**Fifty Years on – and Still no Resolution: Deaf Education, Ideology, Policy and the Cost of Resistance**

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**Abstract**

This article proposes and develops a model of teacher resistance based on interviews with eleven teachers employed in a school for the deaf that operated an oral teaching policy up to 1979. It focuses on the relationship between the reified structures in deaf education and individual agency. Teachers had to negotiate tensions between how they were instructed to teach and what they felt was best for the students in terms of language, cultural identity and community membership. Costs of collusion and resistance, and the pertinence of these issues in the context of current discourse around speaking and listening are discussed.

**Introduction: Conformity and Resistance**

This article focuses on the relationship between the ideology governing deaf education and the individual agency of teachers in a school for the deaf over four decades in the twentieth century (1940s to the 1970s). During that period, the rigid adherence to a policy of oralism meant that the use of signing in the classroom was suppressed. We explore the implications for teachers - some of whom resisted the policy of oralism, some of whom conformed. We explore their feelings decades after the events, highlighting both the professional and emotional risks resulting from conforming or resistance. We argue that this should not be viewed as a merely historical phenomenon, but as a process that remains highly relevant to contemporary teachers, working in any sector of education. With regard to deaf education, the authors believe that tensions still remain between externally-imposed notions of what is best practice for educators and the ethnographic views now emerging from within the deaf community itself.

While there are occasional instances of successful resistance to dominant policies in schools (see, for example, Smith, 2020), they remain relatively rare. For teachers who feel

they have little voice, and/or have lost confidence in the policies and pedagogical practices of their institutions, the choices are restricted (Ball & Collet-Sabé, 2021; Moore & Clarke, 2016). One form of resistance can be to leave the profession (Hirschman, 1970) and those who are more experienced and do so might be termed as *invested leavers* (Glazer, 2018). Others may choose to remain, resisting through acts of overt (Thomson, 2008) or covert opposition (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). This can involve complex behaviour of compliance and subversion (MacBeath, 2008), in which consent may be simulated (Thomson, 2008).

As education is becoming increasingly influenced by neoliberal politics (Hall & Pulsford, 2019) the behaviour of teachers is increasingly being controlled and standardised and Giroux (1988), for one, advocates that teachers should resist neoliberal overtures and become 'transformative intellectuals,' focusing, instead, on producing curricula suited to the cultural and social contexts of where they teach.

In order to understand the power dynamics in school, we have used an eclectic collection of theorists on power and resistance. This has been useful in helping us to understand the forms of teacher resistance through different lenses. Foucault's (1998; 63) ideas, for example, help us understand that "power is everywhere" not simply in structure or agency. With regard to the relationship between power and knowledge – and specifically, how those in power shape knowledge to determine what is accepted as 'truth', it is important to remind ourselves of his views on discourse. He depicted discourse as producing, transmitting and reinforcing power, while also making it fragile, "possible to thwart" (Foucault, 1998: 101, 102). While not conflicting with this, Hall's focus on discourse feels, subtly, different. Both are concerned with the production of knowledge through discourse, not only through writing and speech, but also practices and conduct, but Hall's interest in encoding and decoding led to greater concentration on the scope for negotiation and opposition (Hall 1997; 2001). Our study, while welcoming Foucault's ideas on resistance as a form of power that can be productive, recognises that he underplays intentionality (Caldwell, 2007; Gaventa, 2003) and does not include moral imperatives or political possibilities for changing the world (Caldwell, 2007; Woermann, 2012). In other words, Foucault's project neglects the idea that change may happen simply because someone wants to make a difference. Giroux, on the other hand, encourages this approach. There are subtle differences.

For Giroux (1983: 103), oppositional behaviours are "produced amidst contradictory discourses and values." Resistance, however, although an oppositional behaviour in itself, "has a great deal to do with …the logic of moral and political indignation" (Giroux, 1983: 107). The key difference between oppositional behaviours and resistance, according to

Giroux (2001: 110), is that resistance has "emancipatory interests." In this assertion Giroux was embracing Freire's (1970) injunction that teachers should demonstrate a loyalty to marginalised communities and that they should, therefore, develop a praxis that helps these communities understand and resist oppression and foster social transformation.

This pragmatic approach in helping us come to an understanding of resistance and conformity in teachers also includes Hall's (1973) Reception theory, which seemed particularly pertinent in a research context of (what were perceived to be) oppositional, mutually antagonistic linguistic options. Although focusing on how media encode meanings in messages, the receiver decodes these messages according to their own perspectives and ideals, which may be different from the intended meaning of the sender:
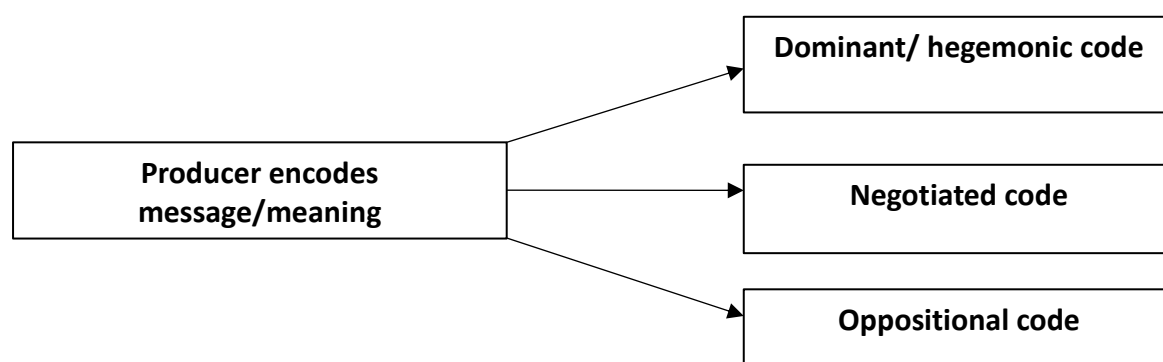


**Figure 1: Hall's (1973) Reception Theory**

At first sight, it may seem rather incongruous to refer to a model designed for linguistic and media contexts; nevertheless, it seemed to correspond closely to the responses of participants in this study. Hall (1973) proposed three ways in which messages in the media were decoded: dominant hegemonic code; negotiated code; oppositional code. These decoding strategies could be seen to be mirrored in the way the participants in this study reacted to the tenets of deaf education: they could conform to the oralist practice of the time; they could occasionally engage in oppositional behaviours when they recognised contradictions in their practice; or they could exercise resistant behaviours with a view to changing their pedagogy for the emancipation of the students.

Finally, we considered the more specific contributions of Scott in the 1990s and Hirschmann twenty years earlier, as both pertain to specific notions which we felt to be relevant. Scott's (1990) work on public and private transcripts has resonance in this study

because teachers inhabit both public and private spaces. Scott (1990) looked at power relations in terms of both public and private transcripts. Public transcripts are those acts and practices that are enacted in the open between the dominant and the oppressed. Private transcripts, however have a "restricted 'public' that excludes – that is hidden from – certain specified others" and that the frontier between these public and hidden transcripts "is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate – not a solid wall" (Scott, 1990; 14). Resistance then, is not a lone thread but is intertwined by periods of submission, mirroring Hall's (1973) concept of negotiated code. Hirschman (1970) argued that there are two types of responses to unsatisfactory conditions in one's workplace, fight it (voice) or run for it (exit).

Perhaps, it is not surprising that there has been a paucity of literature over the years about the costs to the individual teacher ensuing from acts of conformity or opposition. Choices about pedagogical method and content tend to have been made externally, with little, if any, consultation with those at the *chalk-face*, and topics such as retention and attrition among teachers remain under-reported (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). The era in which those participating in this research worked was one that did not encourage professional reflectivity. As noted by Hargreaves & Tucker (1991), there were far more studies of teacher *thinking* than teacher *feeling*.

The authors wish to discuss examples of resistance shown by teachers in a school for the deaf in the 1960s and 70s. In order to situate the pressures on staff to conform to the oral policy and, therefore, opportunities to resist, a brief history of deaf education in Britain will help describe the context.

**Historical Context: The Education of Deaf Children in UK Schools**
Two methods of educating deaf children influenced UK provision. The first was what was known as the French Method. The Abbé de l'Epée, after being introduced to two deaf sisters, opened the first public school for deaf children in Paris in 1760 and he used the local French sign language to educate these children. Samuel Heinicke, sometime later, opened up a school in Saxony in 1778 where he taught the deaf students how to speak, initially using flavours on the tongue to induce students to make specific sounds. His method became known as the German Method.

The first school for the deaf in Britain was opened by Thomas Braidwood in Edinburgh in 1760 who then moved it to East London in 1783 (Löwe, 1990). Braidwood used

the French and German methods together, a combined approach involving manual signs and finger-spelling as well as rehabilitating students to the spoken word (McLoughlin, 1987). Sixteen deaf charitable schools opened up in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, mostly residential schools, which generally used the combined method. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, the teaching of speech declined and the manual approach of using both finger-spelling and sign language grew (Markides, 1985). As these institutions were largely ignored by central government throughout much of the nineteenth century, they led largely isolated and independent existences (Woodall, 1882). The winds of change began when the Baroness Mayer de Rothschild founded a school for deaf Jewish children in London and, in 1868, invited William van Praagh from Rotterdam to teach in the school using oral methods. The successes he achieved in getting the deaf to speak prompted the Baroness to make attempts at solidifying oralist methods in Britain which she did when she founded the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (1872), followed six years later by the foundation of the Society for Training Teachers of the Deaf and for the diffusion of the German System (Farrar, 1923). As their names suggest, both organisations were committed to the oral system of deaf education. Oralism was about to become the dominant force in Britain that culminated with the resolutions that would be adopted from the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf in Milan in1880.

The school selected for this study began in 1826 and used, like many other school of the time, a combined approach. The school adopted the oral only method of teaching deaf children in 1883 in the wake of the Congress of Milan (1880), which announced "the incontestable superiority of speech over signs" (Grant, 1990; 8). The significance of this announcement proved influential in the decision of many deaf schools to discard sign language and embrace an oral only approach. Essentially the oral policy was a medical assimilationist model that that has been described as "an all-encompassing set of policies and discourses aimed at preventing [deaf children and their parents] from learning or using sign languages to communicate" (Ladd, 2003; 7) with its emphasis on the development of spoken language and literacy skills (Knight & Swanwick, 2002) as well as lipreading and the use of technology, including hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices (McCracken & Sutherland, 1991).

It should be emphasised that the Milan conference was, in many ways, merely the culmination of a growing cultural rejection of sign in favour of speaking and listening that had its roots in seemingly unrelated disciplines and developments. Medicine, for example,

was now focusing on normality rather than health resulting in the deaf being treated by doctors, in the main, "not as patients but as pathological specimens" (Hodgson, 1953; 117).

Since the 1860s, popular fears relating to the impact of Darwinian theories and eugenic concerns also filtered into discussions on deafness (Anglin-Jaffe, 2013a; Baynton, 1993; Esmail, 2013; Woll & Ladd, 2003). The use of sign language was regarded as a throwback to a former era of humanity, whereas oralism symbolised human advance. After the congress of Milan sign language was forced underground (Bates, 1985). In fact, such was the antipathy towards sign language after this period that one writer felt able to declare that "everyone ... regards [signing] as the arch-enemy of language" (Story 1929: 41). Everyone, perhaps, except the occasional teacher and some of the students themselves. Student resistance to oralism, through the continued use of sign, has been well-documented (Anglin-Jaffe, 2013b; Craddock, 1991; Deuchar, 1984; Ladd, 2003; McDonnell, 2016; Stokoe, 1960). Although the deaf schools in Britain officially used the oral method of teaching during this period, they also functioned, paradoxically, as the main channel for the transmission of sign language and deaf culture. It has even been suggested that each school for the deaf had its own distinct variety of sign language (Deuchar, 1984) which was transmitted from child to child and generation to generation as part of an evolving and richly varied deaf culture (Stokoe, 1983).

A discourse that some histories of deaf education have as its central theme is the colonisation of the deaf (Branson &Miller, 2002; Ladd, 2003; 2008; Lane, 1992; Lewis, 2007; Stone, 1996; Woll and Ladd, 2003). Ladd (2003) has argued that the use of colonial type models to interpret the marginalised status of deaf people in society is a useful one.

The main colonial features in deaf education were the imposition of speaking and listening, or lip-reading (McDonnell, 2016; Silvers, 1998a, 1998b) and the banning of sign language, sometimes the student's preferred language (Anglin-Jaffe, 2013b; Lane, 1992). Also, the colonial notion of 'othering,' a process by which empires define themselves against those it colonises, excludes and marginalises (Ashcroft et al., 2013). Othering in the context of deaf education is a form of social oppression based on marginalising differences in which deaf people are labelled as inferior and are excluded from social power and cultural life (Israelite et al., 2002). These notions of differences are also coupled with issues of power (Brice & Strauss, 2016), for example the discourse of normalisation that promotes assimilation (Boréus, 2007). Assimilation may seem to be a positive step forward but when the cost is de-emphasizing difference, different barriers to true integration appear.

The discourse of assimilation is concerned with bringing deaf people into line with the idea of the 'normal mode.' For deaf people, this means bringing them into the fold of hearing society through the use of speech and the use of assistive technological devices such as hearing aids and latterly cochlear implants (Power, 2005).

The increasing bureaucratisation of the education system, in the nineteenth century, was also a significant factor in the adoption of oralism.

> *One can best understand specific influential moves such as the Milan Congress by exploring the interweaving of industrialization, imperialism, bureaucratization, and professionalization. A group of thoroughly socialized individuals who were middle class and who maintained an imperial orientation were reinterpreting the goals and purpose of deaf education*. (Branson & Miller, 2002: 43)

Traditions and practices of the school may have offered teachers a narrow oralist practice between the 1880s and the 1980s, but teachers were often able to mediate the structures of domination and constraint, either recreating the traditions or even reshaping them giving them some flexibility that previously did not exist (Fullwood, 2019). The 1980s was an important decade in the deaf education system in Britain and particularly to the school under review. The oral approach had started to weaken its grip on deaf education for a number of reasons. Many children, who traditionally went to deaf schools, were now being mainstreamed as integration became enthroned in legislation and hearing aids and other technologies improved to allow this. More children with additional special needs, who could not be educated through the oral methods, started to attend the school. Deaf awareness grew nationally as people became more aware of the value of deaf culture and the language of the deaf community, British Sign Language (BSL). These changes at the national level allowed the school to begin to augment oralism with manual methods, either sign supported English, a manual system that operated with spoken English, or cued speech, a manual system of handshapes that help to clarify speech. This was a teacher inspired innovation, however. Although the school's management did not oppose the changes, it seems clear that they were not its proponents and much of the innovation found its roots in teacher resistance (Fullwood, 2019).

The traditions of the oral method before 1980, however, may have appeared to constrain teachers but they also created the potential for adaptation and change. This was largely due to tensions in teacher lives, such as the competing discourses of normalisation and diversity, as well as misalignments between existing social arrangements and the goals of

the teachers. Teachers were able to construct a shift in their professional identity that provided some flexibility from the social position ascribed to them by society, their training, the traditions of the school, as well as the expectations of school leadership and parents. Moreover, what has often been overlooked in this story is the impact on the teachers who have had to implement policies and practices about which they may have had serious reservations. There were consequences in the cases of each of the options – ranging from collusion to active resistance and the creation of oppositional spaces within classrooms.

Four decades on this narrative remains important, not simply as a salutary lesson on the dangers of inflexible policies imposed on practitioners by those with a specific ideological vision, but also in the context of the debate around the impact of new technologies, in particular, cochlear implants, on both pedagogical practice and social belonging.

**Methodology**

The central aim of this research was to investigate teacher resistance in a deaf school, in Britain, as they responded to contradictions in their careers during the oral method of deaf education. The teachers participating in this study all taught at a Deaf School in Britain and had experienced, personally, the transition from a communication policy based strictly on oralism to one that added manual support (in this case, cued speech and sign supported English). The school report of 1980 was used to identify potential participants. Of the 27 teachers on the report, many had died, moved away from the area or were ill. All the available teachers were contacted and nine of them, who had all joined the school between 1958 and 1973, agreed to be questioned in separate face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to elicit their attitudes and perceptions in connection with this significant change in philosophy and praxis. Additionally, the written memoirs of two other teachers, who had both started at the school in the late 1940s and retired in the mid-1970s, were consulted and two members of staff who started in the late 1970s/early 1980s and had experienced the transition were also interviewed. Of the thirteen teachers involved in this research, all were qualified Teachers of the Deaf, were all hearing and the names used here are pseudonyms.

| Participant pseudonym | Gender | Decade started | Length of service | Acquired BSL pre-1979 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Joan | F | 1940 | 33 years | No |
| Rae | F | 1970 | 21 years | No |

| Faye | F | 1970 | 17 years | Yes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| May | F | 1980 | 19 years | No |
| Peter | M | 1950 | 29 years | Yes |
| Esther | F | 1980 | 12 years | No |
| Sophie | F | 1970 | 30 years | No |
| Mark | M | 1970 | 35 years | No |
| Trish | F | 1950 | 34 years | No |
| Nigel | M | 1950 | 31 years | Yes |
| Alice | F | 1970 | 23 years | No |
| Marie | F | 1970 | 26 years | No |
| Fran | F | 1940 | 35 years | No |

**Figure 2: Participant Information**

Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was framed within social encounters that encouraged a more equal and natural exchange of ideas. Time was allowed for joint exploration of meanings. Although several themes, including participants' views on communication methods and literacy, were explored, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed participants to introduce their own themes. As Flick (2006: 155) has pointed out, professional participants "have a complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study" and using open ended questions in a semi-structured way allows them to articulate this knowledge. In this way, the process of data collection was both deductive and inductive: the study was driven by specific questions about what was already known within the domain of oralism but, because of the open questions used, some data emerged that could not have been predicted and these were used to reformulate the original domain (Bryman, 2008).

Social constructionist epistemology puts a high premium on the interviewer and interviewee co-creating the findings of an inquiry (Krauss, 2005; McNabb, 2002). In the context of this study, research was conducted by the first author, a Teacher of the Deaf, who had either been a colleague of the participants or was known to them. As a consequence, he was an informed insider on many issues related to the lives of the teachers and to deaf education, and could not, therefore, be seen as an "incompetent interlocutor" (Flick, 2006:165). The shared knowledge between interviewer and participants facilitated a forum in which understandings could be co-constructed.

As the participants could be regarded as experts in their field, the questions posed to them needed to be theory-driven and hypothesis directed. In other words, some questions needed to be polemical (Flick, 2006). Participants were interviewed twice, allowing time for reflection and development of investigation into specific issues arising from the first

interviews. During the second interview, they were asked to review the statements they had made in their first interview and to reflect on them "in the light of competing alternatives" (Flick, 2006: 157). Challenging them in this way on what they had said earlier gave them the opportunity to consider alternative theories and constituted an essential part of the validation process.

Analysis of the interview material involved identifying themes from the data and three steps were taken for the descriptive analysis: the first step was to read and review the transcripts; the second step being to label words, sentences or phrases; the third step was to bring together the coding into themes (Angrosino, 2007). The coding tried to answer three questions that gets to the heart of agency: 1. How do social structures shape practice? 2. How does the practice shape social structures? 3. What motivated action? (Downey, 2005; Ortner, 1984). The answers to these questions helped identify how the participants were constrained by social structures and what events allowed the participants to think more deeply about their practice and either continue with the oral method or make some changes.

The next section looks at how the participants felt about conforming to the oral method of teaching of the time.

**Teacher Agency: Conformity**

One of the pervasive ideologies that was internalised by all the participants, at least initially, was that the oral method worked:

> *"I became filled with an almost missionary zeal to teach deaf children by the oral method and enable them to take their place in society as understanding and speaking people." (Joan)*

> *"The training at the time said, 'This is how we do it and this is how we are going to make things work.' The thinking was it's a hearing world and they have to cope and learn to lip read."* (Alice)

> *"People really believed in oralism and that this was fitting the students for their future life."* (Mark)

The ingraining of oralism started long before participants joined the school. In fact, it started at college, where they were trained to become Teachers of the Deaf:

*"We were told that we were not allowed to sign under any circumstances, the children would learn English and would learn to talk. It was propaganda and brainwashing of all new teachers into the profession!"* (Faye)

*"Really oralism was a drawback for many deaf pupils but all the teachers, either from [1]Manchester or from the National College for Teachers of the Deaf in-service training were trained oralists."* (Nigel)

Fran added that this was not just about training, but school codes and rules including the prohibition of signing. The pressure to collude links to a natural tendency to want to conform:

*"[The headmaster] once said to me that the school was like an ocean liner and he was at the wheel. The direction of the ship just needed tweaking a bit, not too much. You get the impression that [the oral method] had a… momentum all of its own and he felt it was unstoppable."* (Mark 1975)

Mark confessed to sharing the same conviction and also referred to an unquestioning belief in the value of new technologies, such as hearing aids, that "would continue to get better and benefit the students." It was only subsequently, that many of those involved in this research began to view the oral methods in a different light:

*"We were teaching deaf children how to fit in to a hearing world. Staff had a paternalistic and superior attitude to deaf people. They didn't know enough about deaf culture and deaf communities and nobody seemed to suggest it might be appropriate to learn."* (May)

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[1] The University of Manchester and The National College for Teachers of the Deaf were the two options available to teachers of the time to train for the mandatory qualification of Teacher of the Deaf.

One of the outcomes of oral education was the ability of deaf children to be able to lip-read and speak, and for many, this goal was achieved. One student, for example, was mentioned by two of the participants:

> *"People like Amanda, who was very deaf, were able to talk and get good jobs."* (Trish)

> *"Students like Amanda… did well under oralism… she has done well in the hearing community."* (Mark)

However, as time passed, some of the participants began to doubt the efficacy of the oralist method for all deaf children. In particular, they discovered that what had seemed plausible as expounded in their training colleges, did not actually work in some classrooms. There was clearly a gap between theory and practice:

> *"When I arrived, I just accepted it. But as I went on, I realised [the oral method] didn't work for all students."* (Peter)

When asked what happened to students who could not cope with the oral method, Nigel said they were just, "churned out the other side." There was no provision for students who could not cope with the oral method and the influence of normalisation was very strong, particularly with parents who wanted their children to be able to speak:

> *"Parents of deaf children were, and still are, always hoping that their child would be 'normal'"* (Faye)

> *"There was pressure from parents on staff for their children to talk and not to appear alien and embarrassing."* (Peter)

> *"There was enormous pressure from parents to get their children to speak."* (Trish)

Despite this pressure to speak, however, many students surreptitiously used sign language with each other in and out of class. Officially the use of sign language by students was punished if they were caught.

*"The children always had a covert communication system. Staff ignored it or tried to believe it didn't exist."* (Peter)

Sign language was demeaned, generally, at that time, and often seen as "pantomime" and "pathetic gesturing" (Lane, 1992; 155) but some staff felt that banning sign language and encouraging speech liberated the students. Asked whether they thought that using the oral method may have been oppressive to some students, one member of staff said:

*"No, I think we gave them the freedom to live."* (Marie)

Another discovery emerging from the interviews with the participants merits mention. It concerns those retired participants who had conformed to the philosophy and practice of oralism and were reflecting on the costs. In Joan's case, there seemed to be a tacit acceptance that the blanket policy of oralism might have been misguided:

*"Watching a TV programme one evening, I was aghast to find that a deaf man was complaining that signing was prohibited at his school. He felt that this was an infringement of his rights. 'I was alright,' he said, 'because I came from a deaf family and grew up signing, so I taught all the other boys to sign.' As an oralist I felt quite chastened. We were trying to help deaf children become part of the hearing community. Was this the wrong aim? Are we to blame ourselves for teaching oralism when signing might have been less stressful for the pupils?"* (Joan)

Another participant seemed more willing to focus on the harm done to students:

*"Many of our profoundly deaf students might have been able to go to University had they been educated through sign language."* (Fran)

In another conversation, she reflected on her own ardent conformity to the oral methods during her time of teaching:

*"I know they [the former pupils] have forgiven me, but I am not sure that God has."* (Fran)

Some of the participants, as a result of the contradictions that existed in their professional lives, either a misalignment of goals or structural properties in opposition to each other, experienced a gradual reshaping of consciousness which sometimes led to oppositional behaviours. The most notable contradiction was that the oral method failed a sizeable portion of deaf students who had no recourse to other methods. Other contradictions revolved around differences between the interpretation of deaf lives from a cultural or medical viewpoint and tensions between the influences of normalisation and the growing acceptance of diversity.

**Teacher Agency: Oppositional Behaviours**

As mentioned, not all students responded well to the oral methods and some staff reflected on this:

> *"Oralism didn't work unless you had a degree of useful hearing. Some kids were no good at lip-reading. Unless you have a talent for it, it's no good. I had a boy from Cornwall named Chris who was very intelligent but couldn't lip-read and he wasn't going anywhere. It was really frustrating. His speech was unintelligible but he learned in spite of me. He learned to read and accessed learning through reading and writing. During teaching time he was helped by the partially hearing."* (Peter)

Teachers faced a dilemma when students did not learn to lip-read or speak. Not all teachers responded in the same way. Admittedly, their options were limited:

> *"Staff did not know sign language so with no alternatives, oralism, as a practice, continued."* (Trish)

Peter mentioned that Chris was helped in his classroom by the "partially hearing" which meant that they signed to Chris but Peter allowed it. Peter also mentioned that some members of staff in the school used student interpreters:

> *"Some teachers employed partially hearing children to sign to their deafer peers if something was vital for them to know or they were unhappy about any situation that had happened and they had misunderstood."* (Peter)

A few teachers openly admitted that they just could not cope without help from the students, as the following comment by a teacher in the nursery department underscores:

*"One girl in the nursery department ...came from a deaf family. Her parents were*
*deaf and her older siblings were deaf and they must have used sign language at home.*
*The children were all at the school and when we couldn't understand what this little*
*one was trying to say she'd get so frustrated that she'd end up signing to us - which of*
*course wasn't allowed and didn't help either because we didn't know sign language.*
*Anyhow, in desperation, I'd send over to school for her sister and she would come*
*into nursery and translate the message."* (Trish)

Statements like these strongly suggest that the symbiotic relationship between the students and some teachers, those who had allowed students to act as interpreters, was to the benefit of all. Despite some individual realisations that the oral method was not successful with all students, the pervading influence of oralism meant that teachers did not talk about their problems with each other. When it came to the staff room, Peter and Nigel indicated that they were never aware of any discussions in the staffroom or with colleagues about the oral method not working for all students or the need to sign. Faye, in fact, commented on staff room discussions:

*"It was always in discussion with all teachers about how to teach deaf children*
*English and how to speak."* (Faye)

The powerful bias towards the oral method meant that although there was, at the individual level, a degree of disillusionment and disagreement, in public there was an unchallenged veneer of acceptance leading some writers to refer to the oral philosophy as a 'juggernaut' (Beattie, 2006; Mitchell, 2006). Occasionally, contradictions may have led to oppositional behaviours, either allowing students to sign to each other or occasionally using students to communicate with others, but in the main, teachers were regrooved back into the oral method, largely because there were no other officially sanctioned methods available to teachers and they were not trained in any other method. This did not mean that all teachers were regrooved back into the dominant way of thinking as a few developed resistant behaviours.

**Teacher Agency: Resistance**

Resistance, as we have chosen to interpret it, involves teachers taking on a different logic or perspective from the hegemonic position of oralism which informed long-term emancipatory goals for the students. Any resistance to the oral method, however, was *de novo*, and concurred with Foucault's (1990: 95, 96) assertion that "points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network … [with] no single locus …each of them a special case." Typical of such 'special cases' was Faye, who determined to learn how to sign:

> *"In order to equip myself to understand the children that I was teaching and to give them the best possible help, I felt I needed to learn signing. I went to weekly classes with Reverend Firth, Missioner to the Deaf and I was completely fascinated to learn not only signs but the origins of signs and also about deaf culture. The Headmaster and Deputy Head discovered I was going to these lessons and I was summoned to a meeting and told that I was not allowed to attend: "If you learn to sign, then you may use signs in your teaching." I promised that I would not but learning sign would help me understand what the children were trying to tell me. It was made clear that I had to stop attending the sign classes. I said I would but, in fact, continued to attend the classes. As time went on, I discovered more and more about Deaf culture. I wanted to feel part of it and felt that it was important to do so if I was going to teach deaf children in the best way that I could."* (Faye)

By availing herself to an opportunity to learn the language of the Deaf community, Faye opened herself up to a different way of understanding and teaching deaf students:

> *"I was… animated, using gestures and props and also the blackboard then the overhead projector. Maybe some of my gestures were BSL?"* (Faye)

Faye was developing cultural competency through her acquisition of BSL and understandings of Deaf culture. She was motivated to change her pedagogy by her recognition that oralism did not work for all the children in the school and that Deaf culture had some answers: learning improved when she included more gesture as well as created a visual environment that engaged her students. Faye's determination to learn how to sign

ultimately put her job in jeopardy. She eventually resigned her position within the school and found employment in an organisation that, explicitly, welcomed the use of BSL.

One member of staff did use signs, occasionally, in his teaching as he explained:

*"I picked up some signing when I worked as a House Parent [from 1958 until 1964] and I used to use signs to some children… When the children were struggling to understand I used to help them out, you know, just to get the message across." (Nigel)*

He further explained that he used signs, not necessarily a sequence of signs, so it was not really language in itself but supported spoken English. Clearly, though, he was resisting the oral method for the benefit of some of his students. Nigel commented that an influence on him was something a former student once said to him:

*"Simon said on more than one occasion we [hearing people] shouldn't be telling them [deaf people] what to do."* (Nigel)

Nigel displayed a degree of cultural competency by not only acquiring sign from the students but also by listening to their views. Another member of staff, Peter, operated within the system but in the early 1970s he was invited by the school leadership to open a unit designed to assist students with especially profound learning difficulties and explained how he began to introduce BSL into the classroom:

*"I didn't sign immediately in the unit as I was still learning myself and then it was gently incorporated. [The Head] didn't mind, he was just happy that the school was seen to be addressing the problem of multiply handicapped pupils in a positive way. I used to get a lot of visitations from the more responsible Governors and, when I was signing, one said, 'This is all very well Mr Taylor but they are still unintelligible,' - so I had to point out the value of learning to write coherently from the result of signing and that writing was a viable means of communication. Happily he accepted that and all was forgiven, apparently."* (Peter)

Significantly, Nigel, Peter and Faye, three members of staff who acquired some sign language, interpreted the world differently from the other participants. For example, the majority of the other participants spoke of a 'hearing world' and the need for the children to fit in, for example:

> *"I think that if they can't speak or read and write then they are unemployable. BSL is OK but it doesn't fit them for life. BSL is not English so it's OK for them to communicate to other deaf people but it's not going to help them communicate with the hearing world."* (Esther)

> *"Most deaf children have to live in a hearing world. If a deaf person cannot use English then they cannot participate in the society."* (Marie)

This seductive moral framework of normalisation seemed to have been the pervading influence in many of the teachers' minds. Nigel, Peter and Faye, however, did not make any mention of a 'hearing world' in our discussions and, as such, they left the impression that their world-view was not founded on notions of normalisation and hence a deficit view of deafness. Integration, for them, did not require deaf children to become as hearing like as possible. They recognised the deaf not as disabled people but as having a life that was different:

> *"Deafness would be [part of] the norm and not a disability, and BSL just a different language."* (Faye)

They also took a different form of logic to education that might be described as cultural competence:

> *"I used to work in the evenings and all the boys were signing so I thought, "This is the way to communicate, we must do the same.""* (Nigel)

> *"I personally always wanted to improve their language …I wanted to expand their BSL vocabularies."* (Peter)

*"I was desperate to help the children ...and learning sign would help me understand what the children were trying to tell me."* (Faye)

It would appear that for these three participants, their motivation to resist oralist practices included a logic that was mindful of some student's preference for sign language as the preferred mode of communication. That is not to say that other teachers did not entertain a student view but any help they offered clearly did not involve the acquisition of sign language on their part. This growing acceptance of cultural diversity and pluralism should not be underestimated. It provided opportunities to stop looking at deafness from an audiological or deficit perspective and to start seeing it from the deaf student's epistemological viewpoint. Accordingly, several participants opted to view deafness through a new lens and to make slow, but steady progress in the acquisition of the language and culture of their students.

**Discussion: Conformity, Negotiation and Resistance**

Adapting Hall's (1973) reception theory provides a novel way of looking at teacher resistance in a British deaf school as they responded to contradictions in their careers, during the oral method of deaf education between the 1950s and 1970s, and summarises the journey that some teachers made from conformity to negotiated code and even resistance:
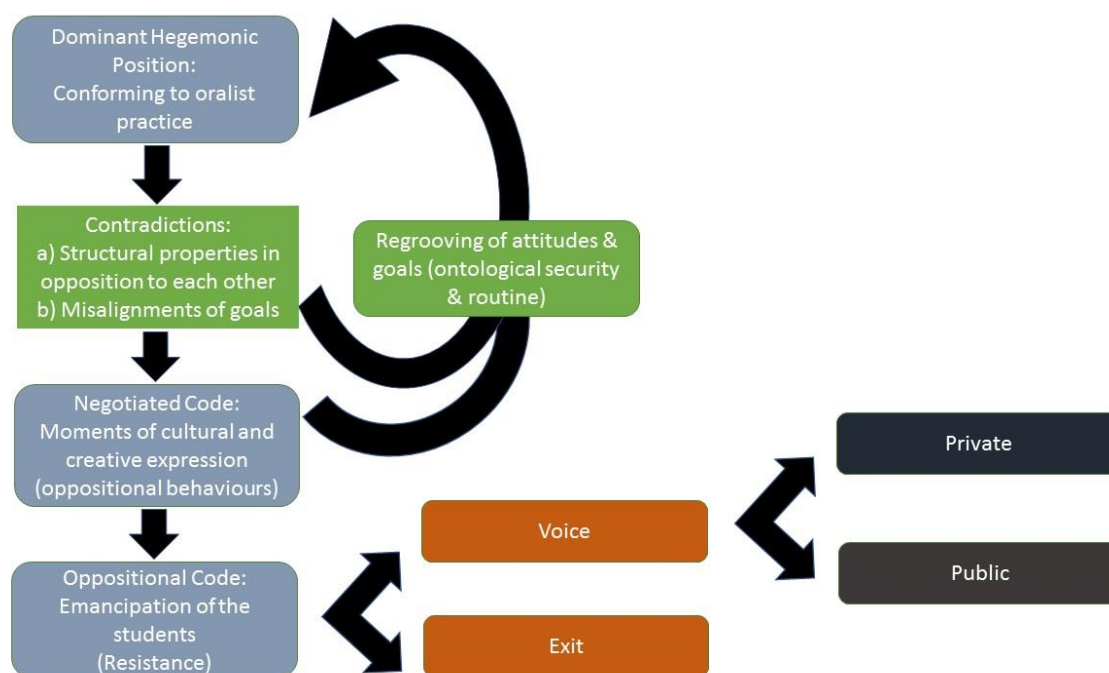
**Figure 3: Model of Teacher Movement from Conformity to Resistance.**

All the participants initially accepted the tenets of oralism, and some, such as Joan, talked of the oral methods with a "missionary zeal," and were therefore operating within the dominant hegemonic position. The seeds of oppositional behaviours appear to have been sown by contradictions in their working lives, mainly because some students could not lip read and, therefore, had no real access to education. These students, according to Nigel, were simply "churned out the other side." His words reveal an almost industrial, mechanical reference to student lives as if, without language, they were treated by the school as industrial products.

Negotiated code, according to Hall (1973), contains some adaptive and oppositional elements. In other words, not all actions operate within the hegemonic code and there is a mixture of conformity and opposition. For example, some staff chose to interpret the rules preventing the use of sign language loosely, at times. From discussions with participants, it would appear that many members of staff engaged in occasional oppositional behaviours, such as allowing students to sign to their peers, and even using students as translators for those who could not lip-read but would then realign themselves with the values of the school. People operating in the negotiated code, according to Hall (1973: 17), still agree with the legitimacy of the hegemonic viewpoint or "what is 'natural', 'inevitable', 'taken for granted' about the social order." It has been suggested that much of this regrooving would take place in the staff room (Cole, 1984; Woods, 1979) with its emphasis on ritual and solidarity, borne

out by three of the participants who explained that the failure of the oral system, even for a few students, was never discussed, to their knowledge, in the staffroom.

For a few staff, however, oppositional behaviours did lead to acts of resistance, evidenced by their acquisition of sign language. They were motivated by a different logic or perspective because they identified with the language of the deaf community and created alliances with their students. Embedded in acts of resistance, there "is an expressed hope, an element of transcendence for radical transformation" (Giroux, 2001: 108). The use of signs with some students gave the teachers, and these students, a hope that education could mean something, that the students could be included in learning.

Hirschman (1970) has argued that there are two types of responses to unsatisfactory conditions in one's workplace, fight it or run for it. For Faye, although she learned sign language in defiance of the school leadership, she chose to exit the social order she disapproved of, rather than fight it. Her resistance was expressed in the way she modified her teaching approaches, using, what she termed, BSL gestures in her classroom. Peter began to learn sign language as a result of setting up a unit for deaf children with additional special needs. He lent his voice to setting up an alternative to the oral method in a public way as he had tacit leadership approval. Nigel also acquired a degree of sign language from the students and used it, showing disregard to the strict oral practice. Although he never left the school, in a sense he chose to fight it but only within the private space of his classroom. The following figure reflects how the participants matched the model using the information gleaned from the interviews (Esther and May have not been included as they started at the school after 1979 when the school began the transition):
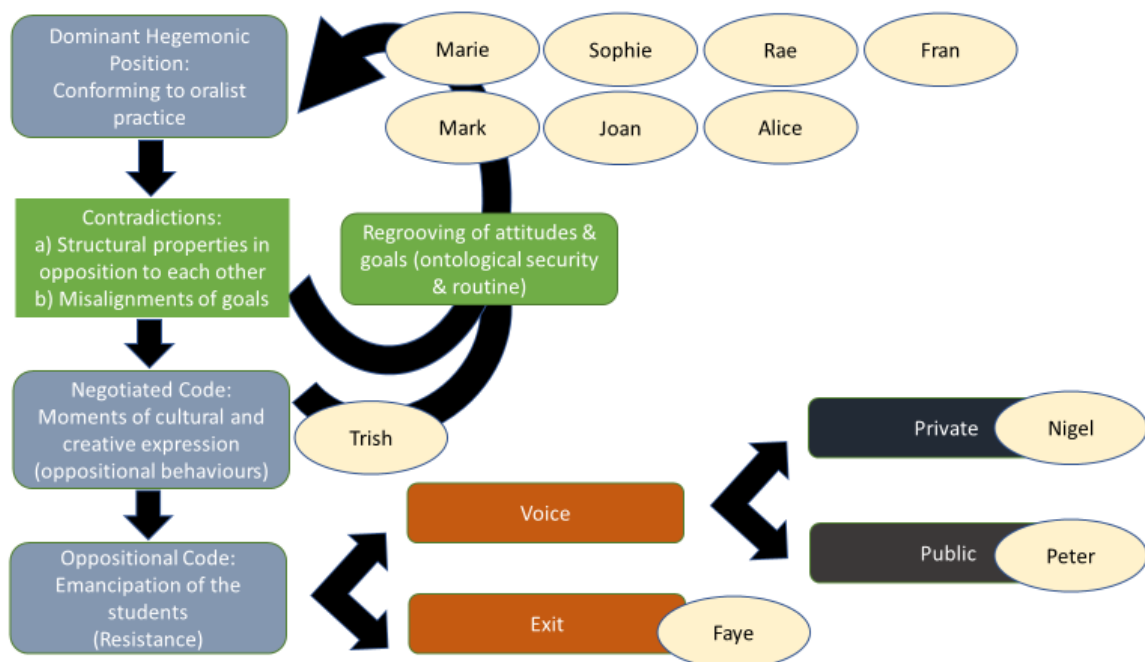
**Figure 4: Model of Teacher Resistance and Participants.**

This model shows how pervasive the dominant hegemonic position is and that only consciously acknowledged contradictions could jolt teachers into considering alternative paths of action. For Faye, her motivation was based on issues around deaf culture and language. Peter looked at sign language as a pragmatic answer for some of his students who could not lip-read, and while Nigel also seemed to take a pragmatic approach, he also acknowledged being influenced by empathy towards the choices that some of his students took towards the positive use of sign language.

It may be argued that the degree of resistance that occurred within the school was not serious because it did not form a collective to change the social order (McFarland, 2004) but private because of a limited public (Scott, 1990). Giroux (2001: 166) has commented on how school organisations isolate most teachers to "prevent them from working collectively." The very organisation of school life, then, reduces the opportunities for collective resistance but increases opportunities for individual resistance which are expressed as part of a teacher 'underlife' (Goffman, 1961). Overall social life was not transformed but some transformations were made in individual classrooms. Social change does not occur in a vacuum, however, and it is often inspired from individual acts of resistance, so one cannot say that resistance is never serious.

As our model highlights, the power of the dominant discourses in society often constrains teachers in ways in which they are not necessarily fully aware and aberrations in

teacher behaviours may not lead them from oppositional behaviours to resistance as they are persistently regrooved back to the hegemonic position. Discourses in education, during the period of time under study, came laden with ideologies that were heavily biased towards oralism: what was good practice; how the students should be taught and managed, including the use of technology; what represented success and failure. With the exception of Peter, resistance was very much private resistance in safe spaces where forces of domination and control were rejected in favour of the emancipation of students, an enterprise that put careers and friendship patterns at work at risk. There are profound issues around professional identities here, for example, the question of to whom teachers owe their allegiance, to the institution or the students. Loyalty to the students would presumably include the teacher treating the student as a person as well as a learner. It seems an injustice to prepare a child for life within a particular community in a way that undermines their membership of their primary communities. As noted by Hooley & Levinson (2013:151), "Ways must be found of maintaining identity and cultural formation while at the same time becoming immersed in dominant approaches to knowledge, teaching and learning."

One of the lessons from some of the participants who conformed to the oral principles of teaching was the level of regret for not having contemplated their methodological position when they were teaching. When teachers are not permitted the freedom to make decisions based on the evidence of their own practice, or at the very least, when their concerns are ignored, they are placed in an invidious position. For those who collude with policies with which they disagree, there can be a lasting cost as Fran said:

> *"I know they [the former pupils] have forgiven me, but I am not sure that God has."*
> (Fran)

Some participants felt a clear conflict between professional role and empathy with students. For some, these opportunities the normalising efforts linked with hearing and speech would provide students with the freedom to access the mainstream community along with educational and vocational opportunities. For others, freedom involved adapting teaching methods to match the needs of those students who could not lipread which included the use of sign language. These are difficult choices because if students are funnelled towards the majority culture and fail, they may become trapped "between cultures," unable to

function effectively in a hearing context but also lacking the facility with sign language available to those who grow up with it as their first language (Sparrow, 2005; 143, 144).

The issues referred to in this article remain relevant today, requiring a consideration of the possible need for resistance on the part of teachers in deaf education. The dominant discourses in our society still very much have an oral bias for the education of deaf people (Andrews et al. 2004; Bauman, 2004; Ladd, 2003; Skinner, 2006; Valentine & Skelton, 2007), a prejudice against sign language (Humphries et al., 2017), an agenda of normalisation, often leading to suppression and exclusion (Siisiäinen, 2016) and a preoccupation with the medical model of disability (Hodge et al., 2019; Matthews, 2011; Shyman, 2016) which views deafness as a disability (Hintermair & Albertini, 2005; Komesaroff, 2008; Obasi, 2008; Valentine 2001). Professionals and parents are often persuaded that hearing impairment is 'avoidable' (Johnston, 2005; Varshney, 2016) encouraging them to embrace medical interventions (Wallis, 2020). Currently, technology (cochlear implants, hearing aids etc.) and habilitation (speech therapy, Auditory Verbal Therapy etc.) provide the driving force in this enterprise (Edelist, 2016), reinforcing the high priority of speaking and listening. In order to frame deafness as 'mere-difference' (Barnes, 2014) or even 'gain' (Bauman & Murray, 2014), parents of deaf children and professionals working in the field of deafness need to recognise dominant discourses for what they are and be prepared to resist these pressures. The medical model often encourages the embracing of a 'bad-difference' approach to deafness (Wallis, 2020). We are not advocating that medical approaches have nothing to offer deaf children and their families, simply that they should not be allowed to be the juggernaut that obstructs other views. We would concur with Horejes (2012), that deaf culture and language are important because they support the life chances of deaf people in mainstream culture where hearing people are not necessarily mindful of their best interests.

Critical reflection is important for teacher, as well as student outcomes. Teachers, perhaps, should be encouraged to reflect on their own actions and cultural knowledge and be "suspicious of [them]selves" (Young & Mintz, 2008; 505), becoming reflexive in these cross-cultural situations (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Emphasising the need for teachers to explore their own ideology regarding the medical model of deafness, Young and Temple (2014) argue that it does not matter whether the bias is conscious or unconscious, the outcome is the same; it leads to the oppression of deaf people in a cultural linguistic sense. This snapshot of events four decades ago has resonance not only for those working in deaf education, it concerns matters of agency and professional autonomy of all teachers. We believe that this

research should also encourage providers who train Teachers of the Deaf to explore the issues we have mentioned as part of their modules on curriculum, pedagogy and educator knowledge. We believe that there is a particular need to be able to take multiple viewpoints of deafness, deaf education and deaf culture and language.

**Conclusions**

This article highlights the tensions between conformity and resistance. It shows how a few teachers resisted the oralist hegemony, developed deaf cultural competence, learned sign language and developed a deaf pedagogy that focused on the needs and strengths of the students who could not access the oral method, usually in safe, private spaces. These teachers shifted from an institutional pedagogical perspective to one shaped by the students as learners and people.

Teachers, when faced with forces of domination may find that they are regrooved too easily back into dominant ways of thinking about deafness, the 'bad-difference' approach. Teachers who are aware of multiple ways of viewing deafness can critically consider the implications of these differences. This can still lead back to conformity, however, because creating a critical pedagogy involves risk and could lead to "losing job, security, and in some cases friends" (Giroux, 2001; 242). There is also an internal force driving conformity, the desire for ontological security or predictability, safety and routine in an individual's life (Giddens, 1984). It is all too easy to become assimilated within the *hive mind* (Rayner & Gunter, 2020:269).

What has not been considered in this research is how teachers, as knowers, related to their students based on their epistemological views of deaf students as knowers. We think that this would be a positive way to extend scholarship in this area. A threat to deaf education is the way in which education, generally, is focusing on student standardised testing (Apple, 2005) and the achievement of teacher competencies and accountability (Taubman, 2009). These aims lead teachers to make their goals for teaching relate to test preparation, rather than epistemic aims, as well as encouraging the achievement of behavioural competencies, rather than intellectual aims (Lunn Brownlee et al., 2017). Teachers, perhaps, should be encouraged to consider the barriers that may be constructed for deaf children by these types of behaviours.

In reviewing the events recorded here, Foucault's thinking was particularly helpful in understanding the mechanics of pedagogical socialisation that was occurring. His scepticism about education being transformational seems well-founded, with the youngsters being positioned in ways that related to mainstream society. Giroux, on the other hand, was helpful

when it came to thinking about alternative communities and resistance. Teachers who truly believe in transformation and personal empowerment, can opt into siding with their students, finding either covert or explicit ways of resistance. Finally, Hall's ideas were useful in understanding the nuanced positions taken by some teachers, to the extent that it may be possible, in certain situations, to be both conforming and oppositional. More broadly, we would argue that the exclusion of both teachers and learners from discourse that shapes practice is both unethical and detrimental to educational outcomes.

Educational institutions need cultural re-sets, through which they become more courageous in resisting top-down, ideological processes, and construct environments in which there are safe spaces for resistance.

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