

The Power of Spoken Language in Schools and Deaf Students Who Sign

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Abstract

Subject to critical policy analysis is how spoken language, which dominates the American landscape, affects the education of deaf students. Regardless of efforts in special education and increased awareness about American Sign Language (ASL), deaf students continue to experience reading difficulties. Integration in regular public schools complicates the situation, as deaf students need an alternative pedagogy for reading development through ASL. Discussion also focuses on lack of attention to the signed language, reflecting spoken language biases. These include the declining socialization opportunities as well as ASL acquisition as deaf students are placed with non-disabled, non-signing peers in schools. As part of boosting the value of ASL, the concept of linguistic accessibility is examined through historical accounts of widespread signed language use on Martha's Vineyard. This is followed with a review of progressive signed language policy in New Zealand, the creation of signed language schools, and signed language proliferation through education.

Key words: sign language policy, deaf/special education, universal design, language power, and audism

1. Introduction

Language distinguishes humans from animals, and our understanding of human language has been extended in recent years from strictly spoken to the signed modality. Meier (2002) explained that it was the quality and high level of research activity on signed languages during the 1970s and 1980s that propelled this alternative language modality into its overdue status as a member of the human language family. In the case of American Sign Language (ASL), its image has changed dramatically from once being thought of as a crude system of gestures (or a code version of English) to a language in its own right. ASL is now recognized as the primary language used by deaf people in the United States and parts of Canada.¹ Dating back to the nineteenth century, deaf people have formed and maintained their own community with strong traits of ethnicity or ethnic-like qualities (see Lane, Pillard, & Hedberg, 2011 for further discussion on the topic). As we will argue, it is society's attitude and behavior towards ASL that resulted in the rise of the deaf community and culture as we know it. Our focus is on helping deaf people find their rightful place in the larger society. Education is our starting and main focal point. The considerations for education, especially since spoken language dominates the American landscape, are increasingly important. The power of spoken language has been taken for granted, and it is our intent here to shed

¹ To be clear, the stated recognition of ASL as the language of deaf people (known as the deaf community in the United States and Canada) is unofficial as there is no federal level policy in either of the North American countries. Moreover, Canada has three different signed languages in use, with the distinctive signed language in Quebec called Langue des signes québécoise (Carbin, 1996). In other countries around the world, distinctive signed languages are in use (e.g., British Sign Language, German Sign Language, Thai Sign Language, etc.), and their history of development and use stand apart from that of spoken languages.

light on the need to accommodate an alternative language modality (i.e., signed) in order to help deaf students realize their potential. This will allow deaf children in schools to experience full communication, learn the content areas, and undergo a process of learning to read in English, a language they do not hear.

ASL is frequently argued to be a language ‘equal’ to English, and while we concur with this equation in general, there is still more to it. We argue that ASL as a signed language carries more weight in the equation insofar as the education of deaf students is concerned. Linguistic accessibility is real and has a significant impact in regard to modality differences. That is, English is a spoken language, whereas ASL is a signed language (see Supalla and Cripps 2008 for further discussion on this particular point and Supalla and McKee 2002 for how ASL is tuned to the visual/gestural modality for natural language acquisition and use).² As with any language that is accessible, learning and using ASL is quite universal, so that for deaf students, disability does not play a role as it does with English. What is interesting is that individuals who hear have the *common* capacity to learn and use the signed language, and can become fluent signers since they can see the language. Even deafblind individuals are known for learning signed language, in this case through tactile means (e.g., Quinto-Pozos, 2002). However, deaf individuals, children and adults alike are burdened with being signers while the American society remains predominantly non-signing and speaking.³

In any case, English literacy becomes problematic when students (including those who are deaf) in American schools are presumed to have experienced access to spoken English, developed spoken language competence, and made connections with print for reading development purposes. This is where an *alternative* form of reading pedagogy becomes relevant as it can address how deaf students learn to read in English based on what they know in signed language. As we will see, the reading standards will be followed regardless of the differences in teaching and learning involved. We reason that deaf students enjoy access to signed language (in the form of ASL) and educators should start there and tap into that knowledge base in order to facilitate their learning of English as a written language.⁴ The process involved is complex, but plausible. Goldin-Meadow and Mayberry (2001) made a convincing argument for the need of mapping ASL onto written English for optimal results (also see Chamberlain & Mayberry, 2000 for the related topic of how ASL proficiency creates a positive impact on the development of English literacy skills among deaf students). Thus it is our opinion that the connection between ASL and written English must be incorporated into an alternative reading pedagogy, and be consistent with an explicit instruction model that is “systematic, direct, engaging, and success oriented” (as expected of any student; Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. vii). While the arrangement of written English with ASL makes eminent sense and is logical, it is not easy for changes in policy development and implementation to be brought about, considering the long history of deaf education and more recently, of special education.

To help understand and validate the use of critical theory in examining the privileged status accorded the spoken language, we will adopt the critical language-policy research framework and “the term “critical” has three interrelated meanings: (1) it refers to work that is critical of traditional, mainstream approaches to language policy research; (2) it includes research that is aimed at social change; and (3) it refers to research that is influenced by critical theory” (Tollefson, 2006, p. 42). Following this, we will first review contemporary issues in the education of deaf students with a special focus on inequalities. This is followed with insight case studies which have implications for social change, where we consider a community comprised of deaf and hearing people who are

² The description of ASL includes the notion that the linguistic differences between this language and English are shaped by modality-specific constraints. Historically, some language planning efforts were made to conform ASL to the structure of English (via an English-based sign system), but learnability and effectiveness became an issue. Thus it is safe to conclude that deaf children born and raised in the United States need to learn and master a language different from that what is spoken.

³ We used the term ‘predominantly’ even though a steady increase of signers among the hearing populations has occurred in recent years. Thousands of hearing students take ASL classes to meet foreign/second language for credit in high schools, colleges and universities across the country (e.g., Rosen, 2008; Wilcox & Wilcox, 1997). This does not guarantee widespread signed language knowledge and use among hearing members of the society. Furthermore, students competition of languages (e.g., whether to study Spanish or French) undermines the potential of the entire hearing population to learn and use ASL.

⁴ The status of English as written language includes the opportunity for deaf students to undergo speech training by specialists while they develop English language knowledge through print with the support of ASL. This will help remove some of the traditional complications speech and language pathologists have faced when deaf students lack sufficient English language knowledge. Of course, speech training is strictly optional and extra-curricular. Signing for the reason of linguistic accessibility remains the primary means of communication for deaf students in the school setting.

integrated through the use of signed language, the development of a progressive signed language policy in a country outside the United States, and the development of a reading pedagogy for English that does not require access to spoken language. Politically, Branson and Miller (2008) are correct in stating that signed language modality and literacy issues in the context of spoken language dominance in education are far from being resolved. We hope that in unpacking the issues involved, we can lay the basis for possible directions in future American policies within the linguistic accessibility framework in education. The themes discussed in this paper are strongly *universal design* in concept, which is new and emerging in the education field.⁵ We will touch on this in the ending remarks along with how to combat the preoccupation of one language modality over another and pursue social change that benefits all.

2. Contemporary Issues in the Education of Deaf Students in the United States

The reason we chose the topic of integration is that the recent movement for placement of deaf students in regular public schools (and their learning along with hearing peers) has been a significant development in American education. We want to be clear about our position on integration: we are not against this important social movement in the United States, but we believe it has not been handled well, and needs to be approached differently. First and foremost, while schools for the deaf can be characterized as *signing*, regular public schools are best described as *speaking*, with students and teachers most frequently being speakers only. This distinction is helpful in our examination of discriminatory biases specific to language modalities, whereby educators and policymakers are skewed toward spoken language in terms of educational experiences of deaf students. A review of the special education law confirms such biases as it is written to generate an unfavorable impact on signing schools and deaf students. We will also show that the quality of special education service delivery is highly questionable when it comes to reading instruction and English literacy for deaf students.

2.1. Review of the Special Education Law

The integration of deaf students with non-signing and non-disabled peers began with the 1974 enactment of Public Law 94-142, known today as Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act last amended in 2004 (or IDEIA). Raimondo (2010) in her review of the IDEIA explained that there are at least 13 specified categories in which identified students are entitled to receive special education and related services. Hearing impairment (or deafness) is one of these categories. Raimondo went on to explain that there are “special factors” outlined in IDEIA regarding considerations for a deaf child’s language and communication needs. The policymakers who wrote and amended the law over the years seem to recognize that deaf students are “different”. Yet, we note that the provision for deaf students’ language and communication needs stops short of specifying signed language or ASL. We must question why the law’s language ignores the reference to the signed language modality.

Another important consideration about the law’s effectiveness lies in knowing what its basic purpose is and how it is fulfilled. We assume that the law speaks for all students with disabilities, but this is not what we found. Raimondo reported that the special education law’s language strongly supports having students with disabilities be placed in what is known as a “least restrictive environment” (or LRE, meaning that students with disabilities are to be educated with non-disabled peers whenever possible). Raimondo explained that the U.S. Department of Education (1992) produced a guideline that the LRE concept may not be applicable to deaf students and that a special school (meaning a school for the deaf) may serve as the least restrictive environment for this student population. With this language, the policymakers seemed to acknowledge the strength of schools for the deaf (i.e., being signing schools). However, in practice, an overwhelming majority of deaf students (over 80% of the entire deaf student population in the United States; Stinson & Kluwin, 2011) are currently integrated, or ‘mainstreamed’, rather than being placed in a school for the deaf. The impact of integration is immense as we continue to see a declining enrollment for schools for the deaf (with several closures in recent years). This has left

⁵ According to the United States Government Accountability Office's (GAO) report on teacher preparation for instructing students with disabilities and English language learners (2009), universal design for learning "refers to a framework for designing educational environments that helps all students gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning" (p. 18). Thus deaf students should not be excluded from optimal learning experiences in school, including reading. As of now, the universal design concept is not adequately taught through teacher preparation programs in the United States as the GAO report indicates.

Nebraska, Wyoming, and South Dakota with no signing schools, for example. Even with these schools defined as potential LREs, this option is no longer available to citizens living in these states.

Given that special provision has been made about language and communication needs, and the LRE definition altered, one might expect that not many deaf students would be integrated. The contrary seems to be true. The push for integration in the field of education has been zealous, and the value of signed language and signing schools diminished in the process. What interests us the most is how an alternative form of integration has taken place in several charter schools. Easterbrooks and Baker (2002) reported that these schools have implemented a 'reverse integration' model. Hearing students enroll in these charter schools with the expectation that they use ASL as the language of instruction and study alongside deaf students (also see Padden and Rayman 2002 for further discussion on the reverse integration movement in charter schools). Padden (2003) has identified the charter schools that promote reverse integration as part of *signed language education*. We wonder why traditional educators have yet to try this approach during the nearly half century of special education. To our knowledge, all of the schools for the deaf have remained segregated with enrollment restricted to deaf students.

2.2. Impact of the Law on Deaf Students

We now ask this question: "How do deaf students fare socio-emotionally in the push for conventional integration?" We understand that signing has been widely seen as 'deaf specific' and that signed language is part of deaf/special education. Teachers and non-disabled or hearing peers in regular public schools are not obligated to learn ASL. Given the non-signing status of the regular public schools, we are concerned about the language and communicative situation that deaf students experience when hearing peers lack signed language knowledge or proficiency. The schooling experience of deaf students is unfortunately usually negative as shown in the following quote from one researcher who conducted a literature review on their well-being:

'Researchers have found that there is minimal to nonexistent social interaction between deaf and hearing learners in the same environment. Further, deaf and hard of hearing students in such environments report feeling isolated, lonely, and rejected by their hearing peers' (Reed, 2003, p. 223).

The next question is: What are the consequences for deaf students' signing skills when they are 'isolated' in a regular public school setting? First of all, language acquisition and use opportunities include ample opportunities for exposure to the language through adult models and interaction with peers. The fact that a vast majority of deaf children are born to hearing parents who would not know any signed language at least initially is a serious matter. These children make up over 90% of the deaf student population in the United States as compared to the minority born to deaf parent(s) who are most likely proficient signers and maintain rich signing environment at home (e.g., Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). With this demographic information, it is easy to imagine how many deaf children are at risk of failing to become language competent, especially at the time of school enrollment. Snoddon (2008) is the one who stressed the importance of signed language intervention with families and how such a pressing issue has not been handled properly over the years. The findings of one study using a formal ASL proficiency measure is distressing as it indicates that deaf students in regular public schools trail far behind those who enroll in a school for the deaf (Singleton, Supalla, Litchfield, & Schley, 1998). The common tendency of deaf parents who have deaf children to favor a school for the deaf (e.g., Marschark, 1993) is something to consider. We believe that hearing parents in general do not have the full understanding or appreciation for a signing school, whereas deaf parents do. We also believe that interaction with peers from deaf families and teachers being signers in a school for the deaf are among the stabilizing forces that ensure ASL proficiency among the deaf student population.⁶

⁶ For clarification, we are not saying that a school for the deaf setting is the only place that deaf children can acquire and use ASL, although historically that has been the case. The situation has changed in recent years with an increasing number of hearing parents learning and using ASL at home (e.g., Schick, Marschark, & Spencer, 2006). We embrace this trend fully. However, as more hearing parents use ASL, there has been a shift from schools for the deaf to regular public schools for enrollment of deaf children, which has resulted in an erosion in the overall quality of signed language environment. A more effective policy and programming would include consideration for hearing parents who sign with their deaf children to have a strong support system through a school for the deaf and the deaf community. In other words, it takes a 'village to raise a child'. Deaf children are not an exception to the rule.

With the apparent damaging effects of a non-signing school environment on deaf students' socio-emotional and language development as found in regular public schools, we are perplexed that the manner in which deaf students have been integrated (i.e., into non-signing schools) has not been specifically addressed in the deaf/special education literature. The fact that schools for the deaf are frequently labeled simply as 'special schools', without any reference to their status as signing schools, is troublesome. Furthermore, some researchers (e.g., Ramsey, 1997 through an ethnographic study) deplored the conventional integration practices, and implied that segregation is the solution. Still other educators who work with deaf students protested over integration efforts. These educators argued against the general idea of integration (e.g., Steffan, 2004; United States Commission on the Education of the Deaf Report, 1988). Those who oppose integration may be intuitively aware of the need for deaf students to receive education through signing, but they have failed to make an explicit argument about linguistic accessibility.

While many educators who work with deaf students have accepted the concept that ASL is a human language in its own right, its relationship with English is not fully understood or appreciated. The lack of sensitivity about the relationship of ASL and English is confirmed when looking at how the bilingual education approach has been adopted in a number of schools for the deaf nationwide. Advocacy for bilingual education gives the impression that both languages are accessible. One must understand that a child undergoing traditional bilingual education is assumed to have heard or can hear the two languages in question and proceed with learning to read. This model cannot be applied to deaf students. We argue that if there is an authentic form of bilingual education for deaf students, it would be two *signed* languages, but that has not been the case in the United States. The significance of ASL as a signed language is obscured when bilingual education is accepted at face value. With the linguistic accessible language framework, deaf children are entitled to learn and use signed language as much as hearing children learn and use spoken language. Reading begins with the understanding that deaf students are introduced to English literacy *through* ASL (see Supalla & Cripps, 2011 for further discussion on the cross-linguistic arrangement of reading pedagogy and the ill-fitting of bilingual education for deaf students).

At this point, without a linguistic accessibility argument, we suspect that the language and communication provision and LRE regulations are part of policymakers and government officials' carefully orchestrated effort to placate the opposition to integration. The opposition to integration of deaf students is actually narrow and self-serving as it is in conflict with the civil rights movement concerning integration of different groups, especially that of African American students. Thus the agenda concerning the education of deaf students needs to be consistent with what society heads in terms of policy and receive attention for what deaf students need at the same time (Supalla 1994). The concept of reverse integration serves as a good example of how progressive thinking leads to possible solutions rather than creating conflicts. We also argue that the special education law's lack of explicit reference to the signed language modality is a political move to reinforce integration while giving the opposition the false impression that deaf students are actually being treated differently. The opposition to integration has been effectively muted this way. It is our opinion that deaf students are shortchanged in the process and that the issue of linguistic accessibility remains submerged to this day.

2.3. Quality of Special Education Services

We now shift our attention to the actual practice of special education in the area of service delivery. Understanding that signed language or ASL is not explicit in how the law and regulations are written, we find it interesting that signed language interpreting is commonplace in regular public schools. In fact, this practice has become synonymous with integration of deaf students (Fleetwood, 2000; see Marschark, Peterson, and Winston, 2005 and Seal 2003 for further discussion on educational interpreting as a field). Of relevance for this paper is how signed language interpreting services are provided, with the assumption being that deaf students are thereby enabled to equally access the information presented orally in the classroom. If learning to read is the primary goal of all students attending elementary school, we argue that deaf students cannot experience adequate meaningful reading instruction from teachers who do not sign. This is especially true as making connections between learning reading skills and English literacy through ASL can be quite specific. If one believes that a signed language interpreter can provide the missing link to teaching reading to deaf students, we ask: "How can the teaching of English phonics (by a regular teacher) be translated into ASL or the signed language modality?" The answer is obvious in that the English phonological information will be lost in the translation. (We will return later to the question of how phonics can be taught through the signed language modality later.) Although signed language

interpreters are widely deployed in regular public schools, we suggest that this type of service delivery – no matter how well-intentioned – may create more problems than solutions.⁷

The use of itinerant teachers of the deaf by regular public schools to work with deaf students on an individual basis also needs to be addressed. These teachers are likely most often utilized to assist with English and reading components of the regular curriculum (Luft, 2008; see Reed, 2003 for further description on the role and functions of itinerant teachers of the deaf in regular public schools). The need for such assistance is not surprising, as deaf students clearly lack access to the spoken language-based curriculum used in regular public schools. However, even though teachers of the deaf are likely to be signers, they have usually been trained to work with the regular curriculum in a rigid and narrow way. Paul and Jackson (1993) set the tone of traditional deaf education practices as follows:

‘...the content of the curricula used with [deaf] students should be similar to those used with hearing counterparts. This does not negate the fact that many [deaf] students may need intensive or extremely individualized education. It might also be necessary to modify (e.g., rewrite or control for) the language requirements of curricular materials’ (p. 35).

The consequences of this perspective for deaf/special education as a field are serious. While individualized education may be beneficial, using this approach with deaf students as a whole becomes a central part of the problem. Both teachers of the deaf and regular teachers are overlooking the common thread that deaf students share: that is, the need to have ASL integrated into the curriculum. It is important to understand that deaf students process language *in ASL*.⁸ This means that deaf students are thinking in ASL, but the printed language they are trying to connect to is foreign and inaccessible. The common deaf education practice of altering or simplifying English reading materials to make them supposedly easier to read actually contributes to the reading difficulties. With this practice, deaf students’ progress in reading skills is retarded (see Padden and Ramsey 1998 for further discussion on the topic of reading difficulties concerning deaf students and how their reading performance have been dismal). Schrimmer and Schaffer (2010) acknowledged that the use of simplified reading materials is popular, especially with the product that teachers of the deaf frequently use: Reading Milestones (Quigley, McAnally, King, & Rose, 1991). The use of simplified reading materials indicates that educators have had low expectations in regard to what deaf students can do with reading. This is consistent with a group of linguists who argue that as long as ASL is excluded from the curriculum, deaf students will falter in education, which reinforces the cycle of low expectations (Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989).

It is Schrimmer and Schaffer who noted that the attention in the field of deaf education has now shifted to the incorporation of direct and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonic analysis. We emphasize that this change of priorities is a direct result of the 2004 amendments to the special education law. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation passed by the U.S. Congress in 2001 includes sweeping reforms concerning all children in American schools. Thus the law that serves students with disabilities was amended to be in tune with NCLB. Of special relevance is how NCLB requires an implementation of five components in reading instruction, and they are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (U.S. Department of Education, 2002 as cited in Steffan, 2004, p. 47). There are, in fact, guidelines that emphasize accountability for states to follow when it comes to serving students with disabilities (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2005). Thus the opportunity for exploring avenues on how to bridge ASL with teaching of English literacy becomes available. All five components of reading instruction would be part of the alternative reading

⁷ We acknowledge that the provision of signed language interpreting services is a realization of the alternative language modality, but its power is constrained in the context of a speaking society. That is, if deaf students are so inclined to sign, some educators must have thought of interpreting services as a 'brilliant' way of integrating these students into non-signing schools.

⁸ For the cognition of deaf signers, Meier (2002) made it clear that an important feature of human language, the signed version of 'slips of the tongue' has occurred. 'Slips of the hand' is how this researcher explains "that in sign, as in speech, these sublexical units of form are important in the adult's planning of an utterance; the fact that speech phonemes or sign handshapes can be anticipated, persevered, or switched independently of the word or sign to which they belong demonstrates the 'psychological reality' of such units" (p. 3). Corina and Hildebrandt (2002) also covered this aspect of psycholinguistic reality of the signed language phonological structure, which resembles what is known for speakers or users of spoken language. With this evidence, oral language processing must be seen as common to both spoken and signed modalities. The prevalence of 'phonology' in the signed language modality has ramifications for teaching reading to deaf students.

pedagogy involved. However, this is not what Schrimmer and Schaffer were thinking. They rather stressed the dilemma of reading instruction over deaf students' inability to hear. No consideration was made for the fact that these students may know ASL or how that can be tapped for reading development purposes with English.⁹

3. Insights for Social Change

At this point, it is clear that social change in the education of deaf students is imperative due to the fact that spoken language dominates American schools, the curriculum, and integration practices. What this suggests is that spoken language biases form an ideology that has taken hold in American society and its educational system, and systematically works to disadvantage deaf learners. As part of understanding how to address some of the inequalities affecting deaf students, we will review several situations and developments, both inside and outside the United States, that favor signed language. These include possibilities for the general public to become *signers* (in addition to being speakers). Such a change, while radical (particularly in a massively speaking society), could help address some of the social problems ingrained in the education system. With the signed language education model tried in some of the charter schools in the United States, it is necessary to review one charter school that spearheaded the development of reading pedagogy for use with deaf students in mind. We will pursue three lines of investigation commonly undertaken in critical language-policy research: 1) critical discourse analysis, 2) critical pedagogy, and 3) critical literacy (Tollefson, 2006), all of which are part of the critical applied linguistics approach (Pennycook, 2001).

The first area, critical discourse analysis, looks at Martha's Vineyard, an island off the Massachusetts coast where signed language use was once *widespread*, extending to both deaf and hearing residents. The period for this unique and accessible linguistic situation spanned over two hundred years until its demise in the twentieth century. The second area, critical pedagogy, allows us to examine a contemporary situation in New Zealand where the development and implementation of a signed language policy has occurred. The signed language of the deaf community used in that country is subject to *proliferation*, meaning that hearing citizens of the country are to learn and use signed language in addition to spoken language. This should help alleviate the social concentration on the spoken language modality. The third area, critical literacy, will allow us to address deaf students' reading difficulties with English through a review of the curriculum developed at a charter school in Arizona. We will discuss how the signed language-based curriculum is *aligned* with the reading standards so that deaf students experience equitable reading development as found among hearing students. The analyses' goal will be consistent with the critical applied linguists' approach, that is, "... to denaturalize ideologies that have become naturalized" (Fairclough, 1995 as quoted in Pennycook, 2001, p. 81). Thus we propose to denaturalize the current spoken language biases with one that is *language modality-free*.

3.1. Martha's Vineyard as a Sociolinguistic Model

Here we focus on how deaf adults fared on Martha's Vineyard. In comparison to the integration efforts in the contemporary United States, the formerly widespread use of signed language on Martha's Vineyard represents an *authentic* form of inclusion concerning deaf people, in our opinion.¹⁰ Nora Groce who wrote "Everyone Speaks Sign Language Here" (1985; see also Bahan and Poole-Nash 1996 and Lane, Pillard, and French 2000 for further discussion on the Martha's Vineyard phenomenon) interviewed older hearing residents of Martha's Vineyard. They recalled the time when they used signed language and that the prevailing view on the island was deafness was not a 'serious' form of disability. The hearing residents consistently described deaf residents as equals, and paid no extra attention to their disability. Groce attributed the positive and socially healthy outlook on deafness to the widespread signed language use on the island. The consequences for deaf residents of Martha's Vineyard were highly positive in that they participated in a wide range of community activities (e.g., serving on a town council and participating in the local militia, interacting with neighbors and others in the post office and store). Groce

⁹ As a matter of fact, there is a group of educators who believe that what is generally known for reading instruction concerning hearing students could not be applied to deaf students. Simms, Andrews, and Smith (2005) are blatant regarding this point. Two of these authors described themselves as culturally deaf and explained that *sounds*, *phonics*, *phonemic awareness*, *reading-aloud*, and *sounding out* are limited in use with hearing students. Our response is that they need to think 'outside of the box' and explore the possibility of parallels in the signed language modality versus spoken language modality.

¹⁰ The situation on Martha's Vineyard was not so unique, as similar inclusive settings for deaf populations in various communities around the world have been documented (also see Branson, Miller, Marsaja, & Negara, 1996; Davis & Supalla, 1995; Fox, 2007; Johnson, 1994; and Washabaugh, 1979 for a review of signing communities).

provided evidence that deaf residents performed well economically, which serves as a contrast to what has been reported for many deaf individuals on the U.S. mainland.

With the relationship between the two language modalities, Groce's research confirms that the signed language use was *secondary* as hearing residents continued to use English as their primary language (see Kendon 1988 for further discussion of signed language serving as a secondary language concerning American Indians living in the Plains region of the United States and Australian aborigines). They resorted to signing when deaf residents were present, for example. When problems arose over communicating via spoken language over long distance or when needing to keep quiet, hearing residents often signed among themselves, although that was not the norm. Interesting to note is Groce's description of the linguistic situation on the mainland as a place plagued with signed language stigma (see Baynton 1993 and 1996 for further discussion of the history of signed language stigma in the mainland United States). This had an adverse effect on Martha's Vineyard over time. When visitors arrived on the island, they found the widespread signed language use to be socially deviant and jeered at the signing residents. These incidents demonstrate a conflict of ideologies between the mainland and the island. According to Groce, the influx of mainlanders as summer home residents towards the end of the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century altered the way of life on the island in a profound way, with only the 'old families' retaining the language modality-free ideology.

We ask this question: "How did a language modality-free climate develop on Martha's Vineyard, and not on the mainland?" Groce explained that the proportion of deaf individuals to hearing individuals on the island was much higher than on the mainland. Martha's Vineyard had a deaf genetic pool maintained over the years. We believe that a high incidence of deafness on Martha's Vineyard became translated into power for the deaf population, resulting in a more positive perspective on signed language and the meaning of deafness. Had deaf residents been viewed as linguistically and communicatively disabled (through a spoken language biased ideology), they would have become a social burden. This would be too much for a small and confined place such as Martha's Vineyard. Hearing residents thus responded to the socio-economic realities and learned and used signed language. It is important to understand that various industries thrived on the island, ranging from farming, and wool production to fish industry activities that demanded manpower. By all accounts, Martha's Vineyard, with rural areas, towns, and a world-renowned port, was not an economically disadvantaged place, and its residents maintained a rather prosperous lifestyle.

We must add that signing had become so commonplace on Martha's Vineyard that the social expectations for signing skills among hearing residents were high. Groce explained that deaf residents were irritated if a hearing resident could not sign. We find this particularly interesting as ordinary deaf Americans on the mainland (both in the past and at present) are rather resigned to the fact that hearing people were and are not signers. Groce also reported that there were no organizational efforts or events where deaf residents would assemble on the island by themselves without hearing residents present. It appears that deaf island residents did not see a need to fight for civil rights (or have their concerns addressed by the larger society) or socialize among themselves while being 'shunned' by the hearing world as contemporary deaf Americans frequently experience (see Padden and Humphries 2005, Baker-Shenk and Cokely 1980, and Ladd 2003 for further discussion on the politicization of the relationship between deaf and hearing people in the United States). Also non-existent on Martha's Vineyard is what we know as Deaf culture, which is the contemporary American concept that accounts for deaf people as a linguistic minority (e.g., Charrow & Wilbur, 1989; Johnson & Erting, 1989; Padden, 1980; Reagan, 1985, 1995: see Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996 for further discussion on the concept of 'Deaf World').

3.2. Signed Language Proliferation in New Zealand

Thus far we have seen some fundamental differences between Martha's Vineyard and the mainland in the United States and it is important to understand that signed language proliferation on the island was naturally occurring, and not promoted through policy or any other means. For a non-signing country such as the United States, a formal policy is likely the necessary impetus to help initiate social change. New Zealand is the one country that has initiated signed language proliferation through policy. Similarly to the United States, New Zealand has had an unfavorable ideology in place concerning signed language and deafness (see Dugdale 2002 and McKee 2001 for the evidence of a strong and vibrant deaf community and Deaf culture in New Zealand over the years). Signed language is now treated as a form of literacy for the general population in New Zealand to learn and master through pedagogy. This would require the government to make sure that the entire society is signing in addition to

speaking. Schools are targeted for the proliferation of signed language as part of the country's social change agenda.

As we discuss the New Zealand situation further, it is important to understand that this country uses a different signed language: New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL, see McKee and Kennedy 2005 for further discussion on the structure and history of this language). We can assume that New Zealand's deaf population is not proportionally as high as reported for Martha's Vineyard, but more similar to the United States (due to lack of a deaf genetic pool among the general population). With this in mind, the NZSL law became effective through the New Zealand Parliament on April 10, 2006 with the declaration that the signed language becomes their country's third official language, alongside English and Maori (the spoken language belonging to the indigenous people of New Zealand; McKee, 2005-2006). Here we see that NZSL is viewed equal to English, the majority language of the New Zealand society as well as to Maori, a historically minority language. The NZSL bill took some time to finalize, spanning three years (2000-2003; New Zealand Sign Language Act, 2006; Office for Disability Issues, 2008).

Pushing for social change through the education domain, Ruth Dyson (2007), New Zealand's Minister of Disability Issues, made an address to launch NZSL into the New Zealand curriculum. Her remarks deserve attention:

'That we are here launching New Zealand Sign Language into the New Zealand Curriculum offers a greater hope of that ordinary life – not only for the Deaf community, but for all disabled New Zealanders. And I'm proud to be part of a government that is working to ensure New Zealanders have the tools and support to reali[z]e their potential ... having these guidelines boosts the recognition of New Zealand Sign Language as a native language... But, critically, it removes sign language from the realms of Special Education. It firmly places New Zealand Sign Language within the mainstream, where hearing students will have the access to the language and culture of the Deaf; where someday its use will become unremarkable – just another facet of ordinary life' (2007, p. 1 & 2).

One may see how the proclamation is very much in the spirit of Martha's Vineyard, but we still ask this question, "What about deaf students themselves?" The proclamation seems to be speaking to hearing students who would learn NZSL. But we have not seen enough about how to integrate deaf students into the education system of New Zealand. This includes how teachers must sign and follow a signed language-based curriculum so that deaf students can learn to read (including English, as it is the majority language of New Zealand). Deaf students also need to attend a signing school from Kindergarten through 12th grade. The closest resemblance to a signing school now available in New Zealand is schools for the deaf, which at present are segregated from the rest of society. These schools most likely operate comparably to what is discussed for the United States (i.e., making do with the spoken language-based curriculum). For these reasons, we believe that the tools, support, and guidelines as worded in the proclamation need to account for the development and implementation of the signed language-based curriculum for *both* deaf and hearing students (made possible through reverse integration).

From what we see in the proclamation, some initial steps have been made in New Zealand by steering away from the spoken language biased ideology to one that is more language modality free. However, more work is needed in the area of policy development concerning the education of deaf students. We add that Martha's Vineyard had its share of problems with the implementation of signed language education. Deaf children did not enroll in the island's public schools and were instead sent to a school for the deaf on the mainland. There have been no explanations as to why the opportunity for integration was withheld from deaf children on Martha's Vineyard. We can only deduce that the hearing students attending the island's schools were learning to read through making the connections with what they knew in spoken language, and the island's educators did not have the tools or alternative reading pedagogy in place to support the deaf students. We suspect that Martha's Vineyard parents did not realize the deficiencies of deaf education at the time, and sent their deaf children to the mainland school for the deaf with the assumption that the teachers there would know what to do for them.

3.3. Curriculum at the Arizona Charter School

At this point, we see that education designed to meet the needs of deaf students is still elusive. This leads our discussion to a tuition-free and publicly funded charter school in the United States, which opened in the fall of 1996 in the city of Tucson, Arizona. True to the reverse integration concept, the Laurent Clerc Elementary School

(LCES) admitted both deaf and hearing students with the understanding that instruction would be done in ASL and many of the teachers were deaf (thus signers along with hearing teachers who could sign).¹¹ The charter approved for LCES included a plan for the curriculum to be aligned to the state academic standards. The tools and procedures were outlined in the charter for teaching English reading through ASL. After six years of operation, LCES closed (due to financial constraints), but one deaf student who transferred to a regular public school required special education due process. The educators of one elementary school found the data and description of the deaf student's reading progress in her Individual Education Plan to be 'unacceptable' (as it was written with an alternative reading pedagogy in mind). The parents of the deaf student demanded that the education program written by the LCES educators be followed. The deliberations ended in a decision favoring the LCES's alternative reading pedagogy. The fact that there was no competitive model concerning *how* deaf students should be taught reading caused the hearing officer to side with LCES (see Supalla and Cripps 2004 for further discussion of the decision, *Villalobos v. Flowing Wells Unified District*).

The positive outcome of the decision is attributed to the fact that the Arizona Academic Standards were followed at LCES (see Supalla and Blackburn 2003 for further discussion on the curricular alignment meeting the standards at the charter school). In consultation with the second author of this paper, the teachers at the charter school aligned the curriculum to meet the standards (see <http://www.ade.az.gov/standards/language-arts/default.asp> for a full listing of language art skills for reading, writing, listening, and speaking from kindergarten through 3rd grade) to bypass the auditory requirement for reading development. It is important to understand that grades K-3 typically focus on 'learning how to read', and grades 4 and beyond on 'reading to learn'. Due to limited space in this paper, we will discuss one example in the readiness skills for all kindergartners at LCES, deaf and hearing alike. If there is a name to describe the approach that LCES adopted to teach reading skills, it is *ASL glossing*. The favorable special education due process decision discussed earlier used this term to describe the approach of teaching reading to deaf students. Unlike the conventional writing systems where students learn to read in one language or another, ASL gloss serves as an *intermediary* writing system (between signed language and written English). At LCES, gloss conventions were developed where English words were capitalized and rearranged to conform to ASL's morpho-syntactic structure. In the following example, an ASL glossed text is provided for a target English sentence:

English: The dog is chasing the cat.
ASL Gloss: DOG NOW CHASE>IX=3 CAT.

Glossed text allowed LCES students to tackle the dual task of learning to read in ASL and transition to written English at the same time. Thanks to the use of the intermediary writing system, the students are exposed to English vocabulary as they learn to read in ASL. The shared orthography and spelling between glossed and regular English text contribute to the cross-linguistic reading experience.¹² The availability of gloss conventions to represent ASL 'on paper' resulted in LCES teachers producing hundreds of glossed text out of basal readers and children's literature for the classroom.¹³ In all cases, the early reading development activities are based on the

¹¹ Both authors of this paper had affiliations with LCES. Based on their experiences, the impact of this program on the local community, deaf and hearing alike was immense. In terms of demographics, it is important to understand that a vast majority of deaf parents have hearing children and they had the opportunity to place their children in the signing school for the first time. These children were mostly native signers and needed to learn English as a second language (see Singleton and Tittle 2000 for further discussion on the experiences and needs of hearing children of deaf parents). The same is true for hearing parents who placed their deaf children at LCES. The parents benefitted by socializing with deaf adults at the school (to practice their signing) and many placed hearing siblings of deaf children there as well. Deaf children of deaf parents attending the charter school made contributions to the socialization processes among peers as highly fluent primary users of the signed language. Additionally, hearing parents with hearing children who had no affiliation with the deaf community were drawn to the signing school. These children either spoke English or Spanish and began learning ASL upon enrollment.

¹² The full transition from ASL to written English requires an additional component of engaging in comparative analysis of grammatical structures between glossed and regular English texts. Comparing and contrasting structures between ASL and English enables LCES students to focus on learning about the grammar of English and includes practice in writing and translation from ASL gloss to English.

¹³ ASL does not have written tradition meaning that the content in the signed language has been transmitted orally through stories, poetry, and other forms. Even if ASL had its own writing system, it would not address the question of how deaf students learn to read in English. Students would be learning to read in the signed language only. Thus ASL gloss plays a key

important reading theory concept that is consistent with how ASL operates as a language. The students could read text based on how they sign 'word for word'. Therefore the chance of students of young age comprehending the simple written selections increased, and they were expected to use prior knowledge and picture clues (in the glossed books).

Equally important is that LCES taught phonics through the signed language modality. To meet the Arizona Academic Standards readiness skills: 'Use phonetic skills to decode simple words,' students at the charter school learned about a set of graphemes that represent an ASL sign's handshape, location, and movement. The combination of handshape and location graphemes actually function as consonants, whereas the movement graphemes function as vowels (see Brentari 1995 and 2002 for further discussion on the consonant and vowel distinction in the signed medium and about the ASL phonological theory). Students were taught to decode in ASL, and then translate into English. They used a special bilingual dictionary that listed glossed English words and their ASL equivalents. The ASL equivalents were written alphabetically according to the system developed at the charter school called *ASL-phabet*. This meant that when a student read a string of ASL graphemes representing a simple sign, they decoded the word via their ASL phonological knowledge and predicted what the print word refers to (see Cripps and Supalla 2004 and Cripps 2008 and for further discussion of the reading process involved and how well deaf students performed with the ASL 'letters'). The example for CAT is *C Q H. Made possible through the dictionary and the ASL-phabet, students at the charter school were provided with a way of deciphering English words written in the glossed books. Thus students experienced decoding at the word level with the ASL-phabet and sentence level with the glossed text (Supalla, Wix, & McKee, 2001).¹⁴

4. Remarks on the Critical Theory of Spoken Language Power

With the combination of insights from curricular development at the Arizona charter school and both contemporary and historical accounts of widespread signed language use and proliferation in New Zealand and Martha's Vineyard, the directions for needed social and curricular change are becoming clear. However, we must address the political forces that can undermine the potential for social change, especially for deaf students in the school setting. While many charter schools have been created for the purpose of innovation (e.g., Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001), this innovation does not appear to have penetrated traditional deaf/special education establishments. This leads us to examine the power of spoken language in both socially conscious and non-conscious ways. We use the term, *audism* to identify and describe this social phenomenon that plagues the American education system. The root of the word implies auditory abilities that distinguish the deaf population from the rest of society and typically in a derogatory way. This will be part of our discussion on developing the critical theory of spoken language power, which is at the heart of the questions regarding discourse, disparity, and differences (e.g., see Pennycook 2001 and Tollefson 2006 for further discussion on the use of critical theory in critical language-policy research). We will discuss how 'spoken language power' has spilled over into the field of Deaf Studies. Specifically, we will address some scholars' views concerning Martha's Vineyard and how and why the worldwide deaf communities have been formed. We will also point out the lack of attention on the New Zealand policy on signed language towards creating a social impact on behalf of the deaf community.

4.1. Definition of Audism

Before we proceed, it is important to recognize that the term *audism* is not new, as Tom Humphries first coined it in 1975. The meaning of this term was elaborated in Humphries' doctoral dissertation two years later. Harlan Lane also explored the concept of audism in his well-known book called, *The Mask of Benevolence* in 1992. If there is a sentence to define the term, it is as follows:

role to help realize deaf students' capacity for becoming literate in English. We reason that if English functions as deaf people's written language, it appears that ASL should remain strictly their oral language.

¹⁴ By all accounts, the curriculum at the Arizona charter school is still preliminary and under development. Given that the charter school is no longer in operation, the alternative reading pedagogy introduced in Arizona can still be duplicated elsewhere in the United States. Future work includes the development of normatively rare data in the area of reading development. This includes examining validity and reliability of curriculum-based assessments for the signed language modality (especially in terms of using ASL to teach English literacy).

The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears (Bauman, 2004, p. 242).

It is obvious that speaking and using spoken language is a social problem for deaf children and adults, as they inescapably exist as members of a hearing society. Bauman (2004) proposed that audism can be viewed on three different levels: 1) individual, 2) institutional, and 3) metaphysical. *Individual* refers to a hearing person who does not know any signed language, is oblivious to the needs of deaf children and adults, and maintains the status quo of a speaking society. This fits the classic description of an audist. *Institutional* audism refers to a system responsible for prejudicial actions towards people who cannot hear. Our discussion about the inequalities in the education of deaf students falls into this category. *Metaphysical* audism is more abstract and defined as "the orientation that links human identity and being with language defined as speech" (Bauman, 2004, p. 242; and see his article for further details on the topic of audism). We believe that the spoken language-biased ideology discussed thus far would fit the description of metaphysical audism.

To be sure, hearing individuals are not the only ones practicing audism. Lane (1999) and Humphries (1975) pointed out that there are deaf individuals who have adopted the audist orientation, accepting the idea that people who have hearing ability are better than those who do not. Lane made it clear that deaf individuals who are opposed to the use and teaching of signed language belong in this category. This includes deaf individuals who try to speak as best as they can and refuse to sign. We would like to expand this notion further by saying that audist behavior can also occur in the form of *reverse audism*. By this, we mean that deaf people who use signed language can discriminate against hearing people who know or want to learn and use signed language. This also includes hearing signers who believe that hearing people in general should not learn or use signed language. Reverse audism can result in the loss of support from a group of people, namely deaf and hearing signers who otherwise make significant contributions to the implementation of social change.¹⁵

4.2. Underappreciation of Signing Societies and Socially Inclusive Signed Language Policies

Despite the positive evidence from the experiences of Martha's Vineyard and New Zealand, some scholars in Deaf Studies have had trouble accepting their value as potential models for other contemporary western societies. The general view still holds Martha's Vineyard as 'exotic' and unattainable with regard to deaf Americans in current society. Deaf communities may be predominantly signing, but the research agenda seems to focus on the *deaf* instead of the *signing* aspect. A highly integrated community such as found on Martha's Vineyard would challenge this conceptualization. It is interesting to note that Woll and Ladd (2011), who co-authored an article on deaf communities worldwide, considered the Martha's Vineyard case as part of a *non-western* society. We respond that Martha's Vineyard was very much part of Massachusetts and New England life during the time of widespread signed language use. Nora Groce's (1985) and other related work on the island's history suggest that the socio-political and economic events taking place on the island were very much western and American. Woll and Ladd seem to suggest that deaf people elsewhere formed their own communities out of choice, but we would argue that it was due to the lack of signing capacity among the general population. It was not necessarily deaf people's choice to band together, but more because of their exclusion due to the larger society's failure to embrace and adopt their use of signed language.

In any case, we believe that Woll and Ladd's commentary on Martha's Vineyard (regarding it as a non-western phenomenon) suggests the impossibility of a language modality-free ideology. This is subtle reverse audism in practice – having low or non-existent expectations of our society possibly becoming signing, to the benefit of deaf citizens. Kusters (2010) is another scholar who believes that it is too preliminary to form a theory that accounts for signing communities such as Martha's Vineyard. More troublesome is how the positive attributes of signing communities are downplayed in Kusters' writing, especially her description of Martha's Vineyard not being 'perfect'. Instead, we see Martha's Vineyard as a source of inspiration. We add that Kusters has flawed assumptions concerning the comparison between deaf people and women in her formulation of the deaf community theory as follows:

Although in Western society, women and men do not polarize that much (anymore), there still are physical, social, and psychological experiences specific or typical for being a woman. Likewise,

¹⁵ The same is true for hearing individuals who do not know ASL, but are supportive of the signed language and think it should be confined to deaf people. This reverse audist view is not helpful for facilitating social change.

there are physical, social, and psychological experiences specific for being deaf: also called "Deafhood," a term coined by Ladd (2003). (p. 13)

One must first understand that women have made great strides at integration with men in different aspects of social life (through voting rights, being able to participate in the military service, and so on). Deaf people, on the other hand, have not yet begun on the integration agenda. We believe that Kusters did not realize that deaf people are in great need of an effective platform to pursue integration in the larger society (see Lane 2010 for further discussion on the lack of platform in the American deaf community concerning ASL and Reagan 2010 for its members to take a proactive role in the signed language policy arena). We attribute this situation to the overwhelming power of spoken language in western societies. Literacy is a problem for deaf people as a group, in our opinion. The notion of having the entire society learn and use signed language escapes them. If anything, deaf people have come to believe that signing is a 'deaf thing'. This is consistent with how society perceives signing (especially when signed language issues have been traditionally within the deaf/special education sphere). The way society speaks predominantly becomes a political message forcing the deaf community (led by the National Association of the Deaf, <http://www.nad.org/>) to polarize itself in order to make its point regarding the alternative language modality. Deaf people do not have much choice in this situation when they want to feel and act like humans (i.e., being linguistically and communicatively capable). This does not include the other society-deduced problem that deaf people have not had any authentic reading development experiences. Reading development experiences (such as phonemic awareness and phonetic analysis) are frequently seen as a 'hearing thing'.

In regard to the NZSL policy, New Zealand scholars Reffell and McKee (2009), who compared their country's legislation with a law enacted in Finland for Finnish Sign Language (FSL; Krausneker, 2000), concluded that the Finnish policy is superior to theirs. We acknowledge that the Finnish signed language policy is the most enlightened among the European countries (where the signed language policy movement has been very active, e.g., Branson & Miller, 2008; Reagan, 2006, 2010), but the comparison to New Zealand that Reffell and McKee made is problematic for several reasons. At first glance, the Finnish policy appears quite good. Jokinen (2000) explained that the regulations of the Finnish policy include consideration for deaf children's linguistic rights and of those who are 'sign language users'. The Finnish policymakers extended the description of signers to hearing individuals who use signed language as their 'mother tongue' (e.g., hearing children who are raised in a family with deaf parents who sign; also see Jokinen 2001 for further details on the concept of signed language person). Jokinen thought that this feature allows for a positive connotation with the notion that signing can be included in the general public. This includes hearing parents of deaf children who will need to learn signed language and create a signing environment at home.

However, a key component of linguistic accessibility is still missing for Finland, as signing is limited to hearing individuals who are family members of deaf children and adults. While the NZSL legislation is designated for *all* citizens and is not restricted to those who can or cannot hear, FSL has been recognized as a *minority* language. This status applies to different spoken languages other than Finnish (meaning that the signed language belongs to deaf people of the country, not others). The way the Finnish signed language policy is set up still subtly suggests that spoken language is superior. In terms of linguistic accessibility, Finland does not have the capacity of becoming a Martha's Vineyard, whereas New Zealand does. We detect reverse audism in the Finnish signed language policy with its acceptance of the notion that hearing people in general do not sign and never will. The social consequences are serious as deaf children growing up in Finland may enjoy a rich signing environment at home and in school, but upon reaching adulthood, their transition to society is more linguistically and communicatively disabling.

For us, pursuing the concept of signed language as a minority language – so common in Europe – gives unwarranted power to spoken language. To be sure, the NZSL policy is not perfect, especially with its lack of attention to the education of deaf students. The fact that the NZSL policy guidelines are still in their infancy stages constitutes an opportunity for pursuing deaf students' educational needs further. We expect the same holds true for Finland, where further developments to the signed language policy can be made, especially in terms of creating a more broadly signing Finnish society with FSL viewed on par with spoken Finnish. By this, we mean that Finnish Sign Language belongs to the country as much as Finnish does. The status of FSL as a secondary language will also help clarify how hearing populations are expected to use the language. More work is evidently needed in this area, but linguistic accessibility is unique to deaf populations and needs to be addressed seriously.

We believe that any consideration for signed language policy in any contemporary western country requires a hard look at reverse audism as well as at audism in general. The concept of signed language education with a well-defined reading pedagogy in place offers a clear starting point for meeting the needs of deaf students. This would be part of the universal design in education that demands further exploration. The overarching universal design concept should provide educators and scholars a way out from the vicious cycle of pursuing or maintaining that deafness means something educationally or even culturally. Deaf culture will need to be seen as a *historical* designation for how it prevails based on the society's discrimination against its deaf citizens (Supalla, 2006). This way, the deaf community in the United States and abroad will develop the level of literacy that is shared and reciprocal with the society. Deaf people will emphasize learning and understanding where they come from (i.e., history) and pursue the *new* direction at the same time. What is more, universality of education will be reinforced when hearing students enjoy a stimulating form of signed language education as much as they do spoken language education. One way or another, schools for the deaf will need to be part of the social change. If a small charter school in the United States can align its curriculum to meet the academic standards (with the priority of serving deaf students effectively), then the same holds true for any education system.

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