

Why Are So Many Deaf Students Mainstreamed vs. Attend Schools for the Deaf? Introduction

In the United States, before the 1960s there were almost 80% of Deaf students attending a residential school for the Deaf. As of 1996 there were only around 30% of Deaf students attending residential schools for the Deaf (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 244), while 54% of high school Deaf students were mainstreamed (Stinson, et. al., 1996, p. 40). The reason for this being the rise and popularity of mainstreaming Deaf students and students with disabilities (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 244-245). The movement for inclusion in special education has greatly affected schools for the Deaf and their population. However, when looking at education for Deaf students people must look at many aspects that involve not only academics, but students' socialization and Deaf culture.

History of Deaf Education

The Deaf community and its input has often been ignored, when talking about Deaf education (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 121). There are very few, if any, Deaf professionals who have a say in the educational and medical fields. Historically throughout Deaf education, from early childhood to post-secondary, Deaf adults are unrepresented in educational fields (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 122). While there are many different ways a teacher for the Deaf can earn their certification, there is not an ASL, or ASL proficiency, certification exam. This can cause communication issues if the teacher is not proficient enough in ASL to communicate with their students (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 144). The teacher certification exams are often held in English, which can be a barrier to Deaf students studying to become teachers, as English is often their second language (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 144).

The first school for the Deaf in America was the American Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, now called the American School for the Deaf, and was founded in 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 17). This school was founded on the use of sign language, and influenced all of the schools for the Deaf that would be founded for the next 200 plus years.

Oralism within deaf education became more popular throughout the 18th century when Samuel Hienick founded the first public oral school in Germany (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 126-127). In deaf education, oralism is the educational belief that Deaf people should not sign, as people believe it deters the development of spoken language, and should only use speech and speech reading as ways to communicate with others. Two oral schools in the United States that are still running today are, the Lexington School for the Deaf in New York City founded in 1865, and the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Massachusetts founded in 1867. Today the Lexington School for the Deaf does incorporate ASL and spoken English in their instruction (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 127). A major person who has negatively influenced Deaf education to present day is Alexander Graham Bell, who was a major promoter of Deaf students learning to use spoken language. Bell advocated for the oral method to be used in schools for the Deaf, and would travel around the country to help schools for the Deaf make the switch to use the oral method.

The event that has shaped deaf education to this day was the Milan Convention in 1880. Countries all over Europe and the United States came together in Milan, Italy to vote on whether or not sign language should be used in schools. By the end of the conference the majority of the members decided to ban the use of sign language in schools. Throughout the next twenty years oralism prevailed in school for the Deaf across the world (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 127).

Throughout the next seventy to eighty years after the Milan Convention the use of sign language slowly diminished in schools for the Deaf across the country. If sign language was used, it was primarily used with older students as behavior management, rather than a language teaching approach. Younger students were often segregated based on their ability to communicate orally or manually (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 127).

Throughout the 1950s and '60s it became increasingly apparent to the educational professionals that the oral method was no longer working as well, as many Deaf children born prelingually deaf. After sign language was recognized as a natural language in the United States during the 1960s, it began slowly becoming a part of schools once more under Total Communication (TC) (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 127). In theory, TC was to include all the forms of communication as possible to teach Deaf students including ASL, fingerspelling, spoken and written English, miming, and more (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 214). However, in realty TC ended up using sign language to accompany a person's speech (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 214). The academic credibility of bilingualism in general education schools helped the process of ASL being reintroduced into schools for the Deaf throughout the 1980s and '90s (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 129). Overall, the quality of deaf education, and the support provided to students and families began with the passing of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973 and the Education of All Handicapped Children (1975), now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA (2004) (Leigh, et. Al., 2022, p. 127).

Deaf Culture

Even though the development of auditory technology has come great lengths within the last century, Deaf individuals still need the support of sign language when communicating with people (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 130). Banning the use of sign language for Deaf children, takes

away their essential language development years. With the movement to educate all children with disabilities starting in the 1970s, there has been major conflict within the hearing and Deaf worlds. The hearing world categorizes Deaf people as having a disability, because they do not have hearing. Medical and educational professionals try to "fix" the problem by giving Deaf children hearing aids, cochlear implants, and having them do speech therapy. However, in Deaf Culture, Deaf people do not see themselves as being disabled, they see themselves as members of a language minority group, with sign language being their native language (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 214). The belief that Deaf children must learn to speak can be very debilitating to Deaf children for many reasons. The first being with so much effort and pressure being placed on the child, there is the chance that the child will have trauma related to being forced through speech therapy for most of their life (Lane, et. al., 1996, 214-215). The second reason is, there is a belief within the medical and educational world that if a Deaf child learns ASL before they learn to speak, they will use ASL as a crutch. So, many Deaf children are banned from using any form of sign language until they are older, which takes away years of vital literacy and language development (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 216). There are many hearing families with Deaf children, who will take the advice of the medical professionals, and will either refuse to have their child learn sign language or completely ban the use of sign language in the household (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 219 - 220).

Factors in Deaf Education

The action of mainstreaming Deaf students in public schools has been rising throughout the educational system since the 1970s. After Public Law 94-142 was passed, parents were given the right to have their child be educated in a public school with hearing students (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 129). There are many factors that can impact a Deaf student's education. Was the child

born Deaf or became Deaf within the first two years of their life, or did they become Deaf later on in life? This impacts the child's language acquisition, and the best ways for the student to gain those language skills (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 122). Another factor is, was the child born with multiple disabilities? For example, a DeafBlind student, who was born Deaf and Blind needs a different form of language communication than a Deaf child with Usher Syndrome who becomes blind later in life (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 122). There is also the fact that, "... numbers of Deaf students from multicultural and multilingual races and/or ethnicities, including DeafDisabled students, have increased in the school system, thus adding even more factors to consider" (Leigh, et al., 2022, p.121).

Parental hearing status also heavily influences a Deaf student's education. Children born to Deaf parents will be able to thrive in both ASL and English, as they have had early access to both languages. However, only 5% of Deaf children are born to Deaf parents, the other 95% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 123). Their access to language will vary greatly based on what decisions their parents make early on in their life. Depending on those decisions the parents make, a child's access to sign language at school and home may differ, such as ASL, Total Communication (TC), and manual codes of English (MCE) (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 123). The child may also only be given access to English, and have no access to sign language at home or school. Deaf students who come from multilingual homes may also have additional linguistic factors. For many students English is not the primary language spoken at home. There are also students who know other dialects of sign language (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 123). Cultural views of a child being Deaf may also cause stigma in the family, and affect decisions on the child's education (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 124). A Deaf student in the LGBTQ+

community will most likely deal with added psychological and emotional stress, for fear of rejection from both their family and peers (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 124).

Research shows that 40-50% of Deaf students have a disability that can affect learning, either intellectual, social, and/or physical disabilities. This can greatly affect how students gain information. Within Deaf education this can mean the student can have, "... alternate communication approaches, school placement, and accommodation within the deaf education system. More often than not, the deaf education system is not accessible and does not incorporate elements of universal design (UD) (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 124). Individualized Educational Plans (IEP), often cause a lot of conflict between professionals and families when discussing where the Deaf child should be educated (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 237).

When settling on the placement and the goals of a child with an IEP, the child must take a number of evaluations. However, for Deaf children these evaluations are not given in sign language, but spoken English, as the professionals who are giving the evaluations do not know sign language (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 237). This language barrier causes many problems, because if the child does not have the proper communication access they will tend to do worse on an evaluation. Which in turn makes the professionals underestimate the ability of the Deaf child. While the parents do have the right to get an interpreter for their child, it is not often exercised (Lane, et. Al, 1996, p. 237). The reason being, "... because of cost and the intimidating and cumbersome nature of the appeals process..." (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 237). Even with the many professionals involved in writing a Deaf child's IEP, there is still no representation from the Deaf world. For the most part when a child's IEP is first written there will be two paths that professionals will suggest the parents take. The first being the speech and hearing path, where speech and hearing professionals focus on the hearing loss the child has and how they want to

mitigate it (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 238). The second being the special education path, since Deaf students are grouped with students with disabilities in the eyes of educational professionals, they will oftentimes be pushed to attend a full inclusive classroom with all hearing peers (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 238).

According to Richard C. Steffan (2004), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) changed the educational system. However, while these high goals were difficult for general education schools to reach and accommodate, they were especially difficult for schools for the Deaf and special education schools. Deaf students have a much different approach to learning than the typical general education student, so changes enacted with NCLB, left many Deaf students and students with disabilities behind (p. 46 - 47).

School Settings in Deaf Education

There are many different options parents have in regards to where their Deaf child goes to school. These placements include: residential schools for the Deaf, day schools for the Deaf, oral schools, or general education school (mainstreaming). The placement of the Deaf child depends on many different factors, many of which were discussed earlier. Politics often also influence where a Deaf child attends school.

Most states have at least one residential school for the Deaf that is offered to Deaf students free of charge (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 134). In a typical residential school, there will be three sections dedicated to an elementary school, middle school, and high school. There will also be dormitories for each of those sections, split into boys and girls dormitories. Students live on campus throughout the school year, and have free access to academics and extracurriculars on campus (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 241 - 242). More and more during present day, DeafDisabled

students are attending residential schools, as they offer a broad array of trained professionals and services (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 134).

Private oral schools provide intensive speech training within academic programming. These schools use a monolingual approach in spoken language, and do not use any form of sign language. Students are expected to have the speaking and listening skills to be mainstreamed by the end of 8th grade (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 134-135). There are also instances where public schools provide an oral program within the school tuition free (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135).

Day schools are often provided within a public school setting, but the Deaf students have their own separate classroom. With the push for full inclusion throughout the 21st century, these classes have been diminishing. If there are students in separate classrooms, they often have a severe disability (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135). Day schools can also be a separate school for the Deaf, usually in larger cities where the Deaf population is larger. In these day schools, the entire school is dedicated towards educating Deaf students. Residential schools may also serve as a day school for some of the students (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 245-246).

In full inclusive classrooms Deaf students are placed in a general education classroom with hearing peers. The students can be provided with interpreters and/or itinerant teachers to help support their learning (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135). While these services make the curriculum available to Deaf students, there is still the possibility that the student will experience delays. The reason behind this is because of the lack of access to language at home, school, or both (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135). Mainstreaming a Deaf student can cover many school settings, including: full inclusion, self-contained classrooms, resource rooms, itinerant programs, and team teaching/co-enrollment programs (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135). The experience in a mainstream setting will look different for every student, depending on their level of need. For the

whole experience to run smoothly for the students, the teachers, administration, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and parents must work together (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135).

In an enrollment program there is a critical mass of Deaf students in a class with hearing students. There are two teachers, one of which is certified in deaf education, and the hearing students take ASL classes to be able to communicate with their Deaf peers (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135). Research about enrollment shows that while Deaf students are still behind their hearing peers academically, this program does provide opportunities for socialization between Deaf and hearing peers (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 136). In a charter school, there may be a mix of ASL-English bilingual approach or a spoken language approach used throughout the school (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 136). In 2013 there were 3.7% of Deaf students home schooled (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 136). Varying reasons a family may home school their Deaf child are, the communication approach, academic support, and/or religious instruction (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 136).

Pros and Cons in Mainstreaming vs. Schools for the Deaf

Supporters of mainstreaming Deaf students state that in a public school, the Deaf students will have a higher chance of social interaction between their hearing peers (Angelides & Aravi, 2006, p. 477). Supporters also state that integrating within mainstream schools helps with oral language skills, the schools have higher curriculum requirements, and have promising results with their social/emotional adaptations (Angelides & Aravi, 2006, p. 477). The major issue that is promptly brought up with mainstreaming Deaf students is socialization between peers or lack of, "In a study of 100 Deaf children who were the only Deaf students at their public schools, the researchers reported they had difficulty in finding friends and social access" (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 135). Mainstreaming Deaf students often does not lead to socialization between Deaf and hearing peers, as Deaf students are often isolated from their hearing peers because they are Deaf

(Angelides & Aravi, 2006, p. 477). In many mainstream settings the students are not included in academic classes with hearing peers. If they interact with hearing students it is often in non-academic classes, such as art or gym (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 248). In some cases, for a Deaf student to be fully included in the mainstream setting they need to meet academic requirements. These students are usually above average in their current academic program and understand spoken English with little difficulty (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 248).

Interpreters are a major factor in the success of a Deaf student in a mainstream setting. There are many problems with educational interpreting including, poor training, conflicts between the teacher and the interpreter on their roles in the classroom, the lack of the academic knowledge taught in the classroom, and inherent delays (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 265). Across the country there is no state level census on what standards interpreters need to be able to meet, so the level of knowledge and skills that each interpreter has can greatly vary (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 257). This is especially true with educational interpreters. There is no standard for how much the interpreter needs to know about the topic they are interpreting, what skill level they are at, and if the Deaf child uses the same form of sign language (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 258 - 259).

Interpreters can gain training and certification in both ASL or one of the MCEs, and many educational professionals who are hiring interpreters for schools do not know the difference and have no qualifications to determine the person's skill level. One of the end results is, the Deaf child could get an interpreter who is not fluent in the same form of sign language as they are (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 258).

There is also the issue of boundaries that can change how much authority the interpreter has over the Deaf child, especially if the interpreter is also acting as a tutor to the child as well (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 260). The interpreter can be given the authority to remind the student of

finishing homework, tutor both Deaf and hearing students, be a class aide, and mention problems the student may have to the appropriate individuals (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 260). Giving authority to the interpreter now means that the Deaf students have two authority figures in the classroom, instead of just the one authority figure that the hearing students have (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 260). With socialization between Deaf students and hearing students, especially when the students are older, they are not going to want to discuss many topics when there is an interpreter present, because they are seen as that authority figure. This could mean that the Deaf student is left out of crucial bonding moments they could be having with their hearing peers (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 261).

Even if the interpreter has all of the right training, and is a terrific interpreter, they might still have trouble keeping up with the fast-paced environment of the classroom. This leaves the Deaf students behind, because the interpreter can only interpret one person at a time. This can happen both academically in the classroom, and socially between peers (Stinson, et. al., 1996, p. 42). One of the ways to help mitigate some of the pacing issues between the teacher and the interpreter, and the students and the interpreter is communication between all parties. If the teacher and students know how best to help make communicating with the Deaf student easier and better, the easier the flow of communication will be (Stinson, et. al., 1996, p. 47).

The drawback of residential schools can come in the form of academics. As a result of the oralism method spreading throughout schools for the Deaf in the late 1880, the expectation and curriculum for Deaf students lowered drastically (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 241). In a generalization of residential school, this can still be seen in residential programs today, as the curriculum and student expectations can still be much lower than the curriculum and student expectations in general education schools (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 241). This means that many

students who attend a residential school do not or are not able to attend post-secondary schools (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 243). Research shows that Deaf students who are mainstream have higher academic achievement than Deaf students who attend schools for the Deaf (Angelides & Aravi, 2006, p. 477). Some of the reasons behind this are because the residential schools are often so isolated from general education, they do not gain the insight to include new strategies of general education into their curriculum. They also may lose insight into what the students at the general education schools are learning at a specific grade level (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 243).

The major things that residential schools provide to Deaf students are a mass of Deaf adults and mentors to look up to, and early exposure to sign language (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 134). They also provide students with comprehensive programming in academic, vocational, and sports areas, and other after school activities and extracurriculars. These extracurriculars can include sports teams, social clubs, drama clubs, class government, and junior National Association for the Deaf (jr.NAD) clubs (Leigh, et. al., 2022, p. 134). The Deaf adults and mentors are usually non-teaching staff, because of the difficulties that Deaf people have at receiving teaching certifications, such as dorm staff and other necessary faculty that keep boarding schools running (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 244). In many instances for both Deaf and hearing people, when they reflect on school they don't remember the curriculum they were taught, they remember the social aspect of it all. This is especially true for Deaf people, who's school experiences may not have always been positive. For many who are mainstreamed, they reflect the feeling of loneliness and solitude as the only or one of the only Deaf students at their school. They often experience bullying and isolation from peers, and may be singled out by their teachers in humiliating ways. However, for the students who attend schools for the Deaf and/or separate classrooms for the Deaf in a public school, they have other Deaf students who they can

form a connection to. It does not matter what method of instruction the school uses, the students are always able to form connections between themselves because of their shared experiences.

Day schools for the Deaf often have the same amount of disadvantages that residential schools have, but not the advantages of the students being able to interact with other Deaf adults outside of school (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 246). They also have the disadvantage of commuting students long distances to get to school. Because schools need enough Deaf students to make a program successful, that usually means that students are transported from all over the surrounding area of the school (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 247). The maximum time a student can spend transporting to school is one hour. However, this means that the students often do not have the time to do extracurricular activities, and families have little time to bond to one another (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 247).

In both residential schools and mainstream settings, the drop-out rate for Deaf high school students is extremely high at an estimated 29%, with one out of every five students who do graduate only leaving with a certification and not a diploma (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 255). The following are the drop-out rates of Deaf students in different educational placements: residential school - 17-23%, integrated setting in general education school - 37%, self-contained classroom - 54% (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 255).

Under IDEA and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Service (OSERS) many professionals see residential schools for the Deaf as "institutions", therefore blocking it as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for Deaf students to start in (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 231). However, for many Deaf people these residential schools for the Deaf are a gateway into the Deaf world and Deaf Culture, opening many possibilities to them as students and future members of society (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 231). With the passage of IDEA, many early

intervention services for students with disabilities and Deaf students were founded. There are very few early intervention services that are catered directly for Deaf students, as residential schools are not always the best fit for younger students. This means that the Deaf students are usually placed in an early intervention, and sometimes elementary school, with students with disabilities (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 233). While the teachers may have the training to successfully teach students with disabilities, they often do have the training to teach and communicate with the Deaf students. This means that the Deaf student(s) are surrounded by peers and teachers who are able to freely communicate in spoken English, while they will most likely have limited access to spoken English (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 234).

There are also the instances where a Deaf student may be placed in a classroom with severe learning and/or emotional disabilities, because of the student's ability to speak. This can cause the student to be greatly underestimated academically, cognitively, and socially (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 234). There are many state funded residential schools for the Deaf that offer programs from infancy through high school. However, because infant-parent programs fall below the IDEA age requirement of 3 - 21, there are many that are underfunded (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 234). Studies show that early intervention programs that combine the cognitive-academic approach and the use of sign language reach higher academic achievement than programs that focus only on articulation skill (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 236).

Politics Behind Student Placement

When discussing deaf education programs, and who is involved in creating those programs, there is a realization that over 95% of the professionals who create programs for Deaf education are hearing (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 238). The hearing professionals will most likely not take into account the voices from the Deaf world and Deaf culture (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 238).

There is also the case of the school districts not wanting to put forward the money to pay for the students to attend programs that are not of their own creation, or give the students the services that they rightly deserve, even though it is federal law (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 238-239). Parents can contest the decision of the professionals, and go to court, but the results may still be the same. Not only are the parents most likely isolated in their endeavor, but the professionals who will be making the decision are likely other special education professionals who may share the same views as the original special education professionals (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 238).

In one Supreme Court case that is mentioned in, *A Journey into the Deaf-World* (1996), Amy Rowley was a Deaf child in a general education classroom, and was functioning at grade level without an interpreter. When Amy's parents requested an interpreter, as they thought she could do even better academically if she had access to one, they were denied because of the cost of an interpreter. The parents contested, and the lower court ruled in favor of the parents, stating that an interpreter is what would make the classroom fully accessible (Lane, et. al., p. 238). However, on appeal to the Supreme Court, while the Court,

Affirmed that children with handicaps have a right to receive the services they need to benefit from their education; however, the Court ruled that Amy herself did not need an interpreter since she was doing all right without one. A majority of the Court ruled that Congress did not intend to give children with disabilities a right to "strict equality." (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 239)

Conclusion

When looking at the education of Deaf children, professionals need to look at the students and what's best for them. Are the students gaining the education they deserve? Are they developing social skills with their fellow peers and teachers? Sometimes, full inclusion may not

always be the best answer for a Deaf student, other times it is. There are some Deaf students who thrive in a mainstream setting, but there are others that need the support that schools for the Deaf offer. The important part is finding the educational placement that works best for the student. A quote in *A Journey into the Deaf-World* that drives this thinking is, "Thus, for the young Deaf child, inclusion does not mean being included or integrated. For all children, being truly integrated means having access to one's peers and to one's teachers" (Lane, et. al., 1996, p. 265).

Resources

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