can't become teachers'. I let it go and stopped thinking about teaching until about thirty years later.

Yvonne: My English teacher did not explain what she was teaching. I just copied.

If classrooms were meant to be safe places that brought hope and enjoyment with plenty of encouragement from teachers, this did not occur in the case of Yvonne and Anna. By their account, Anna and Yvonne internalised negative beliefs about themselves because the classroom interactions with their teachers was normalised. The participants felt that if, at least, one of their teachers was deaf they might have received positive encouragement about their education and future career prospects. One of the most significant findings from the discussion on literacy was the extent to which participants as adults were affected by teachers' lack of motivation for their higher educational achievement. An obvious emotional element of their past was evident in their storytelling. Yvonne suggested that if the teachers had respect for Irish Sign Language and deaf culture, 'they would probably have been more encouraging when seeing the benefits of teaching and learning through our language'. While on the subject of literacy, it is interesting to note Niamh's criticism of the school for excluding Irish Sign Language from curriculum.

Reflections and conclusions

Participants' narratives encapsulate the overall themes discussed in this study on the cross-cultural experiences of deaf children attending St. John's and St. Anne's Schools. In most cases, they reflect a period of time when the school operated an overt philosophy and a hidden curriculum in the construction of teaching and communication methods. Overtly deaf children learned how speaking, speech, lip reading and listening contributed to their educational disadvantage. They attended classes that had an overt method of oral and auditory communication but covertly learned not to conform to the school's philosophy on how children should behave and interact with one another. In Goffman's (1959) terms, this scene was present where children (performers) behaved (performed) 'back stage' and while they were present their teacher (audience) could not see them. The children learned that talking would only take place 'front stage'. They learned that this was a place where they became subservient to the demands of the teacher. 'Back stage', they found it necessary to clandestinely engage in their distinct language and culture inherited from earlier times. In doing so, they instinctively employed a distinctive form of agency to overcome barriers to class instruction, experiences of language discrimination and loss of cultural support. Questions of why the children did not conform to the norms and values of the school and why they responded the way they did are key issues raised and addressed in this paper.

Participants schooled in oralism expressed dissatisfaction with their experience of education on the basis of negative educational outcomes and the way the school created learning obstacles for them. A stand out comment is Niamh's assertion that 'the school should have allowed sign language in the curriculum' because schooling 'would have been a lot easier for us'. Martin pointed out that problems with literacy arose because children 'could not access education'. Martin also reported that educational failure was due to the fact that children were forced to 'learn to speak and lip read by our teacher'. While these pedagogical approaches

were probably intended to increase the possibility for self-transformation in the pupils, they adversely resulted in negative and humiliating experiences for them.

Foucault's theories on dividing practices and the treatment of the human body resonate with the participants' schooling experiences. The official stratagem of dividing practices operated by the school was designed to keep children deemed 'closer to the normally hearing' (Griffey 1994, 38) away from the signing pupils because they were allegedly 'a bad influence on oral students' (Frank). By way of example, placing 'signing pupils' at the back row of the chapel (Anna) seemed to be signal to the children that spoken language, speaking, listening and hearing were superior ways of communicating and socialising.

The children were unable to abandon their language because for them it was about accessibility and only Irish Sign Language provided equitable access to information about the world around them (Crean 1997; Ladd 2003). Yet it also brought dire consequences when they infringed on school policy on language and these misdemeanours led to physical and mental punishment. Punishment was meted out to 'language offenders' for the purpose of creating 'order' out of the 'abnormal'. Order could only be maintained when the children's cultural norms, gestures, hand movements and behavioural habits were regulated and kept under control. As things transpired, young children who did not conform were physically beaten on the hands and legs in the early years of their schooling. The goal of the school regime reflected Foucault's (1977) argument that the effect of discipline was to create 'docile bodies', bodies that are willing and capable of following any order (Rabinow 1984).

A noteworthy theme that emerged from the interview data concerns the courage displayed by the children when dealing with the challenges posed by the school authorities. They developed their own form of counter-discourses as a survival mechanism. The children sought support from each other in situations where they were confronted by modern

discourses of audiology, and 'technologies of normalization' (Lane 1992). Some children took on the role of 'go-between' or interpreter, translating spoken language instructions into Irish Sign Language for the benefit of others. Indeed the evidence suggests that they acted in the knowledge of the collateral costs for themselves.

The study reported here proposes two implications for the promotion of deaf education in the Republic of Ireland. The first one is concerned with addressing the communication needs of deaf children at school level and the second refers to developing policy to ensure ease of access to education and curriculum. A key issue arising from these implications concerns the question of which language is most suited to deaf children in terms of their learning accessibilities. This question inevitably leads to other questions: What is the current language policy for the schools for deaf children? Which language is used as the first language of instruction? Because the schools are now mainly concerned with addressing each individual pupil's language and communication needs, there is some ambiguity about policy. It is not clearly understood if these institutions operate a sign-bilingual policy using Irish Sign Language as the first language of instruction and English as second language of learning (O'Connell 2013). While Irish Sign Language has gained importance in the schooling of deaf children, spoken language, for example, English is given priority because it is perceived as one of the key drivers of national literacy and numeracy agendas and the primary medium for increasing the integration and inclusion of all children (Mathews 2011). This article demonstrates the limits of such an educational approach, if schools for deaf children do not seriously address the issue of teachers' competency in Irish Sign Language as an everyday language in classrooms. When considering the cultural and linguistic needs of deaf children, curricula, pedagogies, teaching methods, the language skills of teachers should be developed according to those needs (Marschark and Spencer 2009).

This study argues in support of the implementation of a sign-bilingual education programme based on Irish Sign Language as the first language of instruction. The programme affords the greatest potential for minimising the language delay and literacy problems of deaf students (Svartholm 2010). As Svartholm (2010) argues, schooling should be about respect for deaf children's instinctive and spontaneous use of self-expression and their own ways of knowing and understanding the world. By responding in this way, schools could potentially become more receptive to the language needs of deaf children. For sign-bilingual programmes to work effectively, teachers need to be competent in Irish Sign Language. In this way, teachers can facilitate culturally relevant and responsive learning and teaching (Marschark et al. 2011) because this approach will engender positive feelings about language and identity (Kyle 1994; Marschark and Spencer 2009). Otherwise, without recourse to a sign-bilingual programme, as Foucault (1977, 200) wrote, deaf children will continue to be 'the object of information, never a subject in communication'.

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