

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

# Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association · Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité

*Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association**

**Association Canadienne des Études sur le handicap**

**Hosted by The University of Waterloo**

[www.cjds.uwaterloo](http://www.cjds.uwaterloo)

# **The Social and Epistemological Violence of Inclusive Education for Deaf Learners**

Kristin Snoddon, Ph.D.  
School of Early Childhood Studies  
Ryerson University  
[ksnoddon@ryerson.ca](mailto:ksnoddon@ryerson.ca)

## **Abstract**

This paper begins by describing several recent human rights complaints brought by Canadian parents of deaf children who have not been able to access an education in sign language in provinces where a deaf school has been closed. The paper outlines some ways in which so-called inclusive educational systems perpetuate social and epistemological violence by depriving deaf children of direct instruction in sign language and access to a community of signing deaf peers. Inclusive educational systems have disrupted intergenerational sign language transmission and resulted in deaf children's loss of identity. The paper calls for sign language policies and sign language-medium educational practices to ensure the viability of deaf futures.

## **Keywords**

Deaf Learners, Inclusive Education, Language Deprivation, Sign Language-Medium Education, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## **Introduction**

This paper discusses the implementation of inclusive education as it has been conceived in practice for deaf students in Canada and around the world, including the creation of country-level educational policies related to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). As this paper argues, across multiple contexts inclusive education has most often produced problems of social and epistemological violence against deaf bodies and ecosystems. Deaf ecosystems have produced community-driven solutions to the challenges of navigating societies and educational systems run by and for nondeaf people. The violence of inclusive education, produced by systems of power, is social since it impacts the well being of deaf learners and the vitality of deaf communities and ecosystems. In addition, this violence is epistemological since it erases or denigrates the knowledge produced and shared across generations of deaf people, including sign language-medium educational practice. Branson and Miller (1993) referred to the epistemic and symbolic violence of mainstreaming, which is how inclusive education has most often been taken up in practice for deaf children around the world. For these authors, mainstreaming reinforces the cultural and linguistic incompetence of deaf people by normative hearing-speaking standards. Mainstreamed deaf students are expected to assimilate to these standards at all costs (Branson & Miller, 1993).

In writing this paper, it is recognized that several disability studies in education advocates have addressed the shortcomings of inclusive education for other nondeaf learners and have stated that inclusive education has not been achieved (e.g., Erevelles, 2000; Slee & Allan, 2001; Snoddon & Underwood, 2014). The use of the term “inclusive education” for the educational practices and policies described in this paper is deliberate, since social actors in various contexts understand their actions to be geared toward inclusion and construct their educational systems to

be inclusive. For example, the author of this paper was contacted by a representative for the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Child Development who stated, “New Brunswick is a fully inclusive education system that welcomes all students in their community schools” (Hughes, M., personal communication, August 19, 2019). At the same time, little or no provision is made for sign language-medium education for deaf learners in this “inclusive” education system. This paper’s response to this problem of misrecognition is not to reject the social category of disability but to call on disability and inclusive education advocates to reframe and re-emancipate the broadly assimilative goals of their activism to attend to the situated and particular.

The next section describes several human rights complaints brought by Canadian parents of deaf children who have not been able to access an education in sign language. This section also provides an outline of Canadian legal frameworks. Next, the paper reviews research findings from diverse contexts concerning the impact of inclusive education on deaf learners and the vitality of sign languages and sign language-medium education programs, where a national sign language is the language of instruction in addition to the national spoken/written language(s). Following this, the paper discusses sign language-medium educational policy needs and programming solutions as a challenge for deaf education futures and for alternative practices.

### **Background: Human Rights Violations**

On October 29, 2019, The Canadian Press reported about Carter Churchill, a deaf eight year-old student in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Newfoundland who has precarious and limited access to an education in American Sign Language (ASL) (McKenzie-Sutter, 2019). Four days later, Global News quoted Carter’s mother, Kim, as stating of provincial education authorities,

“They’re harming him in this process under the umbrella of education, which is just not happening” (Lord, 2019). At this time, the government of Newfoundland, which closed the Newfoundland School for the Deaf in 2010, was reportedly providing Carter with one-and-a-half to two hours of instruction in ASL every seven school days. This student, like many other deaf students with or without cochlear implants, is unable to communicate or access instruction in spoken language. Even when cochlear implants are deemed to be successful, they may only provide partial access to spoken language (Hall et al., 2017). As a consequence, language deprivation, due to a lack of full access to any language during the critical period of language acquisition, is prevalent among deaf people (Hall et al., 2017). Cochlear implants are the standard of care for deaf children in Canada, as they are in other Western countries (Komesaroff, 2008). The implants are frequently accompanied by policy restrictions on deaf children’s access to sign language in early intervention and education (Snoddon, 2008).

As Carter’s mother reported, he is also still learning ASL, a language to which he has insufficient access to support his optimal development (CBC News, 2019). While the provincial Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has struck a steering committee to study services for deaf students, Carter’s parents filed a human rights complaint in 2017 and subsequently sought a hearing in regard to their son’s lack of access to an education equal in quality to that received by nondeaf students in Newfoundland (McKenzie-Sutter, 2019). In June 2020, the Newfoundland Office of the Child and Youth Advocate issued a report that is lacking in practical solutions (Kavanagh, 2020). Carter’s as-yet unresolved situation and his parents’ filing of a complaint are reminiscent of other legal challenges involving families with deaf children across Canada, including the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission’s (2016) investigation of complaints made by deaf individuals and their families since the Saskatchewan

School for the Deaf closed in 1991 (Weber, 2019). The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission's (2016) report describes inequities in deaf children and adult's access to education, health care, social services, justice, and employment. However, many of the issues to be addressed are still pending action.

Carter's lack of access to an education in ASL occurs against the backdrop of Canadian legal protections for disabled children. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) is a constitutional bill of rights that includes a section 15 guarantee of equal rights for disabled persons and protection from discrimination on the basis of disability. Provincial human rights codes, such as Newfoundland's, outline the duty to accommodate, which means schools are obligated to provide an education for all children. However, enforcement of provincial human rights codes relies on a system of individual complaints. Enforcement of *Charter* rights is similarly complaint-driven. The provinces of Alberta and Manitoba have passed legislation to recognize ASL as the language of the deaf community, and Alberta also recognizes ASL as an optional language of instruction in schools and postsecondary institutions (Snoddon & Wilkinson, 2019). In Ontario, as discussed further below, the *Education Act* recognizes ASL and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) as languages of instruction. Canada has also signed and ratified the UN CRPD and ratified the CRPD's Optional Protocol. Ratification of the Optional Protocol means an individual or group of Canadians may approach the CRPD committee if there has been a violation of CRPD provisions (Council of Canadians with Disabilities, 2016). Article 24 of the CRPD calls on governments to facilitate the learning of sign language and promote the linguistic identity of the deaf community in education, ensure the education of deaf children is delivered in the most appropriate language for the individual, and employ teachers who are qualified in sign language. In June 2019, Bill C-81, the *Accessible Canada Act*, received royal

proclamation. Section 5.1(2) of the *Act* recognizes ASL, LSQ, and Indigenous sign languages as primary languages for communication by deaf persons in Canada (Canada, 2019a). However, the protections listed here have not been sufficient to guarantee an education in sign language as a human right for Carter or many other Canadian deaf children. Outside of the small number of provincial schools for the deaf, a natural sign language is rarely made available as an accommodation for deaf students in Canada.

Cases such as Carter's are not uncommon, but in Canada they follow race and class patterns. These patterns are both distinct from and reminiscent of research about cochlear implants and deaf children in the USA (Mauldin, 2016). In the American context of privatized healthcare, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status play a larger role than they do in Canada in determining which children receive cochlear implants (Mauldin, 2016). However, human rights complaints regarding deaf students' access to education are often made by white, middle-class parents, such as Tammy Benson's complaint regarding the Saskatoon public school's system's refusal to provide an ASL interpreter for her son, Adam (Snoddon, 2009). In the case of underprivileged and Indigenous children and youth, the legal challenges have been different and escalated in nature, such as with the 2005 Provincial Court of Saskatchewan decision regarding Ryley Allan Farnham, an eight-year old Indigenous deaf child whom provincial Department of Community Resources and Employment authorities had sought to remove from the custody of his mother (Snoddon, 2009). April Farnham, a young single mother on welfare, had opposed the direction of provincial health and education authorities to continue with her son's cochlear implant and auditory-verbal therapy (AVT). In the course of eight years, the cochlear implant and participation in AVT had failed to result in Ryley's acquisition of a spoken, written, or signed language. However, provincial authorities blamed Ryley's language deprivation on his

mother in a manner reminiscent of Mauldin's (2016) research, which found children and parents are implicated as not working hard enough when cochlear implants do not produce desired results. In Ryley's case, language deprivation and his mother's subsequent efforts to learn ASL resulted in her criminalization by the Saskatchewan government (Snoddon, 2009).

More recently, the Saskatchewan child advocate tabled a special report regarding Dylan Lachance, an Indigenous deaf sixteen-year-old in youth custody who was unable to communicate with staff responsible for his care and died "of acute bronchopneumonia with associated sepsis" (Langenegger, 2016). The 2016 special investigation report mentioned Dylan's "significant hearing loss" and inability "to communicate through speech and formal sign language" (Pringle, 2016, p. 4). However, none of the report's ten recommendations address the issue of deaf children's language deprivation in inclusive education systems. Instead, the report made general and vague recommendations regarding the need for the Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing and related bodies "to incorporate youth with broader complex needs and/or disabilities" (Pringle, 2016, p. 4).

At the core of these complaints, with their differential impact on white and racialized deaf bodies, is deaf children's recurring language deprivation in so-called inclusive educational placements. Language deprivation is defined as the persistent lack of access to a natural language in early childhood that leads to poor education and health outcomes for deaf individuals (Murray et al., 2019). The profound consequences of being deprived of sign language are seldom acknowledged by public education systems. Furthermore, the sign language needs of deaf people have often been overlooked and flattened by disability rights in education advocates. Often, these advocates reduce deaf children's needs to the provision of sign language interpreters and/or have unrealistic estimations of the resources needed to provide direct instruction in sign language



(e.g., Kayess & Green, 2017). While provision of a sign language interpreter may be viewed as facilitating inclusion, an interpreter cannot provide direct instruction in sign language or opportunities to study sign language as a school subject with signing teachers and peers (Kauppinen & Jokinen, 2014). Rather, an interpreter is “a compensatory tool for accessing the dominant hearing classroom environments” (Hult & Compton, 2012, p. 612). However, in Canada, many deaf children attend school without access to qualified interpreters. School boards who decide that a student requires an accommodation of this nature are more likely to hire an educational assistant with inadequate proficiency in sign language (Russell & McLeod, 2009).

Fundamentally, this oversight of deaf learners’ needs may be a problem of nondeaf people’s constant misrecognition of deaf people (Graif, 2018). Branson and Miller (1993) termed this “a complete insensitivity on the part of the hearing culture to the sensibilities of the Deaf” (p. 26). As Graif (2018) observes,

When you’re deaf, very little can be taken for granted about what the hearing know about you, and as a consequence deaf political interventions are most often organized around broadly pedagogical attempts to remind the hearing that they should think about what they take for granted too. (p. 134)

This oversight of deaf children’s needs is also due to the politicized nature of much public discourse surrounding deaf children’s access to sign language. This discourse frequently ignores sign language as a biological and psychological need for deaf children’s language and identity development, and instead presents sign language as being in opposition to cochlear implants and spoken language (Mauldin, 2016; Snoddon, 2008). This opposing discourse can be glimpsed, for example, in Ontario Infant Hearing Program policy restrictions on sign language for deaf children who receive cochlear implants. This policy presents parents of deaf children with an

exclusive and dichotomous choice of either spoken or signed language development service options (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2018). As Branson and Miller (1993) noted, sign language continues to be deemed inferior to spoken language because of its modality and because of its attachment to deaf people, who are regarded through the lens of society's ableism. In the present, deaf schools that provide an education in sign language are in danger of disappearing completely under the guise of an inclusion agenda. For instance, deaf community activist Ryan Commerson (2019) recently reported on individual U.S. State Performance Plans. These plans have indicators that show the aim of reducing numbers of students in deaf schools and increasing inclusive educational placements.

### **Deaf Education and Inclusive Education**

The history of deaf education is often overlooked in discussions of disability studies in education, which may conflate the founding of deaf schools with institutionalization of other children with disabilities. However, an anti-institutionalization discourse overlooks the value of congregated settings for deaf children, which have sustained sign languages and allowed them to thrive in school hallways, dormitories, and extracurricular spaces even when forbidden in the classroom, as they were for most of the twentieth century in Canada and the USA (Lane et al., 1996). Deaf children's congregation allows natural interactions to take place through sign language that are ordinarily enjoyed by nondeaf children and are understood to be critical to overall language and literacy development and socialization for any child (Jalongo, 2014; Kermit, 2019; Kusters, 2017). All children depend on access to a range of adult communicative partners and language models for language and literacy development. Since the early 1980s, deaf communities' struggle to implement sign language-medium education programs has been largely

circumvented by the inclusive education movement. This movement, when joined by government austerity policies, has resulted in the dismantling of deaf schools and in the loss of teachers and resources that enable the provision of sign language-medium education (Snoddon & Murray, 2019). In Western contexts, the inclusive education movement has also unrolled in tandem with the near-universalization of cochlear implants for deaf children. Cochlear implants are intended to promote the integration of deaf children into spoken-language classroom environments with nondeaf peers (Mauldin, 2016).

In this way, the disability rights in education movement's transformative goals are placed at odds with deaf communities' interests and local ecologies. In other words, proponents of inclusive education often appear to broadly conceive of multilevel educational ecosystems as fundamentally in need of change and transformation toward a universalizing inclusive norm. This inclusive educational system is constructed without regard to ethnographic data concerning how education for particular groups of learners takes place in practice or respect for local community ecologies that sustain these practices (Snoddon, 2019). This point became clear during the author's participation in a March 2019 International Disability Alliance inclusive education workshop in Nepal, where national and international deaf organizations stood alone against other disabled people's organizations in expressing a strong preference for congregated settings. Congregated settings, or deaf schools, were also held by Nepali deaf associations to be superior in quality to the education provided for deaf children in mainstream settings, and this was supported by the author's collection of baseline data on deaf education in Nepal (Snoddon, 2019). There is a long history of international- and national-level deaf organization advocacy for deaf schools and congregated settings that enable provision of sign language-medium education

and socialization with deaf peers (Murray et al., 2020; Snoddon & Murray, 2019). This advocacy is often met with resistance from other disability organizations.

As Friedner (2019) notes, “disability as a social and moral category and experience is frequently routed through and exists alongside other domains” (p. 403). Building on Cioè-Peña’s (2017) work about the intersectional gap faced by culturally and linguistically diverse disabled children, other authors have argued that an intersectional approach to inclusion for deaf learners is needed (Murray et al., 2020; see also Kusters et al., 2017). The term “intersectional” derives from Crenshaw’s (1989) seminal work in Black feminist thought about the multidimensionality of experiences for people who are multiply oppressed by racism, sexism, and other systems of discrimination. The disability studies in education movement frequently proposes that a central goal for inclusion is to educate disabled learners alongside nondisabled learners. An intersectional approach takes into account deaf learners’ particular language needs, proposing that education alongside nondeaf peers in mainstream settings is not the central goal since these settings rarely support an education in sign language or deaf children’s positive identity development (Murray et al., 2020). Similarly, De Meulder (2016) and others have argued that deaf people have a “dual category” status as disabled people and members of linguistic and cultural minorities. Disability spaces are not the same as deaf spaces (Snoddon & Underwood, 2017).

Deaf ontologies create alternate views for disability studies not only in terms of categories of impairment and disability (Kermit, 2009) but also in the view of how social inclusion is achieved. This is not to reject the value of a disabled identity or the contributions of disability studies and activism toward deaf people’s lives. Rather, it is to resist the “totalizing category” of “disability in a liberal framework,” which includes the UN CRPD (Friedner, 2019,

p. 407). To date, in Canada and elsewhere, the CRPD has largely not succeeded as a sign language planning in education document, despite the provisions of Article 24 regarding facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community in educational systems (Snoddon & Wilkinson, 2019). In part, this may be due to the CRPD's lack of an explicit statement on the value of deaf schools for deaf learners like that found in Section 21 of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (Snoddon & Murray, 2019; UNESCO, 1994). The CRPD's framing of inclusion and access may actually obscure the lived experiences and desires of deaf and other disabled people (Friedner, 2019). The next section of this paper further describes the social and epistemological violence of inclusion in terms of disrupting intergenerational language transmission.

### **The Severance of Intergenerational Language Transmission**

One effect of implementing inclusive education for deaf people in both the global South and North is the near-severing of transmission of language, culture, and identity between older and younger generations. Intergenerational transmission of a language is Factor 1 on UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment questionnaire, which measures language vitality, since child speakers are needed for the survival of any language (McKee, 2017). For example, in Iquitos, Peru, Goico (2019) notes that the shift to an inclusive educational system, in line with the UN CRPD, has meant deaf children are placed in mainstream classrooms with no support in the form of sign language interpreters or other resources. As a result, the Peruvian Sign Language used by deaf adults who as children were educated in special schools alongside deaf peers is currently not being transmitted to deaf children and youth under the age of eighteen in inclusive settings (Goico, 2019). In these settings, deaf students are often the only deaf

individuals in their inclusive classrooms (Goico, 2019). Consequentially, deaf children and youth in Iquitos have been shown to be using home sign, or the signing created by isolated deaf children who lack access to a full sign language. Furthermore, this home sign is maintained as their primary form of communication for a much more extended period of time than previous generations of deaf people (Goico, 2019). According to Goico (2019), in the Peruvian educational authorities' view the ideological goals of inclusion for deaf learners are achieved by socialization with nondeaf students. Lacking awareness of deaf students' language needs, these authorities disregard students' lack of acquisition of Peruvian Sign Language as a standard sign language, or of Spanish in its written or spoken form. As a consequence, students lack access to the curriculum itself (Goico, 2019). Thus, language deprivation is exacerbated by the educational structure and school placement, and the vitality of many of the world's sign languages are threatened in an inclusive education system (De Meulder et al., 2019). This point underscores the social and epistemological violence of inclusive education for deaf learners. Like many Indigenous and minority languages, sign languages become endangered through community fragmentation (Bower, 2017). Conversely, deaf schools are instrumental in supporting the vibrancy of sign languages. When deaf adults are permitted entry, deaf schools are a cornerstone of deaf ecosystems and employment (Cordano et al., 2019).

In Regina, Canada, the decline of standard ASL varieties and a deaf ecosystem has similarly been noted in a historical context where a deaf school has closed and deaf teachers have left the province for employment elsewhere (Weber, 2019). This is so even though Saskatchewan has ample resources for providing the hearing screening and technology lacking in many parts of the global South, including Peru (see Nguyen, 2018 for a discussion of Southern theory and disability studies). In Saskatchewan, hearing technology does not lead to ensuring deaf children

have accessible linguistic input since the implementation of inclusive education has been defined as the provision of cochlear implants and speech-based instruction to the exclusion of sign language (Snoddon, 2009). Thus, inclusive education masks antipathy toward sign language, deaf children's individual needs, and deaf communities (Weber, 2020). As Branson and Miller (1993) noted, inclusive education is based on a medical model of deafness instead of on cultural and linguistic difference. In Regina, white settler and Indigenous deaf youth have been joined by deaf youth newcomers to Canada with minimal signed or spoken language abilities (Weber & Snoddon, in press). There is a pronounced age and sign language gap between deaf senior citizens who were educated at the former deaf school and deaf youth in a Regina high school resource classroom where ASL-medium education is provided. The loss of the deaf school has meant the loss of approximately two generations of deaf community participants (Weber & Snoddon, 2020).

Even in Ontario, which continues to maintain four schools for deaf students with varying enrolments, concerns have been raised regarding a sharp decline in the numbers of deaf teachers who can provide educated first-language models to deaf children (Snoddon, 2020). Without deaf teachers, it is not possible to provide sign language-medium education for deaf children since most deaf children lack access to proficient adult sign language models (Mahshie, 1995). Deaf teachers are also an implied provision of Article 24(4) the UN CRPD, which calls on states parties to "take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language." Deaf teachers and children share an ontological sameness and "teach deaf children 'how to be deaf' in this world" (Kusters, 2017, p. 255). Moreover, deaf teachers represent deaf communities in educational systems (Kusters, 2017). However, in Canada and around the world there is a pervasive shortage of deaf teachers owing to barriers to

postsecondary education, teacher education, and licensure requirements (Kusters, 2017; Snoddon, 2019; Snoddon, 2020). Affirmative action policies for signing deaf teachers are present in the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006; Ontario Regulation 184/97, s. 19) but are not followed by York University as the only English-language provider of a deaf education program in the province (Faculty of Education, 2018). In 1997, York University ceased to follow the policy of allowing deaf teacher candidates with undergraduate degrees but without Ontario College of Teachers licensure to enroll in the deaf education program (Malkowski, 2005; Snoddon, 2020). This represents the highest level of professional use of mechanisms to enable discriminatory practices to be implemented in schools. In Canada, deaf education teacher preparation programs also do not provide the support needed for hearing candidates to achieve sign language proficiency (CBC News, 2019; Snoddon, 2020).

The next section of this paper further discusses the social and epistemological violence of inclusive education related to deaf children's identity development.

### **Loss of Identity**

In Canada, deaf youth growing up in an inclusive education system have reported a lack of acknowledgment of their identity as deaf individuals on the part of parents and professionals (Snoddon & Underwood, 2019). Kermit (2019) describes this as “the ability to identify rationally and emotionally with oneself as an authentic human being” (p. 121). Instead, deaf children and youth in inclusive educational contexts are frequently reported to employ “passing” behaviours where children attempt to behave like hearing people (Goico, 2019; Kermit, 2019; Weber, 2020). As Kusters (2017) notes, without empowering role models in classrooms “deaf people lack information, remain timid and passive, and do not assertively ask for clear information and



reciprocal communication” (p. 257). Kermit (2019) reports data from a study of seven deaf children with cochlear implants in an inclusive classroom where these children, despite what was deemed to be the success of their cochlear implants, largely failed to engage in spontaneous or sustained peer conversations. Techniques of passing included producing monosyllabic responses, participating in games instead of activities requiring more complex social language, taking control of conversational exchanges in order to avoid unknown topics, avoiding conversations, and avoiding asking for clarification or repetition (Kermit, 2019). As Kermit (2019) notes, passing is an exhausting activity aimed at “faking ‘normalcy’” (p. 127).

The effects of passing, borne by lone deaf students in inclusive classrooms, were expressed by Weber’s (2020) student journal as follows: “Who would give me an award for being deaf? For not being able to speak properly? For not being able to sound normal? For talking too loud? Who is going to applaud me?” The author of this paper wrote a piece entitled “The Girl” for her sixth-grade school newsletter that began:

She stands apart from the others because she is apart. She is not like them; she doesn’t want to be. She stands stiffly, her back to the wall, her face fixed in the same unmoving expression of blankness. The others are hardly aware of her; she does not belong with them, and there is no use in pretending that she does. She remains apart. (Snoddon, 1986)

As Kermit (2019) observes, “Inclusive communities must be communities where everyone has the opportunity to express, and to receive, recognition in the form of solidarity. *But this might only truly work between peers*” (p. 127, italics in original). Without congregation and socialization with other deaf students and learning “how to express and receive recognition through language” (Kermit, 2019, p. 127), development of a positive deaf social identity may not be possible.

This paper has outlined some ways in which inclusive education causes social and epistemological violence to deaf learners and communities in terms of disrupting language transmission, deaf ecologies, and transmission of deaf ontologies by deaf teachers, and failing to support deaf students' identity development and peer relationships. The next section of this paper discusses some alternative policies, practices, and requirements for implementing sign language-medium education and supporting the vitality of deaf futures.

### **Alternative Policies and Practices**

If disability rights frameworks and legal recognition of sign languages truly have the goal of supporting sign language rights for deaf children, then there must be clear-eyed and meaningful consideration of the requirements for providing sign language-medium education. These requirements may need to be considered separately from inclusive education policies for other disabled students. Legal recognition of sign languages often takes the form of nebulous policies like section 5.1(2) of Bill C-81, the *Accessible Canada Act's* 2019 recognition of ASL, LSQ and Indigenous sign languages "as the primary languages for communication by deaf persons in Canada" (Canada, 2019a). This framework views sign languages in terms of accessibility accommodations (i.e., sign language interpreters) in a context of communication barriers when receiving federal government services (Snoddon & Wilkinson, 2019). However, like most sign language recognition legislation around the world, this framework does not provide for educational linguistic rights, which are needed to implement sign language-medium education (Snoddon & Wilkinson, 2019) and prevent epidemic language deprivation in deaf children. As an alternative policy framework, Bill C-91, *An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages*, which received royal assent on the same day as Bill C-81, includes Indigenous sign

languages within the purpose and direct scope of the Act to support and promote the use of Indigenous languages and supports the efforts of Indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages (Canada, 2019b). However, it remains to be seen if legislation aimed at supporting Indigenous language revitalization will provide for the sign language-medium educational needs of Indigenous deaf children (Snoddon & Wilkinson, in press). Because the *Indigenous Languages Act* falls under the remit of the Department of Canadian Heritage rather than Indigenous Services Canada, the *Act* may not lead to immediate changes in Indigenous education (Leitch, 2019).

Ironically, legal recognition of sign languages without meaningful regulations concerning sign language-medium education is also evident in the *Ontario Education Act*. The amended Regulation 298 of this *Act* emphasizes the contingent and voluntary in decreeing the following:

32. Where it is practical to do so and if the pupil understands American Sign Language or Quebec Sign Language, as the case may be, a teacher or temporary teacher may use American Sign Language or Quebec Sign Language,
- (a) in the classroom; and
  - (b) as a language of instruction and in communications in regard to discipline and management of the school.

In over a decade since the above regulation's amendment in 2007, Ontario schools are less likely to provide accommodations for deaf students in the form of sign language interpreters or signing educational assistants, let alone direct instruction from teachers in ASL or LSQ (Snoddon, 2020). In Canada, both federal and provincial recognition of sign languages appears to be inadequate in terms of securing meaningful sign language rights that support access to language models for intergenerational sign language transmission and deaf children's positive identity development.

Therefore, inclusive education and disability rights in education movements must enact and fully support policies concerning sign language-medium education for deaf children and access to signing teachers and peers who are also deaf, within the context of both deaf schools and mainstream schools. From the implementation and ongoing interpretation of the UN CRPD, it is clear that inclusive education policy documents must also be explicit regarding funding for and provision of deaf schools (Murray et al., 2020). As seen in the case of Carter Churchill that was cited at the beginning of this paper, many of the resources needed to provide education for deaf children in any setting are dependent on the survival of deaf schools and are lost when these schools are no longer available. Therefore, without the resources and language models provided by deaf schools, mainstream schools are less able to meet their responsibilities to provide appropriate educational supports and services (Murray et al., 2020).

Inclusive education and disability rights in education advocates must call for renewed affirmative action policies for signing deaf teachers, such as those that are present in the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* (Ontario College of Teachers 2006; Ontario Regulation 184/97, s. 19) but are not followed by York University. Affirmative action policies for deaf teachers are needed to reduce pervasive barriers to both postsecondary education and teacher licensure (Canadian Hearing Society, 2014). This is also in keeping with the provisions of Article 24(4) of the UN CRPD.

Further development of teacher-driven models of sign language-medium education for deaf students is sorely needed. This point is in recognition of the fact that even when qualified sign language interpreters are provided, they cannot replace a sign language-medium environment (World Federation of the Deaf, 2018). To be current, sign language-medium education models must be informed by interdisciplinary research in sign language linguistics,

linguistic anthropology, and deaf population health as well as education. This interdisciplinary focus is needed in order for knowledge from different disciplines to be mobilized to impact deaf and disability activists, policy developers, educators, and administrators. This framework should also inform teacher preparation courses and resources and be an integral component in teacher preparation and provision of sign language-medium education.

Weber (2019) has created multiple arts-based ASL interventions with her Indigenous, immigrant, refugee, and white settler deaf high school resource room class students, most of whom grew up without access to ASL or other sign languages. The multiple iterations of these efforts have been showcased in theatres and art galleries (Deaf Crows Collective, 2019). In addition to supporting students' learning of and self-expression in ASL, these arts-based interventions correspond to other disability arts movements which "contribute to rights and justice pursuits by expanding our collective imagination of what is required to live vital lives" (Chandler & Ignagni, 2018, p. 258). However, in order to be sustainable and transferable, innovative deaf education practices like these need a renewed investment in teacher preparation, deaf schools, and programming that supports high-quality sign language-medium education.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has addressed the social and epistemological violence of inclusive education for deaf learners as it threatens the vitality of sign languages, deaf knowledges, and deaf community futures. As Branson and Miller (1993, p. 23) noted nearly three decades ago, it behooves "a society which asserts equality of opportunity through equal access to society's economic, political, educational and cultural resources" to further examine how marginality and inequality are reproduced for deaf people. Disability studies theorists have noted that the vitality

of disabled futures is threatened by curative and eugenic discourses and systems (Kafer, 2013), including with medical assistance in dying and genetic technologies that “offer greater access to death” (Chandler & Ignagni, 2018, p. 256). In this way, deaf and disability communities share similar preoccupations with their own vitality and survival in a culture that does not view them as desirable (Chandler & Ignagni, 2018). However, deaf futures are particularly threatened by inclusive education systems and discourses that deprive deaf children of the conditions they need to thrive.

This paper has called on inclusive education and disability advocates to recognize the particular and situated ways in which the language and educational needs of deaf learners are met, and to reconsider the tenets of inclusive education itself. For instance, inclusive education advocates frequently condemn sign language-medium education for deaf children as “segregated” (e.g., Kayess & Green, 2017). However, sign language-medium educational settings may be essential to counter the linguistic and cultural deprivation of deaf learners (Branson & Miller, 1993) and the social and epistemological violence wrought in inclusive settings. Reconsidering the tenets of inclusive education may also re-centre the importance of identity and belonging for other groups of children with and without a disability label (Murray et al., 2020). Neoliberal governments and educational systems frequently proclaim an inclusive education mandate that is simultaneous with these governments’ austerity agendas and antagonism toward signing deaf people. It is important for a disability rights in education movement that originated in disabled people’s emancipation to not drive the eradication of signing deaf communities.

## References

- Bowern, C. (2017). Language vitality: Theorizing language loss, shift, and reclamation (Response to Mufwene). *Language*, 93(4), e243-e253.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2017.0068>
- Branson, J. & Miller, D. (1993). Sign language, the deaf, and the epistemic violence of mainstreaming. *Language and Education*, 7(1), 21-41.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09500789309541346>
- Canada. (2019a). *An act to ensure a barrier-free Canada*, SC 2019 c 10.
- Canada. (2019b). *An act respecting Indigenous languages*, SC 2019 c 23.
- CBC News. (2019, September 6). Parent says school district failed her deaf son by hiring unqualified teacher. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/nlesd-school-deaf-student-1.5272898>
- Canadian Hearing Society. (2014). *Canadian Hearing Society's position paper on challenges and issues affecting access to post-secondary education for deaf and hard of hearing students*.  
[https://www.chs.ca/sites/default/files/final\\_board\\_approved\\_chs\\_position\\_paper\\_on\\_post-secondary\\_education\\_nov\\_29\\_2014.pdf](https://www.chs.ca/sites/default/files/final_board_approved_chs_position_paper_on_post-secondary_education_nov_29_2014.pdf).
- Chandler, E. & Ignagni, E. (2018). Strange beauty: Aesthetic possibilities for sustaining disability into the future. In K. Ellis, R. G. Thomson, M. Kent, & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary approaches to disability: Looking towards the future* (pp. 255-264). Routledge.

- Cioè-Peña, M. (2017). The intersectional gap: How bilingual students in the United States are excluded from inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(9), 906-919.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1296032>
- Commerson, R. (2019, November 4). Attention all local deaf education activists/advocates. [Facebook update]. Retrieved November 25, 2019 from  
<https://www.facebook.com/ryan.commerson/videos/10156742451861732/>.
- Constitution Act, Part I: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html>.
- Cordano, R., Holmes, T., & Rashid, K. (2019, July 25). *Beyond sign language recognition: Building a signing-based global learning economy* [Paper presentation]. XVIII World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf, Paris, France.
- Council of Canadians with Disabilities. (2016, December 23). *Canada to ratify CRPD's Optional Protocol*. <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/international/un/canada/CRPD-OP-23Dec2016>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(8), 139-167. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- De Meulder, M. (2016). *The power of language policy: The legal recognition of sign languages and the aspirations of deaf communities* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- De Meulder, M., Murray, J. J., & McKee, R. (Eds.) (2019). *The legal recognition of sign languages: Advocacy and outcomes around the world*. Multilingual Matters.
- Deaf Crows Collective. (2019). *Home page*. <https://www.deafcrowscollective.ca/>.



- Erevelles, N. (2000). Educating unruly bodies: Critical pedagogy, disability studies and the politics of schooling. *Educational Theory*, 50(1), 25–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2000.00025.x>
- Faculty of Education. (2018). *Admission requirements & application: Residents of Ontario*. York University. <http://edu.yorku.ca/academic-programs/deaf-hard-of-hearing-education/how-to-apply/>.
- Friedner, M. (2019). Praying for rights: Cultivating deaf worldings in urban India. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 92(2), 403-426. <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2019.0020>
- Goico, S. A. (2019). The impact of “inclusive” education on the language of deaf youth in Iquitos, Peru. *Sign Language Studies*, 19(3), 348-374. <http://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2019.0001>
- Graif, P. 2018. *Being and hearing: Making intelligible worlds in deaf Kathmandu*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hall, W. C., Levin, L. L., & Anderson, M. L. (2017). Language deprivation syndrome: A possible neurodevelopmental disorder with sociocultural origins. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52, 761-776. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-017-1351-7>
- Hult, F. & Compton, S. (2012). Deaf education policy as language policy: A comparative analysis of Sweden and the United States. *Sign Language Studies*, 12(4). 602-620. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2012.0014>
- Jalongo, M. R. (2013). *Early childhood language arts* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson.
- Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, queer, crip*. Indiana University Press.
- Kauppinen, L. & Jokinen, M. (2014). Deaf culture and linguistic rights. In M. Sabatello & M. Schulze (Eds.), *Human rights and disability advocacy* (pp. 131-145). University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Kavanagh, J.L. (2020). *The sounds of silence: Perspectives on the education system's response to deaf and hard of hearing children*. Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.  
<https://www.childandyouthadvocate.nf.ca/pdfs/TheSoundsOfSilenceDHHJune2020.pdf>
- Kayess, R. & J. Green. (2017). Today's lesson is on diversity. In P. D. Blanck & E. Flynn (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of disability law and human rights* (pp. 53-71). Routledge/Taylor & Francis.
- Kermit, P. (2009). Deaf or deaf? Questioning alleged antinomies in the bioethical discourses on cochlear implantation and suggesting an alternative approach to d/Deafness. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 11(2), 159-174.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15017410902830744>
- Kermit, P.S. (2019). Passing for recognition: Deaf children's moral struggles languaging in inclusive education. *Deafness and Education International*, 21(2-3), 116-132.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2018.1561783>
- Komesaroff, L. (2008). *Disabling pedagogy: Power, politics, and deaf education*. Gallaudet University Press.
- Kusters, A., De Meulder, M., & O'Brien, D. (2017). Innovations in deaf studies: Critically mapping the field. In A. Kusters, M. De Meulder, & D. O'Brien (Eds.), *Innovations in deaf studies: The role of deaf scholars* (pp. 1-53). Oxford University Press.
- Kusters, M. (2017). Intergenerational responsibility in deaf pedagogies. In A. Kusters, M. De Meulder, & D. O'Brien (Eds.), *Innovations in deaf studies: The role of deaf scholars* (pp. 241-262). Oxford University Press.
- Lane, H., Hoffmeister, R. & Bahan, B. (1996). *A journey into the Deaf-World*. Dawn Sign Press.

- Langenegger, S. (2016, June 15). Youth justice system “failed” late Sask. teen with hearing disability who tried gesturing severity of illness. *CBC News*.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/advocate-says-sask-teenager-failed-by-youth-justice-system-1.3636392>.
- Leitch, D. G. (2019, December 8). *Indigenous language rights: Moving beyond C-91* [Paper presentation]. The National Colloquium on Canada’s Indigenous Languages Policy in the Wake of Bill C-91, Glendon College, York University, Toronto.
- Lord, R. (2019, November 2). “They are hurting him”: Newfoundland family fights for education equality. *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6113747/ewfoundland-human-rights-complaint/>.
- Mahshie, S. N. (1995). *Educating Deaf children bilingually: With insights and applications from Sweden and Denmark*. Gallaudet University Press.
- Malkowski, G. (2005, April 29). *Response of the Canadian Hearing Society to the Ontario College of Teachers: Preparing Teachers for Tomorrow Initial Teacher Education in Ontario*. Canadian Hearing Society. <https://www.chs.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/chs-preparing-teachers-tomorrow.pdf>
- Mauldin, L. (2016). *Made to hear: Cochlear implants and raising deaf children*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKee, R. (2017). Assessing the vitality of New Zealand Sign Language. *Sign Language Studies*, 17(3), 322-362. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sls.2017.0008>
- McKenzie-Sutter, H. (2019, October 29). N.L. father says review of services for deaf children must include families. *CTV News*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/n-l-father-says-review-of-services-for-deaf-children-must-include-families-1.4660089>.

- Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (2018). *Language development services guidelines: Ontario Infant Hearing Program. Version 2018.2*. Ministry of Children and Youth Services.
- Murray, J. J., Hall, W. C., & Snoddon, K. (2019). Education and health of children with hearing loss: The necessity of signed languages. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 97. <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/97/10/19-229427.pdf>
- Murray, J. J., Snoddon, K., De Meulder, M., & Underwood, K. (2020). Intersectional inclusion for deaf learners: Moving beyond General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 of the UNCRPD. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 24(7), 691-705. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1482013>
- Nguyen, X. T. (2018). Critical disability studies at the edge of global development: Why do we need to engage with Southern theory? *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 7(1). <https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/400>
- Ontario College of Teachers. (2006). *Preparing teachers for tomorrow: The final report*. Ontario College of Teachers. [https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/Preparing%20Teachers%20for%20Tomorrow%20Final%20Report%202006/EN/tqr\\_report\\_e.pdf](https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/Preparing%20Teachers%20for%20Tomorrow%20Final%20Report%202006/EN/tqr_report_e.pdf)
- Pringle, B. (2016). *The silent world of Jordan: Special investigation report*. Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth. <https://www.saskadvocate.ca/sites/default/files/u12/The%20Silent%20World%20of%20Jordan%20Public%20Report%20June%2015%202016.pdf>.

- Russell, D. & McLeod, J. (2009). Educational interpreting: Multiple perspectives of our work. In J. Mole (Ed.), *International perspectives on educational interpreting* (pp. 128-144). Direct Learned Services Ltd.
- Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. (2016). *Access and equality for Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing people: A report to stakeholders*. Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.  
[https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/pub/documents/news/2016/20160512\\_SHRC\\_DdHoH\\_Report.pdf](https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/pub/documents/news/2016/20160512_SHRC_DdHoH_Report.pdf).
- Slee, R. & Allan, J. (2001). Excluding the included: A reconsideration of inclusive education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(2), 173-192.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210100200073>
- Snoddon, K. (1986, May 8). The girl. *Thorah Central Public School Newsletter*.
- Snoddon, K. (2008). American Sign Language and early intervention. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 64(4), 581-604. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.64.4.581>
- Snoddon, K. (2009). Equity in education: Signed language and the courts. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 10(3), 279-295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664200903116303>
- Snoddon, K. (2019). *Report on baseline data collection on deaf education in Nepal*. World Federation of the Deaf. <http://wfdeaf.org/news/resources/report-baseline-data-collection-deaf-education-nepal/>
- Snoddon, K. (2020). Sign language planning and policy in Ontario teacher education. *Language Policy*. Ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-020-09569-7>.
- Snoddon, K. & Murray, J. J. (2019). The Salamanca Statement and sign language education for deaf learners 25 years on. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7-8), 740-753.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1622807>

- Snoddon, K. & Underwood, K. (2014). Toward a social relational model of Deaf childhood. *Disability & Society*, 29(4), 530-542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.823081>
- Snoddon, K. & Underwood, K. (2017). Deaf time in the twenty-first century: Considering rights frameworks and the social relational model of deaf childhood. *Disability & Society*, 32(9), 1400-1415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1320269>
- Snoddon, K. & Underwood, K. (2019). *Analysis from young deaf people on IECSS findings*. Inclusive Early Childhood Service System project: Research Brief No. 2. Retrieved from <http://iecss.blog.ryerson.ca/library/briefs/>
- Snoddon, K. & Wilkinson, E. (2019). Problematizing the legal recognition of sign languages in Canada. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 75(2) 128-144. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2018-0232>
- Snoddon, K. & Wilkinson, E. (in press). Vulnerabilities, challenges, and risks in sign language recognition in Canada. In C. Cunningham & C. Hall (Eds.), *Taking risks in applied linguistics*. Multilingual Matters.
- UNESCO. (1994). *World conference on special needs education: Access and quality. Final report*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000110753>.
- Weber, J. (2019). *Becoming deaf in the posthuman era: Posthumanism, arts-based research, and deaf education* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Regina, Regina, SK.
- Weber, J. (2020). Interrogating sign language ideologies in the Saskatchewan deaf community: An autoethnography. In A. Kusters, M. Green, E. Moriarty Harrelson, & K. Snoddon (Eds.), *Sign language ideologies in practice*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Weber, J. & Snoddon, K. (2020). *Intelligibility as a methodological problem in the rehearsal spaces of a deaf play*. *Apple Time. Sign Language Studies*, 20(4), 595-618.

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/763670>

World Federation of the Deaf. (2018, May 10). *Position paper on inclusive education*.

<https://wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WFD-Position-Paper-on-Inclusive-Education-5-June-2018-FINAL-without-IS.pdf>.