The Historical and Social Context of the Philadelphia ASL Community

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Abstract

The focus of this article is the experiences of Deaf Philadelphians vis-à-vis language policy and practice at PSD. We delineate the official and unofficial communication philosophies and pedagogies from the school's inception to present day, providing a framework for understanding the trajectory of linguistic freedom and restriction of its students. We couple these administrative perspectives with crucial input from older Philadelphia Deaf community members who acceded to and resisted the oralist policies against sign language use before, during, and after their time at PSD.

We have undertaken the current article at this early stage in our analysis of conversational interviews of Deaf Philadelphians so that we can better understand the external forces that facilitated and militated against sign language use in Philadelphia. By doing so we will be better positioned to understand how social and linguistic contexts have shaped Philadelphia ASL.

Research on sign languages has long documented widespread variability in phonology, morphosyntax, and discourse. Appendix D of the *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles* (Stokoe, Casterline, and Croneberg 1965) acknowledges that

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American Sign Language (ASL) exhibits both regional dialects and socially structured variability within dialects. This claim has since been robustly supported by a proliferation of empirical work on sign language sociolinguistics. ASL exhibits variation along social lines such as race (Woodward and De Santis 1977; Aramburo 1989; Lucas, Bayley, Reed, and Wulf 2001; McCaskill, Bayley, Lucas, and Hill 2011, *inter alia*), gender (Lucas, Bayley, Valli, Rose, and Wulf 2001; Mulrooney 2002), and age (Bayley, Lucas, and Rose 2000, 2002). It also differs across regions of the United States (Shroyer and Shroyer 1984; Lucas et al. 2001). In this article, we trace the educational and sociohistorical context that has given rise to one such regional variety: Philadelphia ASL.

Stokoe et al. (1965) note the importance of schools for the Deaf, many of them residential, as loci for the innovation and propagation of new sign forms (see also Lucas et al. 2001). For many Deaf children, schools provide the linguistic input from both adult models and peer groups that is so crucial to childhood language acquisition. The communities formed in and around schools for the Deaf provide social conditions conducive to new-dialect formation (e.g., Kerswill and Trudgill 2005). Each of the early schools for the Deaf was headed by affiliates of the first manual school for the Deaf—the Connecticut Asylum for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Persons—who brought with them the sign language of their alma mater. However, each school existed in its own self-sufficient sphere where alumni would remain at the school for work and social activities. As a result, school communities shared a linguistic foundation but developed distinctly in partial isolation. In Philadelphia and the surrounding region, the center of sign language proliferation has always been the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD).

Originally called the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (PIDD), PSD is the first but not only school for educating Deaf children in the area; the public Wills & Elizabeth Martin School, known as the Martin School (now closed), hosted an oralist program for Deaf students, and the Catholic school Archbishop Ryan also offers oralist education to a cohort of Deaf and hard of hearing students. And though students from these other schools at times encountered and even became signing Deaf community members, potentially in-

fluencing Philadelphia ASL, we do not focus on these schools because they forbade the use of sign. The focus of this article is the experiences of Deaf Philadelphians vis-à-vis language policy and practice at PSD. We delineate the official and unofficial communication philosophies and pedagogies from the school's inception to present day, providing a framework for understanding the trajectory of linguistic freedom and restriction of its students. We couple these administrative perspectives with crucial input from older Philadelphia Deaf community members who acceded to and resisted the oralist policies against sign language use before, during, and after their time at PSD.

Before we begin our discussion of the history of PSD, though, we briefly turn to the question of whether Philadelphia ASL really is a distinct regional variety, and if it is, what features distinguish it from other varieties. This article provides the background and context for a larger language documentation effort, the Philadelphia Signs Project (Fisher, Hochgesang, and Tamminga 2016), which emerged from the community's desire to document their local ASL variety and its PSD roots. The next section discusses the existing evidence that Philadelphia ASL is different from other versions, and sketches our linguistic research directions as we move ahead with our documentation of conversational ASL from Philadelphia Deaf signers. Further substantiation and linguistic description will necessarily have to wait until later stages of the analysis. We have undertaken the current article at this early stage so that we will be able to interpret the linguistic data currently being collected in light of the external forces that facilitated and militated against sign language use in Philadelphia. By doing so we will be better positioned to understand how social and linguistic contexts have shaped Philadelphia ASL.

What Is Philadelphia ASL?

Anecdotally, the ASL used by Deaf Philadelphians attracts attention in the rest of the Deaf community for being "different" and "strange." The sentiments expressed by signing Philadelphians and outsiders who encounter these signers echo the observations made about the variety known as Black ASL prior to data collection and analysis under the auspices of the Black ASL project (McCaskill et al. 2011; Hill 2012). By pursuing these informal reports empirically, researchers on the

Black ASL project were able to identify distinct features of Black ASL in handedness, lowering, signing space size, and more. Following in these footsteps, the Philadelphia Signs Project involves the recording of conversational oral history interviews. The recordings are being annotated and analyzed using the SLAAASh annotation conventions and the ASL Signbank (Hochgesang 2015).

According to our ongoing observations, the signing documented in the Philadelphia Signs recordings contains unexpected phonetic forms (handedness, repetition, path, orientation), phonetic alternations, and morphological processes. We have also noted that some of the older Deaf Philadelphians use a much larger signing space than younger signers, and a few exhibit unusual syntactic constructions with respect to constituent ordering and pronoun dropping. These observations do not yet constitute a systematic linguistic analysis of Philadelphia ASL, but they do hint at exciting work to be done. What is better documented at this stage, though, is that there is a sizeable vocabulary of lexical items that are associated with Philadelphia ASL. Several interpreters who have been working in Philadelphia for many years now offer a special training session about signs that local interpreters need to know, based on a list of over 250 signs. Even signs as basic as the months of the year differ in Philadelphia. In a pilot study examining how Philadelphia-specific signs are perceived by users of ASL (Hamilton and Hochgesang 2017), participants from Philadelphia recognized the Philadelphia signs significantly more and reported using those signs much more than participants from other areas, which is evidence supporting lexical differentiation of ASL in Philadelphia. Several lexical variants that occur spontaneously in Philadelphia Signs Project recordings are shown in figure 1.

Another source of evidence for the distinctness of Philadelphia ASL comes from self-reflective commentary in the interviews we are collecting, including in comments from the primary interviewer himself. In the following excerpt, one of our participants (a woman in her early thirties) reflects on her awareness of her native Philadelphia ASL variety and how it was influenced by the Gallaudet, pan-regional variety when she transferred from PSD to Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD) in Washington, DC, and subsequently to Gallaudet:

FIGURE 1. Examples of lexical variants unique to Philadelphia ASL. (Adapted from Hamilton and Hochgesang 2017.)

Interviewer: Tell me about your experience about transferring from PSD to MSSD and how that influenced your signing. Was it different? Did Gallaudet change your signing?

Colleen: Oh yes, there was definitely a difference.

Interviewer: Tell me about it.

Colleen: Well, for example, I still say "inch" like this.

(See figure 2 which shows the ASL sign that is not recognized by other members of the ASL community at Gallaudet, only members of her local community in Philadelphia.)

FIGURE 2. Colleen signing "inch."

Figure 3. Philadelphia ASL variant for "eagle" (left); other ASL variant for "eagle" (right).

Colleen: I sign it like this (figure 2). But when I was at MSSD, if I tried signing it like this, others would not understand me. So I'd have to express the concept in a different way. They even told me their sign. I can't remember what it looks like. But it doesn't matter because I like my version of "inch." And I've stayed with the same version all this time. Although when I'm at Gallaudet, I'll just fingerspell "inch." But I still hold everything—all of the old signs. And when I return home, I use them. . . . For example, for some months of the year, I'll produce our signs for them. . . . There are a lot of signs like that. Our sign for "eagle," for example. . . . I catch myself changing. At home, I'll sign our version of "eagle" (figure 3, left) but at MSSD, I'll sign their version of "eagle" (figure 3, right).

Colleen: Why I change is because I think they won't understand me if I sign that way so I hold my "eagle" sign and remember that it's Philadelphian. I'll use the other ASL variant for "eagle" out there but when I go home I'll use the Philadelphian one. I go back and forth.

As in many other cases cross-linguistically, awareness of uniquely Philadelphian features may arise partly in contrast to perceived loss of those local features by new generations. The educational changes we will detail in this article have resulted in younger signers in the Philadelphia area having less exposure to local native signers and more

exposure to people using other varieties of ASL, especially a pan-regional variety influenced by Gallaudet, just as Colleen describes in the earlier excerpt. One of the authors, a native Philadelphian and hearing native signer, has encountered many members of the Philadelphia Deaf community who lament the fact that their variety is dying out with the older members of the Deaf community. In turn, many have expressed appreciation of these efforts to document their unique variety.

A History of PSD as It Relates to Language Development, Policy, and Use

PIDD was founded in 1820 in Philadelphia by David Sexias, a hearing Philadelphian crockery maker who was moved by the plight of destitute Deaf children he saw on the streets. Seixas took these children into his own home to feed, clothe, and educate them before PIDD was formally incorporated (Gannon 1981; Van Allen 1893). Laurent Clerc and Thomas Gallaudet, cofounders of the Connecticut Asylum, visited Philadelphia while on a tour to showcase the methods of the first manualist school in Hartford (Padden and Humphries 2009). Having met Gallaudet and Clerc on those visits, Sexias traveled to Hartford for formal training in the manualist methods in the summer of 1820 (Lane 1984).

As the school grew, it moved to locations at Eleventh and High Streets in 1821 and Broad and Pine in 1824 before moving to the Mount Airy neighborhood in 1892. The Mount Airy campus is what many older Deaf Philadelphians remember as PSD: a residential school with vast grounds where Deaf people from the region lived together and were schooled during the academic year. These spaces were the major sites of sign language transmission through the generations, as the pupils were surrounded by Deaf peers and adults, all of whom used ASL to communicate in the dorms and, before the 1908–1909 school year, in the classrooms for instruction. The Mount Airy location closed in 1984 and PSD is now located in a historic building in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, where it educates Deaf children from ages 3 to 21 in a day-school setting.

Like some of the other early Deaf schools, PIDD employed graduates and others from the Connecticut Asylum as teachers. Abigail

Dillingham, a member of the first Connecticut Asylum cohort, became the first American-born Deaf teacher in the United States when she joined PSD in 1821. Dillingham came to Philadelphia upon the "stron[g] recommendation by the principal of the Hartford school, and by Laurent Clerc" (Williams 1822, 7). Later, her brother Charles, a hearing Williams College graduate and fluent signer with two Deaf sisters including Abigail, was also hired to teach at the school, also at Clerc's recommendation, upon Clerc's leaving the institution (Williams 1822; Lane 1984). Abigail Dillingham's tenure at PSD was cut short by her death in 1824. She was replaced by another Hartford school graduate, George Comstock, who stayed until 1830.

Dillingham's time at PSD brought the original Connecticut variety of ASL, which presumably bore founder Clerc's Old French Sign Language (Old LSF) imprint, to Philadelphia. Clerc himself also spent seven months at PSD, serving as acting headmaster from Sexias' resignation in October 1821 until the arrival of Lewis Weld, "a graceful and fluent signer and a kind headmaster" from Hartford (Lane 1984, 243). While Clerc was at PIDD, he "introduced fully the methods practiced at Hartford and gave much valuable instruction to the teachers" (Van Allen 1893, 157). At that time, the school's enrollment had grown to fifty-one ("Laurent Clerc—His Connection With the Pennsylvania Institution" 1920) and "upon his departure the school was the equal of any in the country" (Van Allen 1893, 157). Clerc and other signers left their mark on Philadelphia in both language and pedagogy; the school adopted the manualist approach used in France and the Connecticut Asylum and children residing at the school inherited the associated language. Anecdotally, there appear to be relics of Old LSF in the Philadelphia dialect used by older Deaf Philadelphians. For example, the signs for WOMAN demonstrated earlier in figure 3 are strikingly similar. It is possible that some of these signs may be remnants from the influence of Clerc and Dillingham.

While other schools of the era, such as the Institution for the Improved Instruction of Deaf-Mutes (now the Lexington School for the Deaf) in New York City and the Clarke School in Northampton, Massachusetts, were founded on an oral-only method, the Connecticut Asylum and PIDD/PSD were both fervently manualist and residential schools from the start. PSD's public representations from

1820 to 1870 show implicit and explicit reverence for manualism. The annual reports of the board of directors from the mid-to-latter part of the nineteenth century all open with a graphic depiction of the manual alphabet, giving a clear and proud nod to the manualist pedagogy of the school. A more explicit affirmation of this pedagogy is found in the 1860 Annual Report of the Board of Directors, which describes how signs are used in instruction:

> It is by means of signs that the process of teaching the deaf and dumb is principally conducted. . . .To enable [the deaf and dumb] . . . to learn the meaning of our words, he must acquire a language, through which he can get that meaning. Every mute of tolerable capacity makes use of motions to indicate assent or denial, approbation or repugnance, as well as some common objects and familiar actions. On these motions, limited and imperfect as they are, we graft a system of signs, which enables us finally to communicate considerable knowledge on many subjects, and to develop and call into exercise the faculties of the mind. These signs convey thought, and have no resemblance to words, but they enable us to define words, explain their relations to other words, give their arrangement in sentences, and the different meanings which are attached to them. This language of signs can only be acquired from the living teacher. Incomprehensible as it is to the speaking person . . . it is nevertheless true, and a system of these motions is the grand means of instructing the deaf and dumb. (Bache 1861, 18)

While it is true that the signs were not recognized by the hearing administrators as language per se, signing is clearly embraced as a linguistic tool. It is notable that the school administrators recognized that the language of the Deaf in Philadelphia could come "only from the living teacher," older signers passing their language to younger ones and on in turn to future generations. This pedagogical approach falls in line with Supalla and Clark's (2015) observations of early Deaf education pedagogy in the United States, wherein teachers for the deaf (and the students themselves) learned from a "sign master," which, in turn, "stimulated the growth of a literary and cultural infrastructure, enhancing the deaf experience with visual aesthetics and social interactions" (22). Indeed, sign masters and fully trained teachers of the Deaf spurred ASL and the Deaf community in the United States.

This sign-based pedagogy of Deaf education at PIDD and other schools for the Deaf in antebellum America was firmly rooted in what we now call bilingual education. It was seen as the mechanism to help Deaf people learn English to "attain social equality with hearing people" (Edwards 2012, 48). Yet, unlike future educators of the Deaf, by embracing signs these teachers and administrators showed "that their students did not have to abandon their Deafness and become culturally hearing. Rather, they could become Deaf while also coming to take their place as citizens, as American" (48). Ultimately, such approaches were "crucial in providing the opportunity for ASL to set down deep and lasting roots in the United States" and critical for the survival of ASL through times of oralist pedagogy domination (34).

The wholehearted support of manualist education in Philadelphia did not last long beyond that 1861 description of sign instruction at PIDD. In 1870, rumblings of the success of oralism in New York City and Massachusetts made enough of an impression on the PIDD Board of Directors that they sent a group of representatives to the Clarke School in Massachusetts, and to the Hartford and New York institutions to observe oralist instruction methods to "preserve and cultivate the speech of . . . semi-mutes" (Van Allen 1893, 168). The Philadelphia contingent was so impressed that, upon return, they recommended giving "articulation instruction" to "all semi-mute and semi-Deaf children" (168). By 1876, Edward Crane, a protegé of Alexander Graham Bell, led the articulation department at the main campus of PIDD (168).

In 1881, in order to resolve an overcrowding crisis at the main manualist campus and to satisfy the increasing demand for oralist instruction, an oral-only day school known as the "Branch for Oral Instruction" was opened. While enrollments grew significantly at this PIDD annex site, the day-school model proved to be too unwieldy for efficient administration; the board moved to convert the day school into a boarding school model, citing need for "increased efficiency in the instruction of the children" (Lewis 1884). The board also noted a desire to accommodate "children from a distance" as another rationale for conversion to a boarding school setting (Lewis 1885). In 1884, the school transitioned to a day and boarding school model (Lewis 1884)

and by 1885, the annex had been converted to an oral-only boarding school known as the Branch for Oral Instruction.

By the 1880s, the day-school model of educating Deaf children gained traction; it was embraced by parents and legislators in other parts of the country for being fiscally sensible and allowing parents to be close to and monitor their children (Van Cleve 2007, 117–120). This model was fiercely advocated for by Bell (1883), who believed the residential school model was largely to blame for the burgeoning population of signing Deaf people in the United States. Bell's theories were known to the administrators at PIDD, who conducted a special report including an investigation of whether its graduates married other Deaf people (Crouter 1884). Then-Principal Crouter was dubious of Bell's conclusions about intermarriage in 1884, but his 1888 report reveals a shift to a significantly more cautious tone on intermarriage among deaf people, noting, "It is not maintained that the intermarriage of these classes will *always* be followed by the birth of deaf offspring . . . but the tendency in that direction is certainly very greatly intensified. Hence, I believe it to be wiser to discourage rather than to encourage alliances among families of decided hereditary tendencies to this defect" (Lewis 1888, 28). This shift, no doubt influenced by the fierce campaign against sign language during that time period, coincides with a decline in Crouter's advocacy for manualism.

PIDD introduced an "experimental class" in the early-to-mid 1880s targeting particular Deaf students in speech and lipreading methods. At this point, these oralist students "were permitted to mingle with the manually taught children out of school" (Van Allen 1893, 169), though that integration did not last more than a decade. The initial success of oralism at PIDD could very well be attributed to the kind of Deaf children targeted for oralist instruction. In the following excerpt, Crouter reveals that the first students to receive this instruction were late-deafened and already had language on which they could build their academic skills. He remarks,

> There can be no doubt that children who lose their hearing after they have acquired spoken language, do not require the interposition of signs for mental development, nor that their speech, if kept up at all, must be kept up by its constant use. Whatever differences

> of opinion may exist as to the advisability of attempting to instruct *all* deaf children by this method, there certainly should be none concerning the semi-deaf and semi-mutes who already possess the ability to express themselves in articulate language. The two classes taught in this way are making very gratifying progress, and bid fair to do fully as well as those instructed by the manual method, at the same time, adding greatly to their powers of articulation and speech-reading. (Emphasis in original, Lewis 1884, 24)

Beyond the fact that the school targeted the students who might be most suitable for oralist instruction—those who had once been hearing—it is also notable that the benchmark for these students' success is the *signing* students. Indeed, at this point in PIDD's history, it is the later-deafened students who are receiving a kind of remediation through these new oralist methods while the Deaf children receive instruction-as-usual via a natural and manualist approach. This is an important indicator of the then-administration's mentality on the continued prioritization of sign language for instruction in the school.

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, PIDD began to substantially phase out its manualist instruction in academic settings, eventually becoming the largest residential school using oralist methods. As can be viewed in figure 4, the manual method of instruction stood at 87 percent of all students in 1882; just five years later in 1887 this was a startling 18.5 percent.

In this period, PIDD maintained separate oral, manual, and combined classes, though Crouter disfavored the combined method, calling it "less effective . . . a great interruption . . . a hindrance to regular manual work . . . and . . . wholly unnecessary" (Lewis 1885, 35–36). Unsurprisingly, in 1887, the combined system of sign and oral instruc-

	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897
Manual Dep't	317	297	332	336	337	340	333	334	332	332	274	200	176	152	121	93
Oral Dep't...	48	80	87	96	96	96	100	100	100	105	170	260	304	350	390	416
Total..	365	377	419	432	433	436	433	434	432	437	444	460	480	502	511	509

Figure 4. Percentage of students using the manual method of instruction ("manual dep't") or the oralist method ("oral dep't"). Taken from Crouter (1899, 46).

tion was discontinued with "the oral work of the school . . . carried on in a pure oral department, and a small oral class in connection with the manual department" (Van Allen 1893, 169–70).

Crouter continued to acknowledge the "superiority of each system for certain classes of children," yet by 1887, he began to show weakening in the value of signing beyond curricular use. In what appears to be a response to Board criticism of the continued use of the manual method (Lewis 1887), Crouter's 1887 Report to the Board of Directors provides a defensive account of how signs are used for instructional purposes:

> By the manual system we must not be understood as saying, or intending to say, that we *teach signs* in order that *they* may form the means, and the only means, of communication of the pupils on leaving school, as is too frequently asserted in certain quarters. We do not *teach signs*, but we teach *by the aid of signs*, a perfectly natural and universal method of instruction, using them only. . . to enable us readily and rapidly to reach and develop the minds of our pupils . . . dispensing with them as their ability to comprehend and us written language increases . . . we endeavor to teach the English language, and impress upon our pupils the necessity, on their part, of its constant use if they would someday arrive at a fair understanding of its use. (Emphasis in original, Crouter in Lewis 1887, 42)

At this point, Crouter expresses a demotion in the school's reverence for signs to one that holds a more utilitarian view. Recognition of this mindset is integral to understanding the systematic elimination of sign language in Deaf education in subsequent years.

Meanwhile, by 1888, the branch using oral-only instruction grew to one hundred pupils, making it one of the largest oral-only residential schools in the country (Van Allen 1893, 170; Crouter 1899). By 1889, enrollments at PIDD were at an overwhelming capacity; the "crowded condition of the school rooms and dormitories and the inadequate facilities afforded by the present buildings for the work of industrial training" made continuation at the Broad and Pine campus untenable (Lewis 1889, 17). Thus, a search for a new campus that could house both the manualist and oralist sites, was underway.

PIDD was able to maintain its separate philosophies of instruction because they were, in effect, two schools under one name. Merging into one campus would surely take some planning as strict oralism

would mean that the manually and orally instructed children could not intermingle. Consequently, the plans for construction of the new Mount Airy campus consisted of an Oral Department building "entirely separate and distinct from the others . . . so located . . . that its play grounds shall not adjoin those for the use of children receiving instruction in the sign language" (F. Mortimer Lewis in Hutchinson 1890, 18). And so, in 1892, both the main and oral branches were consolidated at the new Mount Airy campus, then a sprawling suburban-country setting in the outskirts of Philadelphia.

In an indicator of both oralism's rise as well as manualism's persistence after the Milan Congress in 1880 (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989; Baynton 1996; Burch 2002, among others), oral and manual methods continued to exist as distinct pedagogies of Deaf instruction at the new campus. H. Van Allen, a Deaf print shop instructor at PIDD, writes in an 1893 commemorative history of the school, that

> The work of the school may be broadly divided into manual and oral. In the oral department the instruction is wholly by speech. Signs are entirely discarded, and as far as possible, prohibited, the aim being to make speech and speech-reading, supplemented by writing, the sole means of instruction and communication. In the manual department the instruction is by means of English, either spelled or written, the use of signs, although not forbidden to the pupils as a means of intercommunication, *being reduced to a minimum*, and every encouragement being given to the pupil to substitute for them either writing or spelling. . . . The ultimate ends of oral and manual training are similar, the aim being to give a good English education and to prepare for college those who may desire to pursue a higher course of instruction. (Our emphasis, 174)

It is noteworthy that Edward Miner Gallaudet, son of Thomas Gallaudet and a promoter of the combined method in Deaf education, and staunch oralist Alexander Graham Bell both attended the formal opening of the new campus in Mount Airy (172). Their simultaneous presence is emblematic of the fact that while oralism was gaining a strong foothold, manualism was still understood to be an acceptable method of instructing Deaf children.

Around the time of the 1892 move to the Mount Airy campus, Crouter's own support for signing had weakened considerably. He acknowledges the functional use of signing as an instructional tool,

but remarks that educators who encourage "acquaintance with natural and methodical signs" in lieu of spoken or written language "which alone can introduce [the Deaf student] to the world of thought and information" to be engaging in "a most reprehensible practice and a complete perversion of the true use of signs in the instruction of the deaf" (Crouter in Hutchinson 1890, 37). At this point in his leadership, Crouter saw signs as a means to an end, foreshadowing his total abdication of support for manualism over the following decade and a half. By 1895, Pennsylvania mandated oral instruction "to every pupil admitted unless physically incapable of being so taught," thereby hastening oralism's already meteoric rise at PIDD (Hutchinson 1895, 14).

By 1898, the manualist numbers at PIDD were dwindling, though Crouter concedes that "there will always be a certain percentage, say from 10 to 15 percent, who may better be taught by manual methods" (Crouter 1899, 46). In the 1901 annual report, he notes an invited talk he gave on oralist pedagogy to the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf in the summer of 1890 (Crouter in Hutchinson 1891). By the 1908–1909 academic year, the PIDD Board of Directors took "pleasure" in noting in its annual report to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that it had "at last succeeded in placing all departments of the Institution under oral methods of instruction," which it had been "continuously endeavoring to complete for the [previous] twenty-five years" (Hutchinson 1910, 10–11). The board highlights that "speech is taught in all the classes, without exception, to the five hundred and thirty students on roll . . . [regardless of] whether the child be in the class-room, the work-shop, or on the play-grounds" (11).

While the annual report makes this claim of a total erasure of manualism from the PIDD campus, the likelihood of this being the case is slim. Burch (2002) documents how the oralism mandate was subverted by vocational programming wherein Deaf teachers continued to be employed, serving as language models for their students. Indeed, this was also the case at PSD. Some of our oldest participants attending PID report that the students continued to sign in the playgrounds, dorms, and even in vocational settings. These same participants remember older alumni who would have attended PIDD at this

time who were also signers. The reality is that even with an attempt at the total elimination of ASL during the academic day, PIDD students still had access to and used the signs passed down to them from the previous generations and used them for communication whenever possible, especially on the playground when they were at their most interactive during the school day.

By 1911, even Crouter, a fluent signer with forty-four years' experience at PIDD, had been converted to using an exclusively oral method for teaching Deaf children (Crouter in Hutchinson, 1912). With the elimination of the separate manualist academic classes, PIDD, like others in the country, also fired its signing Deaf teachers, leaving no signing role models in instructional settings. By the late 1920s, oralism was at its height in the United States (Lou 1988), yet ASL persisted, though only in secret and among Deaf people themselves. Interestingly, one participant recalls the sign language of the time to be heavily influenced by a spoken English structure. He calls this type of signing "oral signing," a distinct form from ASL that we know today (Jay Basch, personal communication, August 24, 2017). It is likely that these "oral signs" were used among the academically oriented students at PID—though never in the classroom—while the students with a heavier focus on vocational training would use the more traditional form of ASL.

Older project participants recall administrators from the 1950s and 1960s as strict oralists, with one in particular who cruelly enforced the oralist philosophy (Randy Fisher, personal communication, August 15, 2017); PSD continued under unwavering oralist leadership from the early 1960s through the early 1970s. Of course, even when academic programs required oralist methods only, signing remained in the dormitories and extracurricular socializing. The oldest Philadelphia Signs Project participants and other Deaf community members attending PSD during the early-to-mid twentieth century recall that signing was tolerated in the dormitories and was used at some points in vocational education. A Deaf father of one of the authors and former PSD student recalls regularly disregarding the school policy against signing in the classroom, though not without risk of punishment. He also recalls that some of teachers would sign to the students if no administrators or parents were around to notice. It is through these

channels and furtive manual conversations within the classrooms that ASL in Philadelphia survived.

In the 1970–1971 academic year, there was a grassroots uprising in Deaf schools around the country, pushing back against the oralist model in favor of the then-new Total Communication philosophy. Campuses reported picketing and protest, and PSD was no exception. In 1972, the first active Deaf board member of PSD, Dr. Jay Basch, pushed then-headmaster, Philip Bellefleur, to convert to the Total Communication philosophy, bringing sign language back into instruction at PSD (personal communication, August 24, 2017). This nationwide trend to reintegrate signing into the educational curriculum followed the scientific recognition of ASL as a language in its own right by Stokoe and collaborators in the early 1960s (Stokoe et al. 1965).

At this point in PSD's history, sign language was creeping back into the curriculum, but there still existed an institutionalized notion that Deaf people and ASL were of second class status and should be treated as such. In 1978, Joseph Finnegan, Jr., took over as superintendent of PSD, bringing with him a dramatic shift in how and where Deaf children were taught in Philadelphia. Under Finnegan's leadership, PSD moved away from a Total Communication philosophy—in this case, meaning Sim-Com, signing and speaking at the same time in an English-order fashion—to a Bilingual-Bicultural (Bi-Bi) approach, integrating ASL and Deaf cultural customs and mores directly into the educational policy and practice of the school (Joseph Finnegan, Jr., personal communication, August 9, 2017).

During this time, however, a confluence of social and policy changes in and beyond Philadelphia led to precipitously declining enrollment at the school. Due to federal mandates beginning with Public Law 94-142 in 1975 that mandated the inclusion of all disabled children in their closest school with nondisabled peers, neither the residential nor day school for the Deaf remained the first preference for school placement, and many families also moved their children to the federally funded MSSD on Gallaudet's campus. The resulting decline in enrollment, coupled with the prohibitive costs of running a sprawling residential campus, forced PSD to relocate in order to remain open. Finnegan and the PSD board negotiated with

then-Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia Constance Clayton about how and where Deaf and hard of hearing children in the Philadelphia region would be educated. It was decided that the School District of Philadelphia would no longer operate the elementary and middle school programs at the Martin School and PSD would no longer house a high school program. Any Deaf or hard of hearing children needing high school programming would either attend the designated high school program in their respective counties or a federally funded program at the MSSD in Washington, DC. In 1984, PSD moved to its current location, a historic building in Germantown, with only a handful of students remaining in the residential program. In 1989, the last cohort of residential students completed education at PSD and the residential side was closed for good. The high school program remained closed until the 2002–2003 school year, when it reopened under the negotiation and direction of Superintendent Joseph Fischgrund who held his position from 1987 to 2008.

While the move from the beloved Mount Airy campus was heartwrenching for most PSD alumni, it actually signaled a shift in school philosophy and pedagogy that was highly favorable to ASL and Deaf community members. As mentioned earlier, the school implemented a Bilingual-Bicultural philosophy and administrators worked deliberately to hire a more diverse and more Deaf staff. Prior to Finnegan's tenure, Deaf children at PSD had "never been exposed to capable Deaf people" because "the school never hired them" (Joseph Finnegan, Jr., personal communication, August 9, 2017). Furthermore, for the first time, the school began placing Deaf staff with the pre- and primary-school aged children, a move that signaled a clear recognition that early sign language exposure is critical to normal cognitive, social, and linguistic development for Deaf children. In addition, the school moved from a closed-door (to parents) residential school to an open-door day school where parents could come in and observe the curriculum and instruction at any time (Joseph Finnegan, Jr., personal communication, August 9, 2017). Though the majority of the hearing parents did not take advantage of this new policy, Finnegan reports that many Deaf parents did (personal communication, August 9, 2017). This, according to Finnegan, "caused friction," between Deaf parents and the majority-hearing educators because Deaf parents were now

able—and would take every opportunity—to question the education methods of the hearing teachers who, on the whole, had a "lack of respect" for Deaf people (personal communication, August 9, 2017). Although the time of the move from Mount Airy to Germantown was tumultuous for PSD alumni and students, the linguistic trajectory that began with Finnegan's hire was positive: PSD finally had administrators who not only recognized the legitimacy of ASL in the education of Deaf children, but ones who also worked to ensure that Deaf children had early and frequent exposure to signing Deaf role models.

During Finnegan's tenure and beyond, PSD also made new efforts to place Deaf role models in staff positions across the school. To counter the culture of audism at PSD before his term as superintendent, Finnegan and subsequent leadership codified the essentiality of Deaf inclusion and Deaf respect, officially insisting that "the culture and heritage of deafness [be] stressed throughout the curriculum, and respect for deaf individuals [be] maintained through collaborative relationships with numerous organizations for the deaf" (The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, no author, no date, 3). Such a value necessarily includes reaching out and bringing Deaf community members into the school, as continued connection to the Deaf school is central to the ethos of Deaf alumni everywhere, including Philadelphia. Thus, slowly but surely, the PSD administration made efforts on systemic levels to move toward Deaf equality.

It should be noted that the Philadelphia Deaf community's collective memory of this time is that the closure of the old (Mount Airy) campus meant the elimination of many jobs for Deaf people at PSD without re-hire at the new school, as there were no longer dorm supervisor and coaching positions at the new campus. Former administrators report that there were, in fact, signing Deaf people rehired at the new campus, many of whom were deliberately hired to ensure a proper balance and representation of Deaf people (personal communication, April 3, 2017, August 9, 2017). However, for many social reasons to be detailed, not all of these Deaf people chose to stay connected to the school or the Philadelphia Deaf community after the move to the Germantown campus. Furthermore, even though there were Deaf people employed on the new campus, far fewer were represented as a whole because the types of positions traditionally

held by Deaf adults no longer existed. The number of Deaf teachers eligible for hire was always small, and now the dorm supervisor positions, vocational programming, athletic coaches, and the like no longer existed beyond 1989. There is, then, a reality to the community perception, albeit likely a result of social circumstances that were systemically entrenched far beyond the reach of well-intentioned hiring administrators. Thus, the dissolution of the residential program left a cultural and linguistic emptiness in the school and the Philadelphia Deaf community that was never recovered.

The sign language at PSD in the 1980s took shape under a Total Communication philosophy in which all students' communication needs were considered viable strategies for instruction. A memo given to one of the authors by PSD's former director of curriculum and instruction, Marcia Volpe, details the school's communication philosophy:

> PSD encourages the use of all modes of expression which result in mutual understanding, including: American Sign Language (ASL); spoken, signed or written English; speechreading; and use of residual hearing. These principles do not require the use of any one language or mode of communication at all times: instead, accessibility and appropriateness are the fundamental concerns. There are times when ASL is appropriate; there are times when a manual code of English with or without voicing may be appropriate; and there may be times when oral English may be appropriate with either no manual representation or with manual representation provided by an interpreter. . . . Appropriateness and accessibility are determined by individual student or colleague need, the context and function of the communication, and the needs of others who are in the communicative environment. (The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, no author, no date, 1–2)

Such a philosophy is inclusive of ASL, but does not go so far as to suggest that ASL be used as the primary mode of communication for instruction. Around this time, there was a large influx of orally trained students from the Martin School and Deaf students with a variety of hearing abilities and language needs. The new PSD Total Communication philosophy was a nod to the linguistically diverse student body enrolled at the school, inclusive of but not solely focusing on ASL. While many in the PSD community took issue with the fact that other sign systems and even spoken English were included

as viable options for communication at PSD, the policy was actually a marked shift away from oral-only instruction and a great step toward the administrative recognition of the value of ASL to the PSD Deaf community. In fact, the same document celebrates and highlights the importance of ASL in the curricular, extracurricular, and everyday lives of Deaf people:

> ASL is a fundamental part of everyday life and learning for deaf children and youth. Therefore, PSD actively supports, encourages and strives to incorporate the use of ASL in the instructional process and in all other aspects of school life. (The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, no author, no date, 2)

Yet, the tensions between remaining loyal to ASL yet accommodating Deaf children with other communication needs are palpable in the juxtaposition of these last two excerpts; in striving to meet every Deaf person's needs, the Total Communication approach is inherently in conflict. For example, it is not linguistically or physically possible to use ASL and spoken English at the same time—the two have discrete grammars and structures—yet there is an expectation that this be possible if desired. Furthermore, it is not mandated that ASL be used at all times to foster accessibility. Instead, the same Communication Philosophy sets forth that:

> At PSD, it is expected that visual/manual communication which is adequate for full participation by deaf individuals be utilized at all times when deaf persons are present, so that the communicative environment remains open and accessible for all students and staff. (The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, no author, no date, 2)

In other words, these tenets indicate that PSD only expects "visual/manual" communication within its halls. The message thus is: ASL may be "fundamental," but "adequate" accessibility will suffice. In other words, these excerpts show mixed allegiances. Support for ASL is undercut by vagueness in terminology in the face of conflicting needs. By not mandating a preference for ASL specifically, such policies leave open the adoption of communication strategies leading to less-than-total participation by ASL-using Deaf students. In fact, the Total Communication philosophy has in practice proven to result in preferred use of Sim-Com instead of ASL by hearing teachers (e.g., Tevenal and Villanueva 2009). To be fair, this is not unique to PSD; it

is an intrinsic flaw of the Total Communication philosophy. It does, however, bring the signing Deaf community's objection to this approach to the fore.

The integration of ASL into PSD's academic curriculum was an important step toward this goal of equality. Beginning in the 1985–1986 academic year, instructional time and staffing were dedicated to "exposing students to native ASL" for the purpose of "fostering [students'] ASL skills and language development through storytelling, book sharing, ASL Literature, and pragmatics" (Marcia Volpe, personal communication, August 16, 2017). This deliberate linguistic effort is significant, since before, ASL acquisition was purely incidental and few, if any, of those linguistic opportunities occurred in the classroom. Integrating native ASL exposure into the curriculum continued at PSD well into the 1990s and still occurs today, but in a much more systematic fashion.

From 1999–2001, a new English Language Arts curriculum was designed to include a designated instructional block for teaching ASL to students from first grade through eighth grade, who, at the time, were the oldest students at the school. Integration of ASL into the curriculum came out of recognition that few of these children had Deaf language models outside the school; this formal ASL instruction was often the only opportunity for PSD students to get native input from a signing Deaf person. This instruction was offered by a Sign Language Specialist, later expanded to an ASL Team. Remarkably, this was the first time in the school's history that ASL was formally taught as a separate language in its classrooms. The school's continued commitment to ASL and Deaf studies is evidenced by the hiring of designated staff, working in a team fashion, for the purpose of providing explicit instruction in ASL. These instructional staff are still in place today, though their titles and approaches have changed over the years.

Regional and Racial Demographics at PSD

Since its opening in 1820, PSD has taken in students from all over Pennsylvania, as well as New Jersey, Delaware, and sometimes far beyond. As other state schools for the Deaf were built, PSD took in fewer students from outside the greater Philadelphia area. By the 1910s, the school then known as PIDD was mostly populated by students from

the eastern third of the state of Pennsylvania (Crouter 1912). By the mid-1940s, PSD was drawing only from Pennsylvania and Delaware, with the vast majority coming from the eastern third of Pennsylvania (Wood 1946). By the 1970s and 1980s, fewer counties were sending their pupils to be educated at PSD because the mandate of Public Law 94-142 prioritized education with nondisabled peers. By the 1984 campus relocation, most of the students at PSD came from the city of Philadelphia. This appears to be still true today, though there are still a few students who come from the suburbs to Philadelphia to receive a sign-language based education.

While there are Deaf people who attended PSD living all over the Philadelphia region, it is reported that a significant number who were educated at the Mount Airy campus currently live in Lancaster County, about an hour west of the city of Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Deaf community is known by insiders and outsiders to be highly insular and relatively unwelcoming of any outsiders, including Deaf outsiders. In general, Deaf Philadelphians tend not to leave the region, not even for college. Those who do leave Philadelphia, usually to attend a college like Gallaudet or the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college under the auspices of Rochester Institute of Technology, intend not to come back to Philadelphia to live for the long term. Those who do leave Philadelphia meet and socialize with Deaf people from other parts of the country and world. In turn, they adopt one another's signs and styles of signing. This leveling of regional differences gives rise to the language variety that we call pan-regional ASL. Some people in Deaf communities including Philadelphia call this "Gallaudet ASL," named after the place where this linguistic intermingling most often happens, but this phenomenon happens whenever and wherever multiple signing communities come together for the longer term. Moreover, nowadays, not all Deaf people attend Gallaudet. However, though the term "Gallaudet ASL" may be imprecise, it is still used to signify a type of standard and stands as a clear marker of those who have left the Philadelphia community and been exposed to other ASL varieties.

When Deaf people from any community stay together for a long time with little outside influence, there is the potential for a regionally distinctive variety to emerge. The Philadelphia Deaf community, with

its historic exclusivity and its members' tendency to stay local to the region, sometimes for a lifetime, provides the ideal conditions for such dialect differentiation. It is unsurprising, then, that anecdotes from the Philadelphia community and beyond suggest that the ASL used by Deaf people who attended PSD before the 1984 move to Germantown seems to differ markedly from pan-regional ASL. Indeed, Deaf outsiders to the Philadelphia community regularly comment on the unusual nature of this variety. While it is not yet clear precisely which linguistic features give rise to these perceptions of difference, there is widespread agreement in the Deaf community that some difference does exist. The Philadelphia Deaf community's perception is that their dialect is still in existence among older living signers, but has been disappearing rapidly. It is only faintly evident among younger speakers because, as delineated above, Deaf students in the Philadelphia area have had significantly reduced exposure to native signers of the Philadelphia dialect after the 1984 turning point.

From the time of its opening in 1820 through the time of the 1984 relocation to Germantown, PSD had historically been an overwhelmingly White school despite being a northern school with no legal precedent for segregation. Anecdotes from Philadelphia Signs Project participants suggest the Martin School as well as Archbishop Ryan were mostly White school programs until at least 1954 and even well into the 1960s and 70s. Yet Philadelphia has had hundreds of thousands of Black residents since the Great Migration, evidently beginning in the 1920 US Census (Gibson and Jung 2005, table 39). Furthermore, archival evidence of social gatherings among Black Deaf Philadelphians from the 1940s shows their presence in Philadelphia and collective mindset. Surely, then, PSD and even the Martin School were not predominantly White because there were too few Deaf Black Philadelphians to populate their schools.

Why were there so few Black students at PSD? One Black participant in our project speculates that the reason so few Black Deaf students went to PSD is because of an inherent mistrust that Black families had in sending their children to a predominantly White residential school where, for all intents and purposes, White people would be raising their Black children in the dorms and classrooms. This

explanation is compatible with the fact that the Martin School, a day school, later became the school of choice among Black people. A dispreference for the residential school model may have been compounded by Black Philadelphians being, overall, at a substantial socioeconomic disadvantage compared to White ones. For poorer families, having children come home to care for elder family members and other children may be an economic necessity, and this pressure can be disproportionately borne by Deaf children when they are viewed as disabled. Lastly and most unfortunately, there is a high possibility that many of the Black Deaf Philadelphians were institutionalized, their deafness and lack of language mistaken for mental illness. There are at least five Black Deaf people that we know of currently living in assisted living facilities who were institutionalized rather than educated as children. The effects of language deprivation and long-term institutionalization have rendered them incapable of independent living (personal communications with Janessa Carter, Deaf Philadelphia resident, March 6, 2017, August 12, 2017). If the latter anecdotes are accurate, this would be more evidence of the systematic exclusion of Black Deaf people's equal access to education (Burch and Joyner 2007). However, unlike the Black Deaf community in the segregated south (McCaskill et al. 2011), it seems that many of the Black Deaf people in Philadelphia, particularly those who did not attend PSD, did not have access to ASL until much later in life, if at all.

Though PSD was never officially segregated—classrooms were always integrated with the few Black Deaf children who matriculated at the school—anecdotes from our participants detail systematic segregation and discrimination implemented by dorm counselors and staff in charge of other extracurricular activities as well as severe hazing and cruelty enacted by their White Deaf peers in the school. For example, one Black Deaf Philadelphian recalls that when she attended PSD in the 1940s and 50s as one of four Black children in the school, she and the other Black children were not permitted to share bathrooms, attend the same parties, and were expected to sleep in the highest bunk—four beds high—all indicators of the second-class status that Black people were given by the after-school staff. Certainly interracial dating was also prohibited; the same participant recalls wanting

to attend the school prom with a White classmate but being strictly forbidden from doing so by the dorm supervisor. Black and White children were said to be physically separated at the prom so as not to be able to socialize with one another (personal communication from an unnamed Deaf Philadelphian, March 6, 2017).

It should be noted that segregation and overt discrimination against Black and Jewish people was not official school policy. In fact, based on participants' experiences, discriminatory mandates came not from teachers, but from dorm supervisors and extracurricular staff. Participants indicate that White teachers, both academic and vocational, were very supportive of the Black Deaf children at PSD, punishing the White perpetrators when they were aware of the offenses. This marks a notable disconnect between instructional and residential staff, many of whom were themselves Deaf. Overall, the White children at the school were not kind and, as reported to us, those who were Black, Jewish, and children with physical disabilities stuck together in a kind of camaraderie formed from persecution by many of the White peers at PSD (personal communication from an unnamed Black Deaf Philadelphian, March 6, 2017).

While the move from the Mount Airy campus to the Germantown site is fraught for Deaf Philadelphians for sentimental reasons, Deaf alumni responses to the move also struck racial nerves. The move to the new campus included integration of the largely Black population of the Martin School, prompting many White Deaf families to relocate their children from PSD to other programs for the Deaf, sometimes out of state. One of the authors of this article recalls Philadelphia Deaf community commentary on the changing nature of PSD around the 1984 move. During this time, several family members and friends cited a changing curriculum as rationale for pulling their White children out of PSD. As it happens, the curriculum had indeed been changing. But according to Finnegan, the change was to what he termed a "Bilingual-Bicultural model," meaning that ASL and Deaf cultural norms would be central to the education of the school's students (personal communication, August 9, 2017). Surely, a more sign-language centered, culturally Deaf curriculum is not what these parents were fleeing. This suggests that in some cases, when parents stated they were looking for a "better" program, they may have been looking for a

whiter program. The effects of such "white flight" on the Philadelphia variety of ASL should not be overlooked.

To be fair, there were other factors that drew some of these families away from PSD. Some parents complained that the school curriculum seemed not to be challenging enough for their children and there were very few "Gallaudet graduates," meaning academically oriented Deaf adults, working at the school to serve as college-bound role models for the Deaf children. The PSD environment was thus not satisfactory to parents who were seeking a program that exposed their Deaf children to the academic elite of the Deaf world. Furthermore, MSSD, the high school on Gallaudet's campus, was heavily recruiting students around this same time and the Intermediate Units in the surrounding counties of Philadelphia started to educate the Deaf students who resided in their areas in Deaf education centers within their respective counties instead of at PSD. As a result, the high-school aged population of PSD dwindled precipitously, feeding the motivation for Finnegan to agree to close the high school in the aforementioned deal with the school district of Philadelphia. Closure of the high school meant that there would also be no sports program, a highly treasured aspect of a Deaf school and community experience. These factors ostensibly affected only the high school-aged children, though without a sports program, for many, the spirit of a Deaf program seemed to be lost.

Conclusion

The social, historical, and educational factors we have outlined here have all shaped Deaf Philadelphians' access to, attitudes on, and use of ASL. The 1908–1909 milestone of achieving total oralism at PIDD and the 1984 move to the new campus are important markers in identifying changing linguistic inputs on Philadelphia ASL. And though ASL persisted through the oralism mandate—primarily through residential school experiences and stealthy signed exchanges—these policies had a significant impact on how, when, and where Deaf people were allowed to use their signed language.

In more recent years at PSD, a more sign-language-supportive educational policy is complicated by the fact that the school no longer occupies an environment where its students live together, guided by

Deaf adults who shared with them their experiences attending PSD and living in the dorms. Further complicating the linguistic context, the high school closed and the school inherited a large contingent of former day school students who had little-to-no exposure to ASL prior to coming to PSD. These students had their own strategies for communicating, which certainly informed the social and linguistic environment of the school. Coupled with the elimination of traditionally Deaf-held positions and an exodus of a large number of Deaf families, many of whom were alumni who used the "old" Philadelphia signs, the Philadelphia dialect became perceptibly different than what it was in 1984 and prior.

From whom, then, would the new crop of Deaf PSD students learn their language? Who would carry on the Philadelphia signs from the "old" Mount Airy school? What will Philadelphia ASL look like in the years to come? Of course, a few PSD alumni remain employed at PSD and live in the Philadelphia area. Remnants of the older Philadelphia dialect can be seen today in some of the younger participants in the Philadelphia Signs Project, as evident in the earlier interview excerpt of Colleen recounting her experience at Gallaudet. But the remaining older signers are very few, and many of those who stayed connected with the school have died or moved elsewhere. With fewer and fewer native Deaf Philadelphians providing sign language input to new generations, it seems likely that Philadelphia ASL will continue to diverge from its historical roots. It is our hope that the intricacies and nuances of these differences will become apparent through our documentation and analysis of Philadelphia signers of diverse social, linguistic, educational, and racial backgrounds. Without question, the urgency of immediate documentation could not be greater.

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