

Keynote presentation

Introduction

When Paul first asked me for a title for this talk I, without giving it much thought, said 'Is an understanding of deaf history important?'

It seemed a good title at the time but when I came to think about it, I was not so sure.

I am all too aware that there are currently many pressures on teachers now, that the diverse areas teachers of the deaf cover are great and there are other pressing concerns apart from history

However, I would like to suggest that knowing about the history of how various practices came about is important, for it helped me understand what was happening.

What I would like to do is first of all to present three examples from deaf history, to think about why in the past deaf education was different and how things have changed and are changing

I would like to start by looking at various events and practices in deaf education and think about how various changes came about. I would also like to reflect on who makes the decisions

Topic 1

The education of deaf children in the 1950s.

Film: This film was released in 1952. It was based on novel by Hilda Lewis, published in 1946, she was a recognised novelist but also wife of Prof MM Lewis who was professor of education at Nottingham university,

Michal Lewis had interest in deaf children's language development, assume his interest was source for this novel.

About deaf girl Mandy growing up. Her mother upset at her failure to develop, her isolation from other children and took her to boarding school,

The film was partly filmed at Manchester school for the deaf. Children then had to board. Film interesting though mainly about something completely different.

Lucky to have it as much of it filmed in a school for the deaf, Manchester.

Focuses on how to make deaf children aware of sound.

No hearing aids, shows how to get deaf children to be aware of sound, and distinguish sounds.

Issues: Involved children leaving their home and family as education primarily boarding. We cannot say whether this was good or bad, but interesting to note how listening encouraged

DVD about Mandy taken from home at age 2 years and boarded. Attitude to importance of family and home different in 1950s, e.g. hospitals which would take ill child at the entrance, and hand them back after treatment.

Topic 2

1960s-70s Attitudes to language and communication in deaf children (pre signing)

Interesting that if you look at the information available about having a deaf child in the 1960s and 70s it was largely provided by men who were either doctors or academics. However, the day to day care of deaf children was by mothers. In schools while most day to day teaching at the younger ages was by women. The people who were largely occupied in looking after deaf children were women, a number of whom felt they had to protect their husbands from the deaf child. A major issue which I feel is of concern is the attitude to language development and the emphasis on speaking and not using sign or gestures. Notice the use of the word sign, although it was rarely referred to as sign language.

Quotes from literature of the time.

The use of signs is a very primitive form of language and creates a barrier against correct and fluent communication between adult and profoundly deaf child; it is an easy way out for the adult and expects very little in return from the child. Fry 1964

It is impossible to recognise the acquisition of a sign language as a good alternative (to a spoken language) ~it is not a verbal language. Ewing and Ewing 1964 (unusual in that it talks about sign language)

A child who signs 'bed me there' instead of saying 'My bed is there' is leaving out two important words and confusing 'is' and 'in', is confusing 'me' with 'my' and puts bed first instead of second. This jumbled way of thinking becomes so ingrained that if he persists with signs, he will have great difficulty in both reading and writing. He must learn as soon as possible to say complete phrases and sentences. Dale 1967.

If you want your child to talk in a normal way you must speak to him as you would to any young child, not in an unnatural manner. If you persist in using gesture or pantomime, he will not take the trouble to learn to talk. He will imitate you and learn that it is easy to get what he wants by gesturing...in order to compete and conform as an adult good speech is essential. Ling 1968

Many mothers were disturbed by this view. I interviewed parents, usually mothers, in the 1960-70s. NDCS project. 122 mothers Wanted to know what parents thought rather than professionals. Two thirds thought, despite the advice they had had not to use gesture that it was necessary. Some even disapproved of any gestures or signs although they thought that you had to, there was no choice. A couple of quotes will do.

Two from enthusiastic or accepting mothers

Boy 4 years profoundly deaf

Oh, I don't mind gesture, I think if they can understand anything it's better than not understanding at all. Anything's better than nothing

Girl 3 years severely deaf

Yes, we gesture because I can't tell when he's thirsty and that. I mean if she wants a drink, she's got to tell me somehow.

But from a mother who uses gesture although she feels she should not.
Boy 5 years moderately deaf.

I try not to but sometimes you just forget. Especially if I'm doing something, if I was washing or baking and I wanted him to fetch his trousers, say his trousers to be washed. I'd say upstairs and trousers, do this business (she mimes) I try not to but if I am washing, I forget and do it.

While I have said it was the influence of male professionals there were exceptions. One was Freddy Bloom who published a book 'our deaf children' about her daughter Virginia in 1963. She was wanting to get away from sentimentalism and felt you should communicate in any way you could.

'Our job is to make them want to learn to make them read and listen and do things... The task can easily become a tiring, frustrating, nagging bore for the parents and the child. One of the few reliefs lies in the excitement of new ways of intriguing the child and putting across new concepts and ideas.' P84

Topic 3

80s and 90s Introduction of cochlear implants Cochlear implants

History, although may be some people here who have not experienced deaf education without implants.

It is difficult now, when cochlear implants are so much a part of the provision for profoundly and severely deaf children, to appreciate that in the 1980's when paediatric implantation was first introduced in the UK, they were so controversial. There were debates about whether they had a place at all in provision for deaf children, whether prelingually deaf children who had never heard language could benefit from them and whether they should be used with deaf children before they were of an age when they could be involved in the decision making.

Issues emerged in a number of areas. Firstly, there were concerns about the fact that deaf children were not ill in the accepted sense of the word, it was an elective operation and not one that was a response to a medical condition. Secondly, it was an issue because it was perceived to be an operation on a particular part of the brain and there was a possibility of damage to the facial nerve. In fact, the operation is to surgically implant a cochlear implant array into the inner ear structure, the cochlea, which in surgical terms is a long way away from the brain.

A third area of concern was the lack of knowledge about the benefits of the cochlear implant; would implantation improve language development, what was the extent of the remediation that would be involved, and what were the long-term consequences of having this foreign body, the implant, in the cochlea?

A further concern expressed mostly, but not only, by the Deaf community was the way in which cochlear implants reinforced the idea that deafness was a medical condition, the medicalisation of deafness. The Deaf community had for some time argued that deafness was

part of their identity and that Deaf people formed a linguistic and cultural minority group (Padden 1980). They asserted that they should be seen as different rather than deficient as they had their own fully developed language, their own history and their own culture. The introduction of cochlear implants endorsed a notion that deafness was an illness, requiring treatment, rather than an aspect of a person. The Deaf Community also felt that the introduction of implants placed too much emphasis on spoken language. This could be to the detriment of sign language which was at that time undergoing a revival in deaf education through the introduction of bilingual programmes.

Briefly, Sue Archbold talks of the introduction of implants in the Nottingham area saying that opposition to implants did not come just from deaf activists for some the depth of feeling was great as reflected in the protests that arose. A conference in Nottingham, home of the Nottingham Paediatric Cochlear Implant Centre, found its walls had been daubed with graffiti saying 'death to those who kill our deaf children' (Archbold 2010). The Federation of Deaf People (FDP), an organisation dedicated to campaigning for British Sign Language, set out its 'Reasons not to have a cochlear implant' in its magazine. These included

Medical professionals are under the illusion that they are helping us when in reality they are alienating us.

The cochlear implant is the latest in technological weapons to conquer and divide deafness

The cochlear implant is sensory imperialism (The Voice, 2000).

These were circulated at a lecture given by a surgeon, and onlookers at FDP protest marches

But early on, reservations also came from more mainstream organisations, including some of the major charities working in the field of deafness. In 1988, Harry Cayton, the then director of the National Deaf Children Society (NDCS) wrote 'A consensus seem to be developing in Britain at least that born deaf children should not be implanted at all, but that some post lingual deafened children may be suitable' Cayton (1988). In November 1989 The Sunday Times reported that

A new 'bionic' ear implant that could bring hearing and speech to totally deaf children is being blocked by one of the major charities for the deaf. Hundreds of totally deaf children in the United States, Australia and West Germany are already learning to hear and speak thanks to an operation to implant the device. But in Britain, opposition by the National Deaf Children's Society could prevent it becoming available on the NHS.

Later sections

Hearing influenced

1. How deaf education dominated by hearing education
2. Have we ever thought about what would be the best system of education for deaf children?
3. These issues may not concern you now but raise questions about deaf education.

Website.

4. Website gives multiple perspectives not just single ones.
5. Response to website on spoken language, Ling

I shall also talk a bit about the importance of an account of deaf history, and why personal experiences are as important in understanding our past.

Quotes

Contrast with the miracle cure.

6. Cochlear implants; recent history, NDCS totally rejected them, demonstration outside Nottingham conference.

In this past but was a time your present will be history