DEAF CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE AND THE QUESTION OF ORALISM, 1880-1914

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Introduction

In 1880, the delegates of the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf in Milan met to discuss the direction of deaf education. Their attention was focussed specifically on the role of articulation and speech, in contrast to the prevalent sign language-based manual teaching methods. Of its 164 attendees, 139 represented the Italian and French clergy, five people each comprised the British and American delegations, and none were deaf.[1] On 11th September, the attendees voted 160-4 for the 'incontestable superiority of speech over signs, for restoring deaf mutes to social life and giving them greater superiority in language.'[2] Without a single deaf voice to be heard, let alone from the children this would be affecting, the Congress began the process of striking sign language from the educational lives of deaf pupils across the world.

A year later, British headmasters gathered at the Conference of Head Masters of Institutions and of Other Workers for the Education of the Deaf & Dumb in London to discuss the 'Pure Oral' system advocated in Milan, which would teach articulation and lip-reading rather than signs. Richard Elliott, headmaster of the Old Kent Road and Margate schools, presented the opening paper, musing on the Congress' recommendation of the abandonment of signs:

> If I believed that the Congress at Milan had settled the question, I should have said change your system - I do not believe it has done so, so far as the English language is concerned, but it has brought forward prominently the claims of the system it advocates, and therefore, I say, try it - but try it without sacrificing the interests of any child in the enlightenment it seeks at your hands.[3]

Elliott's cautious optimism for the system epitomised the long, varied and often contradictory debate which Britain experienced in the years after 1880, neither wholeheartedly embracing it nor fighting the ideologies of normalisation and language suppression that had been shaped at Milan.

The practice and legacy of what is now largely termed 'oralism' in has become without doubt the most controversial and passionately-argued topic of modern deaf history. Some early histories of special education in was discussed uncritically – Kenneth Hodgson's *The Deaf and their Problems* (1953) presented deaf history from a distinctly medical perspective, the history of oralism fitting into a narrative of progress against the 'problem' of losing hearing.[4] Similarly, D.G. Pritchard's exhaustive 1963 work *Education and the Handicapped* finds the earliest deaf schools' abandonment of it 'deeply to be regretted'.[5] Whilst these works still find use as compendiums of facts and sources, the ideology behind them seems outdated and overly medicalized.

More recently, however, many historians of the deaf have written in powerful and emotive terms. The deaf historian and activist Paddy Ladd asks, for example, 'What could we have been had not sign language and Deaf teachers been removed from Deaf education after the Milan Congress of 1880, a date as pregnant with meaning for us as 1492 is for Native Americans.'[6] Interpretations of 'what could have been' vary, however most criticism of oralism centres on its dismissal and suppression of any kind of deaf community and its language, as well as the general failure of the system to even succeed its main goal – enabling deaf children to write and speak English.[7]

Moreover, historians are beginning to address the need for deaf voices in their own history. Cathy Kudlick notes the shift towards seeing deaf people as 'active agents of thier own fate', standing up for their position as a 'legitimate linguistic minority'.[8] Studies such as Robert

Buchanan's *Illusions of Equality* show a picture of organisational and personal resistance to the threat posed by oralism to American deaf people's communities.[9] 'This record of sustained resistance through shared linguistic and cultural identification,' he argues, 'is remarkable, if not unique, in American history.'[10] These contests over language would have been fought not just in the United States, but worldwide.

This chapter aims to supplement the existing studies and criticisms of oralism and its historical effects by focusing specifically on Britain. It will reveal a deeply-fought contest for the identities and lives of deaf children which, from a national perspective, did not simply boil down to an instant shift from manualism (the use of sign in the classroom) to oralism. After an overview of British oralism, it will focus on the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, the first and largest deaf institution in Wales. Its records – most significantly a collection of letters sent by its deaf principal Benjamin Payne - reveal an open but questioning, and frequently contradictory, attitude to the values and ideology of oralism.

Furthermore, it will argue that, in order to understand the complexity of the situation, the historian needs to consider the experiences of the pupils and the deaf communities they might have belonged to, alongside the far more widely-documented opinions of those educators and philanthropists who made the decisions. Payne's letters provide clues to the effects on the individual children's lives, whilst deaf newspapers from the time reveal deaf resistance to oralism's destructive effects on their community. Though these deaf voices are hard to find, and in some cases require careful reading of institutional sources, they help to reveal the damaging effects of oralism and, crucially, the response and resistance from the deaf people whose lives it affected.

Oralism in Britain

Whilst Milan is largely considered the world watershed for the replacement of sign language with oralism, Britain's pre-1880 deaf education was less homogenous than the extremes experienced by France and Germany. Despite some voices of opposition, the majority of French deaf students, beginning with those at the Abbe Charles-Michel de l'Épée's school in Paris in 1760, had used French Sign Language. This was until a dramatic shift to oralism as a consequence of Milan, FSL being banned in many schools that same year until the 1990s.[11] Conversely, Germany had mostly been using the Pure Oral system since Samuel Heinicke had founded its first deaf school in Leipzig in 1778, using the articulation-focused teaching method he had developed.[12]

As several historians have pointed out, Britain's deaf schools had been mixing manual and oral methods long before 1880 and did not rely on one fixed interpretation of how deaf children should be educated.[13] Thomas Braidwood, whose Academy for the Deaf and Dumb in Edinburgh was the first school for the deaf in Britain, used what Jackson has called 'a form of total communication' which taught both speech and sign.[14] His early methods were primarily oralist and involved using mouth instruments to teach children sounds of words, moving to more manual-focused teaching later in his career.[15] Many of the emerging British deaf schools (which until the 1820s remained dominated by Braidwood and his family) used either the 'combined system' of sign and speech or occasionally, in the case of the Swiss headmaster Louis du Puget at the General Institution for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Children at Birmingham, manualism in the French tradition.[16]

The Milan Congress succeeded in raising the profile of oralism in the UK, though the Pure Oral method had been spreading from the 1850s. This started on a small scale through figures such as Susannah Hull in London and Gerrit van Asch in Manchester, and culminated in the founding in 1871 of the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb in Fitzroy Square, London.[17] Likewise from 1879 the London School Board introduced the Pure Oral

system into their experimental Day Schools.[18] The LSB's approach to deaf education was somewhat unique. Firstly, it was one of few School Boards to deal specifically with deaf children. It shunned the traditional institutional approach in favour of Day Schools, which most leaders of Institutions considered insufficient to provide deaf children with a full education. Rev William Stainer - the LSB's first Superintendent for deaf children - presented this idea in a paper on 'The Advantages of Small Numbers in Day Schools over Large Numbers in Day Schools' at the Headmasters' Conference of 1877. He noted that a number of School Boards (such as Sheffield) sought to emulate the LSB, however the resulting discussion at the conference suggests his ideas received a less than enthusiastic response from the institutions' headmasters.[19]

Yet for all its unusualness, the LSB's adoption of oralsim was indicative of Britain's increasingly receptive attitudes towards the method. In the wake of Milan, oralism took a place as a major facet of British deaf education, receiving widespread recognition as a valid educational practice and a direct rejection of sign language. Indeed, Stainer himself made what Pritchard calls 'a very sudden conversion' to pure oralism, having previously advocated the combined system.[20] The Royal Commission on the Blind, the Deaf and Dumb &c. of the United Kingdom acted as an outlet and introduction for some of the key strategies and ideologies behind oralism. Initiated in 1885 by Lord Egerton to recommend state action for blind education, it began reporting on deaf education the following year. Their Report emerged in 1889 as a forum for debate on oralism. It reprinted the American debate between Edward Miner Gallaudet and Alexander Graham Bell. Edward, like his father Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, helped give signs a major role in American deaf education, whilst Bell's work in deaf education focused largely on speech and articulation.[21]

The American interviews provided a backdrop to the Commissioners' own debates. Both sides were included in their Report, and indeed the three panellists varied in their own

educational backgrounds, however the conclusions came down firmly on the side of oralism. Whilst stopping before a total ban of signs, as in France, its adoption in schools was 'a step in the right direction.'[22] Perhaps more telling were the explanations offered as to why signs were to be sidelined:

> We have observed how the use of signs creates a tendency to live apart as a class rather than to mix with the world, and upon the consequent intermarriage of the deaf, which in Germany and Switzerland does not occur to the same extent under the oral system.[23]

The supposed dangers of deaf people marrying or cutting themselves off from hearing society were flagged throughout the report. The Commisioners printed research from a paper by Dr Buxton at the Medical Society at Liverpool, who argued that congenital deafness in children was seven times more likely if both parents were deaf, rather than just one.[24] Oralism was proposed by the Commissioners as the best solution to the supposed problem of deaf people failing to integrate into wider society. 'The use of articulate language and the power of lip-reading accurately', they argued, 'are the greatest alleviation to their isolated position.'[25]

The reasoning behind the Royal Commission's findings demonstrates the importance of finding the underlying motivations behind oral education, and their effect on (and destruction of) Deaf communities. Much research has already been done on the wider social motivations of oralism. Douglas Baynton has explored the 'linguistic Darwinism' at the heart of the theory. It was argued, even by Darwin himself, that contemporary sign language was 'used by the deaf and dumb and by savages', and was linked to the gestures used by humans before they mastered spoken language.[26] Oralism therefore would give teachers the responsibility and ability to instil spoken language in deaf people, returning them to hearing society and thus human evolution.

It was this evolutionary slant and normalising ideology which made oralism more than compatible with the emerging eugenics movement. Alexander Graham Bell's warnings against 'the formation of a deaf variety of the human race' (this despite his wife's deafness) chimed perfectly with the eugenicists voicing their fears of the decline of the race and the reproduction of the 'unfit'.[27] Likewise the Royal Commissioners' argument that schools should keep careful statistics of pupils' age of deafness, existence of deaf relatives, amount of hearing and physical condition mirrored the meticulous race science methodology of Francis Galton and Karl Pearson.[28]

Most use of oralism was deeply class-based and exclusionary. Oral methods were more expensive than manual and required smaller class sizes, and few doubted the reality that not all deaf children could be taught speech. It was, however, accessible to the 'parlour pupils' - the private pupils taught exclusively by headmasters for an increased fee - which helped create a deep linguistic class divide.[29] It is highly likely that this was fully encouraged. An interview with William van Praagh, the director of the Training College for Teachers of the Normal School of the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, certainly suggests this. Asked why 'orally-taught deaf, after leaving school, seldom, if ever interest themselves in the welfare of their less fortunate brothers and sisters', he responded:

> Your remarks are perfectly correct. The deaf, taught to speak, feels his superiority, and the more advanced he is in speech and lip-reading the more he feels inclined to ignore his affliction and mix with the hearing. The pure oralist ought to encourage this feeling.[30]

Oralism's ability to divide and destroy deaf communities, far from being a side effect, appears to have been actively encouraged. Many oralists were hostile towards the very idea of a deaf community.

Yet for all its influence and power, Britain experienced a debate on oralism, not a full-scale revolution. As seen earlier, the headmasters' conference of 1881 revealed a receptive but uncertain community of deaf headmasters, willing to try the oral method but expressing doubts as to its effectiveness and costs. The latter was a key point for deaf institutions weighing up the supposed benefits of oralism: it was significantly more expensive than the manual or combined systems, a matter of concern for many institutions which struggled on a daily basis to teach and provide accommodation to children on mostly voluntary donations.[31] It was this lasting uncertainty which ensured oralism never swept Britain with the rapidity and scale experienced by France.[32]

Furthermore, Iain Hutchinson notes both the continuing presence of the 'combined system' across Britain, and the geographical differences in the spread of pure oralism.[33] Thus England and Scotland experienced a marked difference in the number of pupils educated orally - whilst oralism continued to spread in England, the combined system retained its firm hold on Scottish deaf education. Hutchinson rightly points out this may partly be explained by differences in the economic backgrounds of Scottish and English pupils.[34] Yet even with social and economic factors taken into account, British deaf education faced debate, opposition and uncertainty over the role to be played by oralism. This would be an ongoing and unresolved contest.

The Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea: A fractured relationship with oralism

The Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was Wales' primary deaf institution, and its records play out a contest between sign language and oral education.[35] The minute books, letters and Annual Reports all point towards the teachers and committee's adoption of oralist methodology and the social manipulation associated with it, though the degree of its success and enthusiasm seems to vary greatly.

Founded in Aberystwyth in 1847 with accommodation for twelve children, it moved to Swansea three years later, finding Swansea's transport links more of an advantage to Aberystwyth's central Welsh location.[36] From the outset, teaching deaf children to speak was high on the agenda. A report in *The Welshman* in 1847 detailed the public meeting to establish the school, which included a customary display and examination of deaf children (here a 16-year-old pupil at the Yorkshire Institution and a former pupil of the London Asylum).[37] After answering a question fingerspelled to him by headmaster Charles Rhind, one of the children pronounced vowels whilst placing his fingers on Rhind's throat to 'feel the muscles that were in operation in the pronunciation of articulate words.' The reporter noted the audience's fascination at 'this wonderful display of man's conquests over the difficulties and defects of nature.'[38] The normalising processes of oralism were clearly aspired to from the very beginning.

Yet it was not until the arrival of principal Benjamin Payne from 1876 to 1914, however, that the oralism contest was truly played out. Payne was one of few deaf headmasters in Britain, having lost his hearing through scarlet fever at ten years old.[39] Deeply involved in the debates occurring amongst deaf headmasters, he was a regular figure at the Headmasters' Conferences and at times acted as its only deaf representative. At the 1877 conference, he used this position as a man who 'for more than eighteen years had been most intimately associated with the deaf and dumb' to highlight the specific needs of the deaf community. He defended the 'immense moral influence' that manualist teachers possessed over their students. The report details this personal attack on oralism:

> ...the pantomimist [sign language teacher] did not bid a final good-bye to his pupil at the schoolroom door, but followed him into his walk in life... Did oralists do the like? No; they depended on others to do it for them, others who did not know half as much about the deaf and dumb as their teachers did, who could not

> communicate with them so well by any system, and whose influence over them was in the same small proportion.[40]

Payne's own experiences clearly informed his contribution to the debate. Oralism is criticised solely for its failure to improve the lives of deaf children. It was a striking rejection of oral educators' inability to understand the workings of the deaf community.

Payne would continue to attend conferences and drawing attention to his experience and opinion, however his arguments regarding oralism varied greatly. On one occasion in 1881, he doubled as a sign interpreter to deaf visitors at the conference. Yet here he used his position as 'the only deaf-speaking member of the Conference to *praise* the German pure oral system. At that conference, he addressed the prominent oralist St. John Ackers, thanking him 'on behalf of the deaf' for 'what he has indirectly done and desirous of doing.'[41] Thus here he acted as a representative for the deaf community whilst simultaneously applauding the ideology intended to destroy it.

Oral education was taught to what were deemed the most able pupils in the Cambrian Institution, and its presence in the curriculum was not hidden. 'Articulation and lip-reading' appeared under a list of subjects taught in the Institution's Annual Reports from the 1880s onwards.[42] Yet letters from Payne to his honorary secretary, Joseph Hall, reveal a deep anxiety about its efficiency. This uncertainty climaxed in 1879 with a lengthy discussion of the system's failings. 'It has been admitted', he wrote, 'that articulation and lip-reading have generally failed ... that the time and means were found to be insufficient, that all pupils were not capable of developing the faculty of speech and acquiring the art of lip-reading, and that the manual means which were therefore resorted to eventually superseded the first in the affection and practice of the pupils.'[43] Oralism in its pure form appears to have been

dismissed. It was costly, time-consuming and exclusionary, thus wholly unsuitable for a charitable institution for poor and uneducated children.

Preference for the 'combined system' was, of course, widespread, and it was not unusual for institutions to reject universal adoption of oralism. Yet Payne's conclusions in the letter suggest a more receptive attitude than first thought:

> We have an oral class of eight. We are ourselves desirous of adding to it. When the Cambrian Institution is supported in the style of the oral schools of London articulation and lip-reading will be taught as extensively as subscribers may desire, compatibly with the education by other means of those who cannot profit from the first.[44]

Oral education here appears to be encouraged as a matter of demand. Wealthier parents with children supposedly able to succeed in articulation would ideally be able to request oral education. Sign language is restricted to the 'other means' resorted to for the weaker pupils. This enthusiasm was not confined to his correspondence with Hall: the following year, Payne inquired for a student from the oralist teacher training school at Ealing conduct his 'oral class', though seemingly to no avail.[45] Payne's letters present a contradictory opinion: he wrote of oralism's many limits and failures, yet was looking to expand its teaching in the Institution.

It is possible that this varying position stemmed not just from a distrust of the pure oral system, but from a desire to avoid the reliance on sign language. 'We do not teach our pupils to sign,' he wrote to the father of a boy taking the oral class, 'It is not the purpose for which they come to us.'[46] A contest of speech against sign was emerging, one which could spill into the children's homes. Responding to her letter concerning the pupil, he wrote to a Miss Maclaran, 'Will you kindly use your influence with her frends in getting them to

communicate with her not by signs but orally, or by finger-spelling, or writing?'[47] The request to avoid sign language at home was stressed frequently to parents and guardians, even whilst manual methods were continuing to be used in the school.

When dealing with the subject of his pupils' home lives and future careers, Payne espoused some of the key methods of social control and normalisation associated with pure oralism. The section of the Annual Reports titled 'Hints to Parents and Friends of Deafmutes' made this bluntly clear: Under 'Guidance after leaving school' was written: 'Warn him in time against forming any attachment to a born-deaf person of the opposite sex, and do not be persuaded that a union with "one like himself" is the best for him.'[48] The pupils to whom this would have applied may not have used the oral system at all, yet its sentiment echoed the eugenic motivations of Bell and van Praagh. Payne further confirmed this at the 1885 Headmasters' Conference: 'I have always set my face dead against intermarriages.'[49] Thus aspects of oralism were clearly present as a philosophy, if not as a practice.

Oralism and experience

Much has been written about the effects of oralism on educational policy and in the classroom, however there has been little work which attempt to uncover the children's own voices and experiences to engage further with the question of oralism. Harry Hendrick notes the general lack of agency given to children in historical work, arguing for historians to adopt a perspective which values children as 'social actors and informants in their own right'.[50] This seems particularly appropriate to histories of disabled children. Felicity Armstrong, for example, laments the 'almost total absence of the voices and perspectives of disabled people in dominant accounts of the history of disability and education.'[51] It is, however, difficult to attribute disabled children with the historical voices they deserve when often the only records of their childhood are written from the perspectives of the institutions to which they belonged.

Institutional sources often form the historian's only access to life for pupils of deaf school. They are most often written by the principal or committee and will and rarely contain first-hand evidence of their thoughts and actions. In particular, details of their lives at home and outside of the school may be completely absent.[52] Yet a careful reading of these sources may still allow for an understanding of their experiences. Read and Walmsley argue that the 'received' content of sources – the implications about the children's own lives – can contribute towards some understanding of the perspectives of children in special education.[53] Even if they are only seen through the eyes of those in authority, aspects of their lives may still be visible.

This is perhaps the case regarding the Cambrian Institution, whose letter books reveal occasional resistance to oralism from the pupils, and the reaction to attempts to bring oralism into the home. Payne's letters to children's parents and friends asking to use speech at home often revealed a reluctance of the pupils to participate in their oral education. Concerns about the use of sign language by both children and their parents or friends are sometimes made explicitly clear: 'I found him confirmed in the habit of signing unnecessarily, at all times', wrote Payne to a parent. 'He is certainly making progress now, however, and I hope that no one who can speak or spell and write will ever use signs to him unnecessarily again.'[54] Though it is only implied, the letters reveal that, in the efforts to remove sign language from deaf children's lives, neither the pupils nor their parents would always comply to the extent the institution wished.

This disobedience of requests to avoid sign language could extent into outright misbehaviour. The same boy was caught using 'bad words' in the school, which he taught to the girls. He had seen the words in the street, which were 'signed to him by vulgar boys'. The boy's use of forbidden signs combined with a disregard for the 'moral training' given to him in school,

suggests signs could perhaps have had a role as method of resistance. The boy's punishment was the final move in the contest of communication: pupils were forbidden to talk to him.[55]

Conversely, oralism could be used as a tool to exert power over pupils' home lives and careers. Payne wrote to a mother who wished to remove her son from the school to become a teacher, with a scathing indictment of her plans:

> If Edward remains a pupil for 15 years more he might learn the English language sufficiently well to teach it by finger-spelling but not by speech. Then if he was a teacher in an institution he might earn less than a joiner, and be discontented because he would be condemned to a life-long celibacy and never have a home of his own.[56]

Oralism is here used as a standard which the woman's son must attain if he would want to become a teacher. It is unclear whether Payne's description of deaf teachers is referring to the profession as a whole, however elsewhere in Payne's letters, he appears more receptive to the idea of deaf teachers of oralism: 'Our Assistant Matrons are generally aspirant Teachers, and if deaf they should be able to teach orally as well as by manual means.'[57] Yet in the case of Edward, the mother's desire to withdraw the boy before he has finished articulation lessons is met with threats of a life of misery. Oralism could become an instrument of power over its pupils' home lives.

"I don't mix with the deaf and dumb": Adult responses

The struggle taking place at the Cambrian Institution to stop its oral pupils using signs confirms that deaf children had an active role in responding to, and resisting, oralism. Whilst these incidents of covert signing did not appear to be co-ordinated community efforts to keep signs alive, they fitted in with an increasingly visible anti-oralist movement emerging among deaf communities in Britain.[58] The first national conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb

Missions and Associations was held in 1890 and spawned an organisation, the British Deaf and Dumb Association. At the conference, founder Francis Maginn outlined its intention to defend 'the efficacy of the combined system' and 'defy the conclusions of the Milan conference and of similar packed conventions.'[59] A petition was given to King Edward VII to recognise signing in deaf education, signed by 1,000 deaf people.[60] Though oralism continued to spread across all outlets of deaf education, there was a clear resistance developing from adults as well as the deaf children taught under the method.

The responses of deaf adults are essential to a historical understanding of the effects of oralism. Oral teaching had a profound effect for deaf people, not just in classrooms, but in homes and communities. Their voices were of course rarely documented in institutional records or mainstream media, however the deaf newspapers being printed at the time provide evidence of reaction and debate. Only recently, though, have historians began to utilise this important source. As Atherton explains in his study of the deaf print media, they are vital insights into the lives and mindsets of deaf communities.[61] Some were written *for* deaf people by missioners or churches, and consequently titles such as *Our Monthly Church Mission for the Deaf* and *Ephphatha* carried a religious and philanthropic outlook. Other newspapers contained articles written by deaf people, or were based around links to local deaf communities and schools. The first recorded deaf newspaper, the *Edinburgh Quarterly Messenger*, was made by pupils of the Edinburgh Institution for the Deaf and Dumb from 1843-1845 and edited by its headmaster.[62]

The newspapers reveal a varied and often passionate response to the spread of oralism. Both sides of the debate often found their way into print. The *British Deaf Mute* in July 1894, for example, carried a profile of the Associaiton for the Oral Instruction for the Deaf and Dumb, accompanied by the van Praagh interview.[63] Yet they addressed the criticism they had clearly received in the following issue: 'We have no desire to criticise unduly the opinions advanced

by those who have favoured us with interviews' and run through some positive sides of oralism, however they proceed to criticise the oral schools' encouragement of its pupils to 'ignore their deaf brethren'.[64] The newspapers revealed oralism's damaging effects on deaf communities, and provided a medium to take a stand.

Articles in deaf newspapers could protest against oralism in powerful and often humorous terms. A piece in *Our Monthly Church Messenger to the Deaf* in the 1890s entitled "I don't mix with the Deaf and Dumb" dealt with interactions between manually and orally educated deaf people. The author recalls the visit of orally educated deaf people to a Mission in detail and with biting sarcasm:

> Then there was Miss Ivy, educated on the *Pure* Oral System. Her folks tell us that we poor Deaf people, with our debates, services and social gatherings, classes, clubs, rambles, and keen interest in current topics, are "buried alive" ... It does seem so funny to be told that to spell on our fingers or sign is "so ugly", especially when we see Miss Ivy and her folks pointing about like excited setters, with an expression on their faces as if they were chewing fearfully hot potatoes.[65]

The author is repeatedly told by the orally-educated deaf people he meets that he is somehow beneath them in "social status". Yet his response is to mock them, and contrast their elitism to the friendship and discussions he enjoys in his community. The article yielded a response in the following issue, in which a reader lamented 'how very ridiculous some of us are': 'If only a little good fellowship could be intermingled, if only we could realise that hearts at least can be the same time - *If!* IF! IF!'[66] Though this may be an unusual or extreme example, it illustrates the fact that deaf people did not all passively accept the threat to their communities posed by oralism. Indeed, as Jonathan Rée points out, some communities may even have

been strengthened by it: 'the oralist opponents of sign language were helping to bring about exactly the kind of separate deaf society they had always wanted to prevent.'[67]

Other articles about oralism's effect on deaf people surfaced in deaf newspapers. The *British Deaf Mute* in 1895 reprinted an American story of a orally-educated football team fumbling around the pitch and failing to communicate, whose 'ignorance of the rules of the game... we can only attribute to nothing but the difficulty of explaining them orally to the players.' The purpose of its inclusion, they wrote, was 'to amuse our manualist friends and give our pure oralist friends food for thought.'[68] The magazine also made clear its favour of signs by calling for a Sign Language dictionary. This would make learning the language easier and avoiding the need to 'painfully pick it up at church, in the lecture hall, or in a haphazard manner from our deaf friends.'[69]

This article sparked another debate, and a reader – who lost his hearing at twelve years old – disagreed and asked instead to spend the time and money 'remedying the ignorance of the deaf.' Sign language, he wrote, was 'the greatest living obstacle existing to the welfare of the deaf', and ignoring it would force up a deaf person's standards of communication.[70] Again, newspapers revealed a fierce and ongoing debate emerging amongst deaf people themselves. These newspapers indicate that oralism experienced criticism in the deaf community, or that it was drawing a deliberate wedge between manually- and orally-educated deaf people. Most importantly they demonstrate that adult and children's experiences could inform and effect each other: the anecdotes and debates in their pages could relate to the authors' childhoods, or developments in schools which concerned them. Whilst the newspapers did not represent the entirety of deaf discourse, they nevertheless confirm that oralism could affect all areas of deaf life.

Conclusions

The spread of oralism across the world remains the most impactful and passionately-debated themes of deaf history. Much has been confirmed in recent and critical studies of the method: many educators who espoused oral techniques were informed by notions of normalisation, eugenics and elitism. They sought to impose aspirations for deaf people of integration with the hearing world at the expense of their own language and communities. Yet oralism's place within British deaf educational history is a deeply complex one. This is not to say that it had a weaker impact than first thought: the eagerness of the Royal Commissioners of 1889, as well as various school boards across the UK to adopt the method demonstrates that this was not the case. Likewise, the heads of British deaf institutions – once mostly committed to manual education – were beginning to welcome its methodology, often with mainly cost issues as a deterrent.

The aim of this chapter has not been to refute oralism's influence in Britain but to understand it as a contest, with varying levels of acceptance and resistance. A close look reveals a level of uncertainty from deaf educators to sign up to the bold new practice. This is seen in the cautious optimism displayed by the Headmasters' Conferences, and the fluctuating opinions of Benjamin Payne at the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, as he juggled his wish for pupils to learn speech and avoid sign language or intermarriage, with his dislike of oralism's expensive and exclusionary nature. Oralism may have been influential, however it would be unfair to characterise British deaf education as making an immediate and total switch to its ways.

What makes the question of oralism so complex is that the deaf people whose lives were affected by oralism did not all passively accept it. The lives and responses of deaf children, their parents and adults involved in the deaf community (both deaf and hearing) are essential to our understanding of oralism, however their voices have only recently begun to be included in narratives. Their personal experiences are of course extremely difficult to find

given the difficulty of finding sources and of understanding historical experience itself, however this chapter has attempted to show that they can still be uncovered. Of course, more needs to be researched on deaf communities' responses to oralism, including those educated on the pure oral system who in many cases might have left the school with no sign language and an extremely limited knowledge of English.[71] Yet the historian can grant deaf people agency through careful reading of institutional sources and use of the few ways that their direct voices have been recorded, such as the deaf print media.

Thus, many pupils of the Cambrian Institution may have had their language suppressed, but this did not stop them bringing in signs and continuing to communicate visually with their parents. Likewise the school faced disobedience and reluctance to be part of oral education. Adult experiences also help us understand the question of oralism: articles in deaf newspapers suggest that deaf people could be critical and dismissive of oralism. Some protested against its attempts to divide their communities, or mocked those orally-educated deaf people who shunned them. The wide variety of opinions in the newspapers suggests that a debate was emerging in the communities themselves, again with different levels of receptiveness and opposition. It is this historical agency given to the pupils and deaf communities, and the interplay between adult and child experiences of deafness, which truly highlights the complex and contested nature of the question of oralism.

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[1] P. Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2003), p.121; J. Rée, *I See a Voice: A Philosophical History of Language, Deafness and the Senses* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), p.228.
[2] Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf (1880) cited in H. G. Lang, 'Perspectives on the History of Deaf Education', in M. Marschark and P.E. Spencer (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language and Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.9-20, on p.15.
[3] Mr Elliott, 'The Milan Congress and the Future of the Education of the Deaf and Dumb' in *Proceedings of the Conference of Head Masters of Institutions and of Other Workers for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, 24-26 July, 1881* (London, 1881), pp.7-18, on p.18.
[4] K.W. Hodgson, *The Deaf and their Problems: A Study in Special Education* (London: Watts & Co., 1953)
[5] D.G. Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped 1760-1960* (London: Routledge, 1963), p.27.
[6] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, p.4.
[7] For further examples of this vehement criticism of oralism, from both within and outside the deaf community, see: J. Branson and D. Miller, *Damned for their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002); Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*; H. Lane,

The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community (New York: Knopf, 1993); O. Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
[8] C.J. Kudlick, 'Disability History: Why We Need Another "Other", *The American Historical Review*, 108:3 (2003), pp.763-93, on p.781.
[9] R.M. Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory 1850-1950* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), pp.20-36.
[10] Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, p.xiv.
[11] F. Buton, 'Making Deaf Children Talk: Changes in Educational Policy towards the Deaf in the French Third Republic' in D.M. Turner and K. Stagg (eds.), *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.117-25, on p.119.
[12] P. Beaver, *A Tower of Strength: Two Hundred Years of the Royal School for Deaf Children Margate* (Sussex, 1992), 29; Lang, 'Perspectives', p.13; M.G. McLoughlin, *A History of the Education of the Deaf in England* (Liverpool: G.M. McLoughlin, 1987), p.24.
[13] Branson and Miller, *Damned for their Difference*, 123; Iain Hutchinson, 'Oralism: A Sign of the Times? The Contest for Deaf Communication in Nineteenth-century Scotland', *European Review of History*, 14:4 (2007), pp.481-501, on p.483.
[14] P. Jackson, *A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain* (Winsford: Deafprint, 2001), p.52.
[15] Beaver, *A Tower of Strength*, p.32.
[16] Pritchard, *Education for the Handicapped*, p.26.
[17] J.S. Hurt, *Outside the Mainstream: A History of Special Education* (London: Batsford, 1988) , p.100.
[18] Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*, p.76; S. Tomlinson, *A Sociology of Special Education* (London: Routledge, 1982), p.26.
[19] *Proceedings of the Conference of Head Masters of Institutions and of Other Workers for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, 24-26 July, 1877* (London: G. Hill, 1877), p.18.
[20] Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*, p.77; *The British Medical Journal*, 1:1013 (1880), pp.822-3.
[21] Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, the Deaf and Dumb, &c., of the United Kingdom (1899), pp.xi-xii.
[22] Report of the Royal Commission, pp.406-89.
[23] Report of the Royal Commission, p.427.
[24] Report of the Royal Commission, p.298.
[25] Report of the Royal Commission, p.484.
[26] D.C. Baynton, '"Savages and Deaf-Mutes: Evolutionary Theory and the Campaign against Sign Langugae in the Nineteenth Century' in J. Vickrey Van Cleve (ed.), *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2000), pp.92-112, on p.99.
[27] Rée, *I See a Voice*, p.223; Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, p.118.
[28] Report of the Royal Commission, 572. The importance of statistics in the eugenics movement is explored in Richard Soloway, 'Counting the Degenerates: The Statistics of Race Deterioration in Edwardian England', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17:1 (1982), pp.137-64.
[29] Branson and Miller (eds), *Damned for their Difference*, p.127.
[30] *The British Deaf-Mute*, 3:33 (July 1894), p.114.
[31] Elliott, 'The Milan Congress', p.18.
[32] Other historians have pointed out the inaccuracy of reducing British deaf education to the dominance of one method. See McLoughlin, *A History of the Education of the Deaf*, p.26; Branson and Miller (eds), *Damned for their Difference*, p.123.
[33] Hutchinson, 'Oralism', p.483.
[34] Hutchinson, 'Oralism', p.493.
[35] Llandaff and Pontypridd had both founded deaf schools towards the end of the 19th century, the former created by a disgruntled ex-principal of the Cambrian Institution, in protest of the religious makeup of the committee. A history of the institution can be found in D. Woodford, *A Man and his School: The Story of the Llandaff School for the Deaf and Dumb* (Cardiff: Llandaff Society, 1996).
[36] Meeting of the Committee dated 28th November 1849, Minute book 1847-55, West Glamorgan Archives E/Cam 1/1.
[37] Most deaf institutions at the time would use public demonstrations to gain funds and show off their alleged success stories and the 'miracle' of deaf education. See Anne Borsay, 'Deaf Children and Charitable Education in Britain 1790-1914' in Anne Borsay and Peter Shapely (eds.), *Medicine, Charity and Mutual Aid: The Consumption of Health and Welfare in Britain, c.1550-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 73-7
[38] *The Welshman*, 5 February 1847
[39] *Ephphantha: A Monthly Magazine, Published in the Interests of the Deaf,* May 1896, 78
[40] *Conference of Head Masters*, 1877, 104

[41] *Conference of Head Masters 1881*, 138-9
[42] *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1888*, 16
[43] B.H. Payne to Joseph Hall, 23 February 1879 , West Glamorgan Archives, Principal's Letter Book 1876-1880 E/Cam 5/1.
[44] B.H. Payne to Joseph Hall, 23 February 1879.
[45] B.H. Payne to D. Buxton, 20 April 1880, Principal's Letter Book 1876-1880.
[46] B.H. Payne to Mr John Davies, 5 April 1878, Principal's Letter Book 1876-1880.
[47] B.H. Payne to Miss Maclaran, 10 January 1879, Principal's Letter Book 1876-1880. Original underlining.
[48] *Annual Report 1888*, 18. This information was repeated in every Annual Report hereafter.
[49] *Proceedings of the Conference of Head Masters of Institutions and of Other Workers for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, 1-3 July, 1885* (Margate, 1886), p.90
[50] H. Hendrick, 'The Child as Social Actor in Historical Sources: Problems of Identification and Interpretation' in P. Christiansen and A. James (eds), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (London: Falmer, 2000), pp.36-61 on p.38. Davis and Watson also approach this question from a modern sociological perspective. See J.M. Davis and N. Watson, 'Where Are the Children's Experiences? Analysing Social and Cultural Exclusion in 'Special' and 'Mainstream' Schools', *Disability & Society*, 16:5 (2001), pp.671-687.
[51] F. Armstrong, 'The Historical Development of Special Education: Humanitarian Rationality or 'Wild Profusion of Entangled Events'?', *History of Education*, 31:5 (2002), pp.437-56 on p.438.
[52] Hendrick, 'Child as Social Actor', p.42.
[53] J. Read and J. Walmsley, 'Historical Perspectives on Special Education, 1890-1970', *Disability & Society*, 21:5 (2006), pp.455-69 on p.457.
[54] B.H. Payne to Mr John Davies, 26 April 1879, Principal's Letter Book, 1876-1880.
[55] B.H. Payne to Mr John Davies, 11 and 13 April 1878, Principal's Letter Book, 1876-1880.
[56] B.H. Payne to Miss Phillips, 15 July 1891, West Glamorgan Archives, Principal's Letter Book, 1889-1893, E/Cam/5/2.
[57] B.H. Payne to George Taylor, June 25 1891, Principal's Letter Book, 1889-1893.
[58] The British and international deaf community's challenge to oralism is summarised in Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, pp.124-8.
[59] B. Grant, *The Deaf Advance: A History of the British Deaf Association* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1990).
[60] Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 128.
[61] M. Atherton, 'Reading Between the Lines: The Value of Deaf Newspapers as Research Resources', *Deaf Worlds*, 19:3 (2003), pp.82-93 on p.82. This is so far the only dedicated study of deaf newspapers in Britain, however they are also explored in Jackson, *A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain*, p.231; Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, p.52.
[62] Atherton, 'Reading Between the Lines', p.83; Jackson, *A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain*, p.231.
[63] *The British Deaf-Mute*, 3:33 (July 1894), pp.113-4.
[64] *The British Deaf-Mute*, 3:34 (August 1894), pp.137.
[65] *Our Monthly Church Messenger to the Deaf*, 2 (no date), p.120. It is unclear how realistic the orally-educated, elitist deaf people portrayed here would have been, however it has been noted by Rée that signs began to be a symbol of embarrassment to 'more respectable members of the deaf community'. Rée, *I See a Voice*, p.236.
[66] *Our Monthly Church Messenger to the Deaf*, 2 (no date), p.148.
[67] Rée, *I See a Voice*, p.231.
[68] *The British Deaf Mute*, 4:40 (February, 1895), p.57.
[69] *The British Deaf Mute*, 3:35 (September 1894), 150
[70] *The British Deaf Mute,* 3:36 (October, 1894), 175
[71] Records of these are, of course, very hard to find, however some have written about the vast difference in teaching quality and results between orally- and manually-educated deaf children in history. See Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, 28