

Education of Deaf Children in Israel: A case of marginalizing a minority groupⁱ

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Introduction

All children have the right to education that meets their needs and aims to enable them full integration in their society. Education should guarantee all children an equal chance to actively participate in society regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or disability (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Yet sophisticated mechanisms within educational structures marginalize children from poor background, ethnic origins, race, gender and disability to the same social status they were born into (Freire, 1970; Shor & Freire, 1987; Giroux, 1997). This article highlights the characteristics of oppressive education, education that intends to give equal opportunities to all but in practice short cut children from marginalized groups.

Oppression of different marginalized groups, whether political groups, working class groups, racial, national, ethnical gendered groups or ones with disability, manifest similar characteristics. Cases become more complicated when certain children belong to multiple circles of oppressed groups: such is the case of a Deaf Bedouin girl, for example. This article illustrates some of these oppression mechanisms through the case of Deaf education in Israel. It will point out the way Deafness is constructed via education. Critical pedagogy concepts have been applied to analyze the manifestation of these mechanisms in Deaf formal and informal educational systems; while relying on theories of Disability Studies, as well.

The arena of Deaf education in Israel is complex; many changes came about during the past 25 years. Some may be described as progressive, based on human rights—and others as regressive changes detrimental to the recognition of Deaf culture and Israeli Sign Language. This article wishes to expose the various transformative forces that prevent equal opportunity for Deaf students, among them: the negation of language and culture; low expectations placed on students; power relations between hearing caretakers and Deaf clients, stereotyping, prejudices and labeling; and the issue of hidden

curricula. The goal is to address the actual meaning of the current lack of equal opportunity in education and the conditions necessary to transform education to be more egalitarian.

The choice to analyze Deaf education derives from a personal connection to the Deaf community. Kristeva (2006) writes about the exclusion suffered by people with disabilities and the objectification of the disabled. Through her writings, I became aware how the mechanisms of exclusion work both on my son and on me as a mother of a Deaf person. The prejudices and other exclusion mechanisms imposed on my son, his friends, and on me as a mother of a Deaf child, attracted my attention with their similarities to the marginalization of other groups I worked with such as Arab children, children of migrant workers, refugees, children from oriental descent, poor children, etc. I struggled against racism and sexism professionally I taught critical and feminist pedagogy and felt the audism toward my son and me at the same time. The dissonance led me to examine the oppression and discrimination I witness Deaf endure and finally I could name it as audism. (Bauman, 2004)

Approaches to Deaf Education

There are three major approaches to Deaf education: the Oral Approach, the Total Communication Approach; and the Bilingual Approach (Gregory, Knight, McCracken, Powers & Watson 1998).

1. Educators practicing the **Oral Approach** assume that since the Deaf live in a hearing dominated world, their most necessary skill is oral, spoken, language, which helps them to integrate into that world. Therefore, oral communication skills receive the greatest priority under this approach. In educational settings, a great deal of effort is put into teaching the Deaf oral languages: e.g. helping them develop their speech intelligibility, lip reading, and usage of residual hearing. In addition, the Oralists avoid the usage of Sign Language believing that it stymies efforts needed to learn oral skills. The Oral approach aims to prepare Deaf children to function as 'normal' hearing children.
2. Adherents of the **Total Communication Approach** believe that all helpful means of communication should be offered to the Deaf in order to teach them oral and non-oral language capacities: i.e. lip reading, signs, finger spelling and writing. Educators holding this approach advocate a combination of oral language and signs simultaneously, based on spoken language grammar. This method uses Hebrew spoken language and Hebrew syntax (rather than Sign Language syntax) while signs are utilized as crutches to support the oral language.

3. The **Bilingual Approach** assumes that Deaf children live in two cultures, with two languages, and gives Deaf children both Sign Language and Oral language, believing this is best for their language development. Raising bilingual Deaf children is similar to any bilingual education where children use two languages in the process of learning. Bilingual educators believe that positive relationship with the Deaf community is healthy for the development of Deaf children. The contention is that as mature adults they might be able to choose the extent of their association with Deaf and Hearing communities, finding a desired balance suited for them between both worlds. Consequently, they should be given the opportunity to be fluent in two cultures and literate in both Deaf culture and mainstream society (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996).

Each approach portrays a different set of values, positions, and often-contradictory worldviews. The Oral and Total Communication approaches, held mostly by hearing educators and caretakers of Deaf children, draw on a *rehabilitation worldview*: i.e. a worldview that tries to minimize the disability of Deaf people and "fix" them so they will fit into the hearing society. Based on a deficit model that always relates to what is absent (Macedo, 2006), this worldview interplays with the medical approach. Achievements by such "normalizing" approaches are determined by how successful education is at helping the Deaf person adjust to society, erase her/his disability, and in the end make her/him resemble the hearing majority.

In contrast, Bilingualism usually advocated by educators who belong to the Deaf community whether Deaf or hearing, springs out of a worldview of human rights that perceives the Deaf as a minority group which deserves equal rights and acceptance of its culture and language like any other discriminated group. This approach expects the majority to fully accept the disabled and make all services accessible to them. It calls upon the majority to transform itself and to make necessary adjustments required by the minority (Tesler-Lazovik, 2004).

The clash between the worldviews of rehabilitation and human rights creates a conflict regarding the most effective form of educating children with disabilities. In Israel today, the Oral and Total communication approaches still dominate early childhood and primary education. On the levels of high school and informal education, complex processes of transformation are taking place with a tendency toward Bilingualism. This change was initiated with my appeal to the Supreme Court of Justice in 1991 on behalf of my own son. The outcome was a compromising court order with an abiding sentence that forced the Ministry of Education to provide an Israeli Sign Language interpreter to accompany my son in regular classes alongside hearing students.

This process has strengthened in the years since my son's graduation. Trends of using Israeli Sign Language became prevalent in a few high schools, on a university level and in other levels of informal education side by side with the rehabilitation worldview as parallel developments. Israeli Sign Language and the bilingual approach were adopted in these three educational forums for practical reasons; the inclusion of Deaf students in hearing students' classes proved very effective, and resulted in major increase of the Deaf students' achievements in college entrance exams (interview #9, 2013; interview #8, 2006).

The efficiency and effectiveness of the use of Sign Language therefore was not built on an ideological recognition of Deaf culture, but rather on meeting the needs of students in a very pragmatic way. This rise in Sign Language in higher and informal education thus created a tension between the Oralist tradition and the bilingual approach, a tension that still exists.

The Negation of Sign Language

Sign Language is considered the natural language of the Deaf (Meir & Sandler, 2004). In the absence of hearing, the visual channel serves as the most effective means for communication. The Deaf use Sign Language among themselves, even if they are good lip readers. This happens because Deaf people cannot read the lips of other Deaf. Some talented Deaf might successfully follow lip hints. Lip reading can be seen as a mechanism to help the Deaf find their way in the hearing world, yet amongst themselves most prefer to communicate in their natural language - Sign Language.

Sign Language has a distinct syntax, grammar and vocabulary like all other natural languages and it was developed within the community of its users - the Deaf (Lane, 1992). The Deaf invented it as a means for practical communication, not as an educational aid to help them overcome their disability. It cannot be compared to the use of Braille by the blind or the use of wheelchairs by those who are paraplegic. Sign Language is not a crutch for communicating in a spoken language.

Instead, Sign Language represents the creation of a localized culture for a distinct group of people; therefore, Sign Language is different in every country. In Israel, Israeli Sign Language (ISL) is used; in the USA, American Sign Language (ASL) is used; and in France, French Sign Language is used, etc.

In their adulthood, many of the Deaf, even the ones that were educated through an oral modality choose to belong to the Deaf community. While often rejected by the hearing society, they need social interactions with people who are like themselves. The majority of the Deaf in Israel marry Deaf

spouses. They feel more comfortable together; they share a common language; they have similar experiences, history, humor, and nuances in communication that those who hear do not understand. They are a linguistic minority with certain cultural characteristics (Padden & Humphries, 1999).

Contrary to other linguistic minorities, Deafness is not a family matter: i.e. the "tribal" element is missing. It is comparable to the homosexual minority. Like other such minorities, the self-recognition and identity of the Deaf is partially in reaction to the exclusionary attitudes of the majority, its construction as an "other" is used as an exclusion mechanism (Butler, 1990). Concerning the Deaf, this includes the attitude of their hearing caretakers.

It is difficult to comprehend the reality of suffering caused by repetitious rejection in the work place, at home, and in society. Like foreign language speakers, the Deaf are looked upon as strangers and sometimes even as mentally or physically disabled because of their heavy Deaf pronunciation. Such attitudes of the majority often push even those who are hard of hearing into the Deaf community where they do not feel rejected because of their impairment.

Most Deaf individuals are born into hearing families who do not share their impairment. From birth, their experiences are those of a minority because even in their families, family members who can hear surround them. Thus, the experience of "otherness" of the Deaf from their hearing families is more powerful compared to other social minorities because the Deaf are not only a minority in society but in their own families as well (Shoval Ben Zeev in Gor H. and Even, T. 2006). Being with other Deaf people with whom they can interact using Sign Language is the only place where the Deaf do not feel as a minority. Living among others with similar life experiences is essential for developing positive self-perception and self-confidence.

While Sign Language (one of the pillars of Deaf culture and identity), is recognized as an official language in the Scandinavian countries, South Africa, the USA, and among others, it is still not recognized as such in Israel. Its lack of recognition, therefore, represents the most oppressive element in the exclusion of Israeli Deaf culture. Its most pernicious manifestation is in the absence of the use of Israeli Sign Language in Deaf education.

In depriving the Deaf of the use of Sign Language, their easiest avenue for fluent communication, they are unable to develop a real sense of equal existence. The denial of Sign Language in Deaf education by adopting the Oralist approach and the rehabilitation worldview thus abolishes any possibility for Deaf not to feel like a minority even amongst other Deaf.

The Negation of Sign Language in Education

As mentioned above, there has been some improvement in the last 25 years. Israeli researchers Meir and Sandler (2004) published a book on Israeli Sign Language (ISL) that raised its prestige among scholars. They demonstrated what has been proven by research of other Sign Languages that ISL is a complex language with the grammatical rules that characterize every language. It has complex syntax, rich vocabulary, metaphors, idioms, double meanings, grammatical structure, etc.

Three leading Israeli high schools, Yahud, Yagur, and Ort Geula, support students using Sign Language. Yagur even has a bilingual program in which Deaf and hearing teachers collaborate in the same class. The Institute for the Advancement of Deaf Persons succeeded in establishing the right of Deaf students to study in universities with the assistance of Sign Language interpretation or transcribing services paid for by the National Social Security. These achievements opened doors to higher education for many Deaf students (interview #9, 2013).

Despite these efforts, many hearing educators and caretakers of Deaf children still do not see the importance of Sign Language. Many continue to believe it is an obstacle preventing the Deaf from developing vocal/oral skills. Though much research has been carried out in Israel, most of the research regarding development of Deaf children still ignores the significance Sign Language plays in the positive development of Deaf children. Even though Meir and Sandler's research clearly shows that Sign Language meets all the criteria of other languages and is itself a legitimate language, many educators and caretakers of Deaf children continue to believe in the supremacy of spoken language and Oralism. Many also assume that with the recent developments of the cochlear implant and pre-natal genetic detection of Deafness genes, Sign Language is an unnecessary, doomed language. Valente (2011) views these practices as ethnocide and linguicide.

The repression of Sign Language in Deaf education has a long and harsh history (Harlan, 1989; Vickrey Van Cleve & Crouch, 2002), and its roots stem from the 19th century, when the Oralist tradition won a decisive victory in the Milan convention of Deaf educators in 1898. They passed a resolution prohibiting the use of Sign Language in order to enhance lip reading and spoken language, grounded on the philosophy that Sign Language prevents children from learning the dominant language of the majority. In the past, educators smacked children's hands or tied them behind their backs in order to inhibit the use of signs. Though the Deaf community has defied this ban in many parts of the world, its traces still dominate Deaf education in Israel.

The repression of Sign Language today is more subtle than in the past and is based on a hidden curriculum. (Apple, 2000, 2013). Nowadays, it is done through conveying hidden and implicit messages to hearing and Deaf parents and children that using Sign Language equates to educational failure. Furthermore, many teachers encourage and reward oral communication. They view Sign Language as an inferior and limited language and pass this on to children in an indirect way. They regard more highly the children who read lips and do not sign. Children are rewarded if they speak well and are excellent at reading lips by being individually integrated into high academic (hearing) classes. Instead of treasuring the bilingualism of Deaf children who naturally grow into two linguistic cultures, teachers teach them to despise Sign Language speakers. They also incite children placed in hearing classes against Deaf children who are placed in lower academic special education classes, making the Deaf placed in Oralist education settings believe they are superior to the Deaf students who depend on sign language. Teachers use signs only as a last resort when children do not understand the material without the help of signs. In Micha, an early childhood center for Deaf Children located in Tel Aviv, the children are divided into two groups, children who sign (mostly children of Deaf parents) and children who are oral. The children are not allowed to interact with each other even in the play yard (interview #17, 2015).

It is reasonable to think that teachers of Deaf students should have a good command of Sign Language, but many Deaf educators in Israel are not fluent in the language. It is not mandatory for them to know it and currently there exists no proficiency exam for Sign Language in order to obtain a teaching certificate, as is common in other countries. Often teachers know only basic signs; thus, they force Deaf children to read lips, which results in thwarted and clumsy teaching and learning. Without Sign Language, learning does not reach deep levels and Deaf children only understand pieces of complex ideas. Children are often then blamed for having a limited capacity to grasp complex ideas (interview #15, 2015). Thus, teachers who view Deaf students as slow learners with a limited ability to grapple with abstract concepts, narrow down the curricula which is already diluted for the Deaf, and create a situation which then locks the Deaf in an endless cycle of unequal education.

Even Deaf children, who grow up in bilingual surroundings with Deaf parents, receive a school education based on one language, Hebrew or signed Hebrew. Not even a single educational framework offers Sign Language classes for Deaf students the way Hebrew is being studied by hearing students and Arabic is studied by students from the Arab national minority. Some educational institutes have Sign Language classes for interested teachers and counselors, but not for children. Schools that

integrate Deaf students into hearing classes offer a variety of languages as electives, but rarely do they include Sign Language. Furthermore, ISL is not recognized as a second language for matriculation exams, or at universities at any level, whether for B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. degrees.

Sign Language is perceived as being so unimportant that the matriculation exams for Deaf children do not even include proficiency testing in it. Deaf children are not expected to reach any level of expertise in their own language and the only way the Deaf can improve their Sign Language is through interaction with their peers.

In addition, the negation of sign language in education leads to the Deaf having only partial access to different school agents, such as psychologists, administrators, etc. For example, in a well-known school that integrates Deaf children, the school director reported about a meeting that occurred between a Deaf student, her mother, and himself (discussion #2, 2000). In the absence of a trained interpreter, the mother was forced to act as one; however, the director demanded that the mother stop translating because he said it bothered him that the student looked at her rather than at him when he was speaking. The mother objected, claiming that with no translation her daughter would not understand anything. The director said that if the mother did not stop signing, he would end the meeting and her needs would not be handled.

In the same school, during a meeting that introduced the structure of the matriculation exams to the Deaf students, the deputy director could not tolerate the attentive looks of the Deaf students at the interpreter, so he stopped her from translating. He also claimed the students need to look at him while he was addressing them rather than at her. The meeting continued without signs, the students looked at him but did not understand what he was saying, and then afterwards their teachers had to repeat it all over. A Deaf graduate of another school reported a sports teacher that prohibited Deaf girls to sign between themselves because she did not understand (interview # 3, 2002).

Many examples point to the fact that there is much to be done to overcome the common rejection of Sign Language by the hearing caretakers of the Deaf. A director of the main institute that offers services for Deaf children noted in his interview, "Our children are oral, they don't know Sign Language." (Interview #4, 2005). He chose to deny the existence of Deaf culture and Sign Language in order to avoid facing the discomfort of being unable to understand the children's language which would have made him feel inferior: i.e. that the students have a secret language the teachers cannot understand.

A Deaf mother whose five years old son has a cochlear implant and has good command of both Hebrew and Sign Language noted in her interview that while waiting for an auditory check up in the clinic she was approached by one of the audiologists who demanded that she should stop communicating with her child in Sign Language (interview #5, 2005).

A kindergarten teacher of Deaf children who used to sign noted:

Today there is no longer a need for Sign Language; the cochlear implant solves the problem of Deafness. Now, the children with these implants are actually hearing and they are placed in integrated kindergartens in order to improve their spoken Hebrew. (discussion #6, 2005).

Few months later, the national supervisor of Deaf Education in Israel repeated the same argument (interview #6, 2005). Many academic research papers in Israel excessively support the comparison of children with cochlear implant to hearing children, who they often call "normal hearing children" (Weisel & Cinamon 2005, Most & Avinar, 2009, Ziv, Most & Cohen, 2013). They incline to prove the superiority of oral implanted children, which support the Medical approach. The research rarely examines the quality of education and the dilemmas of Deaf culture and sign language; it is basically grounded in the assumptions that sign language has no use for implanted children. Policy makers, researchers and educators don't share the idea that disability is a socio-cultural construction created by interaction between society and people with disability. They look at Deafness as a trait located in the child who needs to be fixed. Thus they contribute to the same social construction of Deafness that nurture their practice defining Deafness as a disappearing deviant body form of low existence that needs to be extinct (Ben-Moshe, Hill, Nocella, Templer, 2009).

The condemnation of Sign Language by hearing caretakers, teachers and decision makers resembles the patronizing attitudes that often characterize a majority population's rule over minority groups (Gramsci, 1971). This conduct connects also closely to pastimes and locations when dominant groups banned certain languages and minority groups were not allowed to use their own language.

In 2006, at the teachers program of Education for Social Justice, Environmental Justice and Peace education, in Seminar ha-Kibbutzim we included Deaf Students with concepts of cultural accessibility. Six of our Deaf graduates are teaching now in various Deaf Education frameworks. For some of them it was a struggle of great aggravation, as the supervisor of Deaf Education refused to employ them with various technical discriminatory excuses. After much hardship they were finally hired. Their presence and activities starts changes and slightly influences the system. It would take time because they need to

get tenure before making major attitude transformations. But small changes are happening already. For example a Deaf science teacher who uses sign language, created in her school a display board of sign language and Deaf culture. Her initiative drew positive attention and was highly respected. She developed good rapport with the home teachers who started listening to her insights with openness and consideration (interview # 15, 2015).

Just as other minority groups have the right to speak their own languages, Deaf children also have the right and are entitled to learn Sign Language as a means for developing their intellectual, emotional and social abilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), in addition to the Declaration of Establishment of the State of Israel (1948), along with the Israeli law of the rights of people with disabilities (1998) guarantees this right.

Since the rehabilitation approach dominates Deaf education, educators and many caretakers of Deaf children do not approve of Sign Language and therefore prevent the Deaf from accessing their language and culture. They do not see that bilingual education of the Deaf falls under the rights guaranteed by the state. Thus, they violate basic human rights, namely, the recourse to freedom of language, education and culture and prevent Deaf children access for equal opportunities.

The Negation of Culture and History

Community gives its members a sense of belonging and continuity, common history, solidarity, connectedness and self-identity. A community that shares a common culture provides its members with the foundation for emotional development that then shapes collective identity through ancient narratives and collective ethos. It helps stimulate inner strength, creative powers and communal development within its members. Though people who can hear rarely think about how many of these attributes are built through the capacity to hear, the Deaf often face the reality of being cut off from their own people due to their impairment.

The Deaf community started to investigate the specific history of the Deaf as minority members of greater communities (Beisold, 2002). Recently, the Deaf in Israel looked into the treatment of the Deaf during the Holocaust. This research is very significant because it creates space for the solidification of the connection of the Deaf collective to the wider Israeli Jewish collective (Savir, at holocaust Memorial Day, April 2013).

Some findings relate that Christian Deaf citizens helped Jewish Deaf members to survive under the Nazi persecution. In one case, a sister of a Deaf person who had a good command of Sign Language saved a Jewish Deaf girl that she met at the concentration camp by translating for her what was going on. By doing this, she helped her to conceal her Deafness (Lindwer and Linszen, 2008). For many, the identity of being Deaf was more powerful than the national and religious identity under the Nazi regime. However, research shows that Deaf collaboration existed, as well.

In 2006, a memorial ceremony was held in Yahud High School to commemorate the Deaf who were persecuted, sterilized, and murdered during the Holocaust. During this event, testimonies were narrated and an historical research report was presented about the Deaf during the holocaust. This was a significant step towards the recognition of Deaf history. Yet, very few of hearing caretakers and decision makers of Deaf education are familiar with Deaf history and the oppression the Deaf minorities suffered. It is not included in history textbooks and not mentioned in history lessons. It is even absent from the curriculum designed for Deaf students (interview # 15, 2015).

Many people do not know, for example, that at the peak of the Eugenic movement, the sterilization of the Deaf during WWII included the German Deaf as well as Jews. Similar sterilization was carried out in other countries: e.g. in the United States, 60,000 people with disability were sterilized between the years of 1927-1970 (Black, 2003). These facts are just a few examples from the historical fabric of persecution the Deaf have experienced as a minority.

However, the Deaf in Israel do not study Sign Language from Deaf community intellectuals; they do not study the laws concerning their rights; and they do not learn about the Deaf in the Jewish community in the past, nor do they learn about the experiences of the Deaf in the present Deaf community in Israel. They become familiar with their customs and activities only through friends' networks. Disconnecting Deaf children from the Deaf community prevents them from creating a link to resources of language, positive self-identity, community identity' cultural assets. Therefore, Deaf children often confront being a minority as a primordial experience of aloneness, devoid of information that might provide a connection to more collective and cultural perspectives.

Academic material is available, such as Shulamit Volkov's (1998) analysis of the history of Deaf in Europe and the USA. Various selections of material exist in English, which could be taught and translated into Hebrew. Oliver Sacks' book, *Seeing Voices* (1989), could be used as a foundational text for the Deaf. Yet, the hearing caretakers of the Deaf deny this history. They ignore the cultural identity of the Deaf community because they adhere to the guidelines of the rehabilitation approach where

constant Sisyphean efforts are made to assimilate the Deaf into the hearing society. The acknowledgment of Deaf culture, in general, and historical narrative in particular, contradicts this worldview.

Viewing Deafness as a culture also contradicts the medical field's perception of Deafness as an impairment that needs to be fixed. Many of the caretakers hold this medical view. This creates ignorance with very pejorative results. For example, an important decision maker of Deaf education policy was overheard arguing with an interpreter who demanded support for the use of Sign Language: "Tell her that soon there will be no more Sign Language that we will be back to the times of sitting on the hands." The genetic prenatal checkups for Deafness and the abortions of Deaf fetuses reinforce the negation of Deaf culture. According to this perception, Deaf culture is a passing episode that will disappear from the world with the medical triumph over Deafness. Deaf leaders in the community see this attitude as another oppressive part of their history.

Hearing Caretakers – Deaf Clients

The Disability Movement uses the saying "nothing about us without us". It challenges the very reality of decisions made for Deaf by hearing caretakers. In Israel, however, Deaf education is not in the hands of the Deaf community. As minorities, Deaf children receive their education mostly from teachers who belong to the majority group, the hearing. Those who can hear make the policy regarding Deaf education. Those who can hear do their placement in the different educational frameworks. Most of the hearing caretakers and decision makers adapt rehabilitation as their basic approach to education as a means for enabling the Deaf to function in a hearing society like "normal" hearing children.

In every educational framework concerning Deaf children in Israel, only a small, negligible percentage of the teachers are also Deaf. Deaf and hard of hearing teachers, either according to the medical definition or the cultural definition, are rarely able to obtain a teaching position anywhere. In the last 10 years, hundreds Deaf academics graduated from different universities. Of these, very few were accepted into the education system. For example, in Tel Aviv's school of the Deaf, there are three Deaf teachers. In Jerusalem's elementary school for the Deaf, there are two more.

Weisel (2005) points out the limited number of Deaf teachers as a possible cause, amongst others, to the low self-aspirations of Deaf adolescents.

People who are not involved in Deaf education find it difficult to understand the rationale for preventing the use of Sign Language from the Deaf. Non-experts of Deaf education who are not exposed to traditional forms of thinking see it only as natural that Deaf education would be bilingual since the children grow into two communities: a Hebrew speaking one and a signing one.

However, the "experts" of Deaf education, who are by and large hearing professionals, adhere to an historical tradition, which see Sign Language as inferior to spoken language. Most professionals believe that Sign Language is unnecessary for children with cochlear implants or those who are talented at lip reading and speaking Hebrew (Plaut, 1994). They realize that some children do not develop any language skills without the use of signs, so reluctantly they give up. They believe that some children's additional disabilities or developmental difficulties prevent them from reaching a proper level of spoken Hebrew. They blame the children, while at the same time they refuse to see the faults in the oral approach and their own educational methods.

Very few view the Deaf as a cultural and linguistic minority (Sacks, 1989). Members of the Deaf community and a handful of academics mostly hold this view. Though much good will and concern are given by professionals towards Deaf education, the field remains dominated by the hearing and the Deaf do not have a foothold. Their control of the educational territory, though it may have good intentions, does not allow the integration of Sign Language or Deaf culture into it.

Adult Deaf professionals do not participate in the decision-making processes that determine the approaches used in Deaf education. In spite of technological developments, internet, early diagnosis, hearing aids developments, a new attitude toward people with disabilities by the judicial system, and the increasing human rights discourse in the general society, still education for the Deaf can be described as patronizing, paternalistic, and coercive.

The condescending attitudes have evolved over the last 10 years, the educational discourse has become more complex, and stigmas and stereotypes that cause low expectations continue to exist. As in other privileged-underprivileged power relations, patronizing caretakers usually lack awareness of their condescending attitudes toward the Deaf. They are full of good intentions and see no faults in their positions; therefore, change comes very slowly.

Most of them devote their lives to Deaf education and are very dedicated professionals with high values and a spirited sense of mission. At the human level, they are devoted, caring and committed to their work. The ability to reflect and criticize their own attitude is impeded by high barriers of

wholeheartedness and one-sided knowledge that shutter their vision from seeing what is so obvious to lay people. They perceive criticism as offensive insults and react with psychological analyses of the criticizers, hearing or Deaf. Thus, the socially constructed normative practices of the hearing caretakers perpetuate the social construction of Deafness as a disability in need of rehabilitation, and block the possibility for equal opportunities.

Stereotypes and Prejudices

Hearing educators' and care takers' attitudes towards the Deaf can be likened to the attitudes of colonialists toward "natives". Their paternalism is mixed with ideological justifications of perceptions that engender stereotyping. The hearing paternalists do not understand the structure of Deaf society; some have not met Deaf individuals as equals but rather as consumers. Since they choose not to see Deaf people as equals, they invent characters or imagine the "Deaf" as being a certain way, thus strengthening the justifications for their stereotypes. This imagined "Deaf" is their point of reference in decision-making and caretaking.

Harlan Lane (1992) in his book, *The Mask of Benevolence – Disabling the Deaf Community*, presents a list of traits attributed to Deaf people in the professional literature. The list, compiled from extensive research and articles of hearing scholars who investigated the Deaf, is so long and general that every Deaf individual could easily be labeled with one of its components. Thus, stereotypical views are reinforced by caretakers' observation of any Deaf person. According to Lane's list, in the eyes of their hearing caretakers, the Deaf are:

Social: childlike, clannish; competitive, conscience weak, credulous, dependent, disobedient, irresponsible, isolated, morally undeveloped, shy, submissive, suggestible, un-socialized. **Cognitive:** conceptual thinking poor, concentration, doubting, egocentric, failure externalized, failure internalized, insight poor, introspection: none, language poor, mechanically inept, naïve, reasoning restricted, self-awareness poor, shred, thinking unclear, unaware. **Behavioral:** aggressive, hedonistic, immature, impulsive, initiative lacking, personality undeveloped, possessive, rigid, stubborn, suspicious, unconfident. **Emotional:** depressive, emotionally immature, lack empathy, explosive, frustrated easily, irritable, moody, neurotic, paranoid, passionate ... (Lane, 1992)

Hearing teachers, who get their training at the university, study a vast body of research articles that present the Deaf this way. They then practice teaching following these patterns of stereotyping. They explain the difficulties they have in teaching through the framework of these stereotypes and tend to lean on them to explain what Deaf students need. Therefore, many of the methods for Deaf education

are built on a paternalistic sentiment that reinforces prejudice and provides self-justification for preventing change.

Stereotypes and prejudices do not remain in the teacher's subconscious but are transmitted by teachers in their behavior towards Deaf pupils: e.g. the way they talk to them, which often includes accusations and acceptance of low achievements; as much as the way that they tend to put them on lower vocational trade tracks. Many of the Deaf internalize the stereotypes inflicted upon them by their teachers. They learn to believe in what teachers transmit to them, and begin to adapt to it as part of their nature.

The achievements of Deaf students in leading academic high schools in recent years, due to the practical acknowledgment of sign language, have improved the percentage of students who complete matriculation exams. Nena Bar, the education coordinator at the Institute for the Advancement of the Deaf in Israel reported that the number of Deaf university graduates has exponentially jumped to over 900 Deaf in universities in Israel (interview #9, 2013). One would expect this change to lead to a transformation of the stereotypical view of the Deaf, but the decision makers of Deaf education still hold the same prejudices. When asked about the performance of Deaf educators, a school director (discussion, 2000) stated that she still prefers hearing ones since "they are more reliable and devoted". She claimed that Deaf educators have "low work moral, that they are childish and irresponsible, and that they lack discipline". When asked whether it could be solved through dialogue, she explained that it is not possible because the Deaf, in general, "lack motivation, are aggressive and impulsive, have no self-awareness, and tend to blame their surroundings rather than being self-critical." Another superintendent asked a new Deaf teacher who she observed and thought to be a good teacher why she doesn't get a cochlear implant, or at list use hearing aid. She did not imagine that the teacher received it as an offensive invasion of her privacy and disrespect of her Deaf identity (interview # 15, 2015).

Another Deaf teacher said:

...they do not really accept me as a staff member, they let me teach 6 hours a week, which is not even 1/3 of a teaching position, so they can say "we have a Deaf" teacher, I am their token Deaf, a Deaf pet (interview # 16).

I do not belittle the difficulties hearing educators face while trying to work together and cooperate with Deaf educators, but I wish to point out that the explanations often given to the phenomena they face are still characterized by the same stereotypes, which Harlan Lane highlights. Too often, caretakers use the power they have in influencing the Deaf reality to perpetuate the stereotypes often attributed to the Deaf community.

Implications of Labeling

Research shows low levels of literacy among Deaf children and adults (Weizel, 1995, interview #15, 2015). The acceptance of the low level of literacy leads to professional tracking later in life and channels them towards lower vocations. Labeling Deaf children as poor readers at an early age contributes to their tracking and drastically encumbers their quest for higher education. They also learn to see themselves through the mirror of their teachers' negative perceptions and internalize them, resulting in a low self-image concerning their academic abilities. Different researchers point out this somber reality in a way that reinforces the stigma caretakers hold (Weizel, 1995).

The above-mentioned research, done in different population shows that the Pygmalion effect that creates self-fulfilling prophecies has very detrimental effects on children. One of the most common existing stereotypes is that the Deaf have low levels of abstract thinking; consequently, teachers decrease the intensity of their lessons. The level of learning drops anyway because of the time it takes for communicating in oral Hebrew rather than using Sign Language. The tortoise-like pace matched with the low level of expectations creates structures that inhibit the Deaf from learning abstract ideas, thus producing a self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1998). What kinds of opportunity are given to Deaf children if teachers label them as incompetent and unable of understanding highly complex material?

Many Deaf children are sent to vocational schools that offer concentrations of vocations such as mechanic, carpentry, simple metal works, etc., but have a very low level of academic concentration. Even though the employment market has undergone a tremendous transformation and many new possibilities exist, vocational schools primarily still offer Deaf students only manual, non-technical—i.e. computer—work. In these schools, where the students have very few choices, Sign Language is permitted and used by teachers, though lacking proficiency. However, these schools have a very low image, and some are under the supervision of the ministry of labor rather than the education ministry. Here, too, the level of expectation is low, and generally so are the achievements of Deaf students.

Contrary to vocational schools, the academic high schools that incorporate the use of Sign Language have opened some high tech programs for the Deaf. Still, in these schools, Deaf students are placed in many classes alone where they do not have the support of their cultural group. Seemingly, the system tries to meet individual needs and offers a large variety of possibilities; but, in the process, the Deaf students are stripped of their community and thus their group power.

Talented Deaf people who follow prestigious professional paths normally find themselves facing a very difficult choice between their social and cultural membership and their professional and intellectual advancement. Having to choose between these two essential components of active membership in society is another form of oppression the Deaf endure. It is an implication of labeling; the Deaf feel they need to choose because often times they are manipulated by caretakers who present this false either/or dichotomy, when in reality there need not be any contradiction. Deaf education of Palestinian Arab minority

Deaf Palestinian-Arab children are trapped in multiple circles of oppression. Arab minority school system is segregated from the Jewish one, except for few places in mixed cities where Arab children go to Jewish school and get Jewish education (Gor Ziv, 2013). In general Arab children get one-third budgets in comparison with Jewish children. This discrimination starts at early childhood and continues through all levels of education (Hasket, Sausan, 2009). It includes Arab children with disability in general, among them Deaf children (Golan-Agnon, 2005). Arab Deaf students seldom enter University. Many times they don't even enjoy their right for education until the age of 21 as the law entitles them. Arab Deaf girls' education ends in many cases after elementary school as some parents prefer to keep them at home and the education system fails to ensure their right for education.

Deaf children in the south used to go to Niv elementary school in Beer Sheva where they got education in Hebrew and sign language. Later on the boys continued to a boarding school, Onim, in Kfarsaba. There, though the expectations were low, they improved their Hebrew and sign language, and got a trade. The girls remained with no education. In the recent years the Niv in Beer Seva closed down. The boarding school where most Bedouin boys studied was also closed. Three new schools for Deaf were established in the south to replace them, in the Bedouin villages of Ksiefe, Tel Sheva and Segev Shalom, the children get mostly oral education in Arabic now, instead of Sign Language and Hebrew education. On one hand it is better since it helps integrating the Deaf children in their own culture. On the other hand the level of study is low, without sign language their achievements are even lower than they used to be in the Hebrew schools that closed down (interview# 12, 2014). In big cities Deaf Arab children continue to study in Jewish schools for Deaf where the main language is Hebrew, such education distances them from their own families and culture.

Unlike the Palestinian Sign language practiced by Palestinians in the West Bank Territories, Israeli Arabs communicate in the same Israeli Sign language used by Israeli Jews. There are only slight local

differences typical to the north and to the south, with the exception of Al Sayyd sign language. Al Sayyd tribe has a high rate of 4% percentage Deaf, a unique Sign Language was developed locally there and became a pilgrimage site for researchers (Kisch, 2004, 2008). The Tribe drew a lot of linguistic research attention, and viewed as a lab of language development within an isolated community of Deaf (Sandler, Meir, Padden, Aronoff, 2005). The scholastic attention did not contribute to improve the education of the Deaf. The institution for the advancement of the Deaf developed empowerment program for Deaf Bedouin women who were deprived of basic education rights for many years (interview # 11, 2014).

In the center of the Israel, an Arab mother of Deaf daughter established in 1992 an NGO that advocated for the rights of Deaf Arab children.

I was appalled when I understood that there was no education for my Deaf daughter. The ministry of education advised me to send her to a Jewish school but I refused. I did not want her to grow up in a different culture. As a village girl this was too much of a difference for her. (interview #14, 2014).

She sent her daughter to a boarding school in Nazareth at the age of six years then she insisted that the ministry of education would open special education classes in the local school in the village. "Nazareth is a Christian city and we are Muslim who live in a village, this was also a big cultural difference" (interview #14, 2014). Her pressure ended up in opening new classes for the all-Deaf children of the nearby villages. Her Daughter, the first Deaf Arab school counselor, credits her for this struggle. She is one of the few Arab graduates with disability, she teaches sign language and Deaf culture, and is a feminist activist for Deaf rights. In the interview she praised the improvement in Deaf education in her village from no schooling at all to systematic curriculum; she complimented her school director for hiring her as a counselor and the staff for accepting her so well. She described her mission in school to strengthen the recognition in sign language since she thinks that the dominance of the oral approach harms the Deaf children achievements and cause their tracking into low scholastic trails where low expectations fixate them in the margins they were born into. Her critic doesn't spare her own society in general and parents in particular for not believing enough in the inclusion of the Deaf in all segments of society. Her frustrated talk was mixed with hope for more improvement through her activism (interview #13, 2014).

Israeli society tends to separate social issues such as poverty, people with disability rights, gender inequality, and children rights etc. from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and see them as unrelated issues. Israeli society often tends to view disability as bad or unfortunate condition. Through many years of

communicating in sign language and interacting with Deaf people I have learnt the great advantages of Deafness. One of them, contrary to the prejudice, is the possibility to communicate cross cultures. Though sign language is not international, people from very different cultures may communicate in signs and understand each other. I had this experience while traveling in many countries talking with Nepali Deaf, Thai Deaf, Deaf in India, in the US, Italy etc. These experiences led me to contemplate on the idea of cross culture discussions between Israeli Deaf and Palestinian Deaf. Together with David Michaelis who were active in Inter-news Middle East we tried to create dialogue groups of Deaf Palestinian and Israeli via internet videoconference. We thought that the Deaf identity, Sign Language and Deaf solidarity would bridge over the national divide. We called it Deaf Dialogue Project and we recruited two schools, one Israeli and one Palestinian. We thought that such project could also serve as a symbol for conflict resolution over obstacles and demonstrate how Deafness could be a positive trait rather than negative one. The project failed because of technological limitations. Bandwidth at the time was not sufficient at that time. The project donated the raised money toward computer acquisition for the Deaf School of Ramallah. Though we did not succeed in it I still believe that the encounter of Palestinian Deaf and Israeli Deaf could teach us all a powerful lesson in communication and conflict resolution. I do believe we have something to learn from Deaf people about visual communication and its force to convey care solidarity and human identification.

Summary

The improvement in high schools regarding the use of Sign Language demonstrated earlier does not flow out of an ideological struggle, but rather from meeting the practical needs of Deaf students. Using Sign Language has proven to be an effective way of enhancing the achievements of the Deaf, thus teachers have slowly become influenced by the results.

Parents testify that their children enjoy interpretation in some classes. However, they also bitterly recall many degrading encounters with caretakers threatening about how devastating the use of Sign Language would be to the future of their children. Still, Deaf children do not study their own language the way other children do: i.e. how Hebrew speakers learn Hebrew. In another school that accommodates only Deaf children the school director allows Sign Language only to assist spoken Hebrew. She forces the two Deaf teachers to use their voice speaking Hebrew rather than sign according to sign language syntax (discussion #10, 2013).

There are many other factors, which make Deaf education very complex in our days. The influence of cochlear implant took back the struggle for acknowledgement of sign language (Blume, 2010).

Yet the law of equality for people with disability demands accessibility in all public services will eventually force the education system to re-evaluate accessibility of education to Deaf via sign language. New technologies such as Google Glass[®] might also someday infiltrate the system offering hope for transformation. But nothing would replace the consciousness transformation that is needed in order to view Deaf children and adult as complete human being, with their own desires, characters, aspirations etc. rather than broken creatures who needed to be mended. Contradicting streams influence Deaf education now, backlash of genetic checkups and cochlear implant on one hand, new Deaf intellectuals entering the education system, new laws that protect people with disability rights on the other. Both reflect different perceptions toward disability, one sees Deafness as impairment to be corrected the other as cultural diversity to be respected and treated under the laws of human right and people with disability rights.

i This paper is a development of the article Equal Opportunity and Oppression in Education: The Case of Deaf that was published in Israel in Hebrew at Iyunim Bachinuch, 1997, 200-219, and in English on the website of the Center of Critical Education, www.criticaleducation.org.il

ii In Deaf studies, "Deaf" with a capital D indicates cultural and social identity, as opposed to 'deaf' with a small d that refers to the physical condition of lack of hearing. In this article, I capitalized all Deaf, as I view this distinction itself as a social construction. Like Susan Wendell (1989, 1996) I refuse to accept this division, from a feminist standpoint, the same way that I would decline a distinction between "woman" and "Women", between "gays" and "Gays", black and Black. This distinction cannot be made clearly as both the physical and the social create the disability. I believe that this cultural distinction signifies the domination of the medical grip over Deaf people, which Deaf criticize and try to struggle against.

iii **Audism** is the belief that a hearing person is superior to a Deaf person because his/her ability to hear. It's the attitude that being Deaf is always negative, that life of Deaf people is miserable and defected. It is a mentality characterized by looking down at Deaf individuals with pity and discrimination. Audism is a form of ableism, discrimination on the basis of disability. Often Audism is practiced by professionals such as physicians, audiologists and educators of Deaf children. Audism is a major reasons for Deaf unemployment.

iv The Institute for the Advancement of Deaf Persons in Israel is an NGO, established in 1993 with the goal to empower Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the society. It struggles to gain equal access to public services available to all other segments of Israel citizens. It has succeeded in achieving better visibility to Deaf rights in society and to sign language accessibility. <http://www.dpji.org/index.html>

v Cochlear Implant is an electronic device inserted by surgery in a Deaf person's head, to stimulate the auditory nerve in order to gain hearing. The device bypasses the non-functioning hair cells of the cochlea and thus enables some hearing to better perceive speech information. This expensive operation is given for free to all adults and children in Israel. Most of Deaf children in Israel are implanted these days.

vi In Oralist dominance atmosphere professionals encourage parents to implant their children. As mentioned before most parents accept this recommendation.

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