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From the Editor's Desk

We have two issues to say in introducing this publication to the readers.

First, for this first issue for 1997 the present editorial board wishes to acknowledge the initial preparatory work on the issue put in by the previous editorial board.

Secondly in this issue, we would like to reflect a bit on our Z.B.T.E. We feel it is appropriate that thirty three after the appearance of the first issue, we should refresh our memories by revisiting the original mission for the bulletin.

The original title of this bulletin was The Bulletin of The Institute of Education. The Bulletin arose out of a "cry for a professional journal concerned with contemporary teacher education and its problems both local and general ..... the need for a clearing house for information and forum for discussion". Vol 1 No 1, March, 1965, p1). Over the years, the title and format of the bulletin have changed to suit the changing times, but we have not deviated much from the original mission for publishing the bulletin as a re-confirmed by the Report of Teacher Education Review Committee (TERC) of 1986. It is our hope that the bulletin will continue to serve the interests, both local and general.

DEAF CULTURE IN ZIMBABWE; EXISTENCE, REALITY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION.

BY

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ABSTRACT:

Most education programs for the deaf in Zimbabwe ignore the existence of the Deaf and make no attempt to use sign language as a medium of instruction. This ignorance is likely to be detrimental to the learning of those deaf children who could benefit from sign language. This paper illustrates the role of Deaf culture in Zimbabwe. It discusses the main components of this culture and the implications they have for the education of the deaf. Whereas sign language features prominently in the discussion, the existence of other methods of communication is critical for the education of all deaf children. A smorgasbord type of education system with a wide range of instructional options to meet the specific needs of each deaf child is proposed.

1. Introduction

Education for the deaf in Zimbabwe began with a non academic foundation. Emphasis was put on speech development, English Language acquisition (Loreto and Jairos Jiri Schools), Shona language acquisition (Henry Murry School), and the acquisition of trades such as metalwork, woodwork, brick laying, leatherwork, tailoring, cookery, motor mechanic and painting. It was only after independence in 1980 that deaf children began to write the Grade Seven National Examinations. Secondary school education was only introduced to them in 1985 with the opening of a secondary school wing at the Emerald Hill School for the Deaf. Up to now most deaf children in Zimbabwe have not yet progressed into institutions of higher learning (colleges and universities). Considering that education for the deaf has been around since 1947 and comparing with developments elsewhere particularly in developed

countries, there is need for the Zimbabwean educators to analyze the system and see how progress into higher education can be enhanced.

One area that has not been emphasized and possibly missing in the education system of the deaf in Zimbabwe is a more widespread acceptance and use of Deaf culture in schools. As Chimedza (1994) points out oralism dominated the education of the deaf in Zimbabwe for a long time and it is only recently that the Ministry of Education has allowed teachers to use sign language for instruction in schools. Several questions come to the forefront with this introduction of sign language into schools. Can we expect the inclusion of sign language into the school curriculum to increase the academic attainment of deaf children? Can we expect them to do better in academic subjects (e.g., mathematics, science, history, geography) and in the acquisition of spoken languages (e.g., Shona, Ndebele, English)? This paper not necessarily answers these questions but will shed more light on Deaf culture as it relates to some of its major components such as sign language, Deaf communities, marriages and parenting and the implications of this for the education of the deaf in Zimbabwe.

It has been observed for nearly a century and a half that deafness creates unique social groupings and identities (Johnson, 1991). Research has shown that deaf people create communities based on the experiences associated with deafness, on their preferred mode of communication such as sign language, oralism and total communication, and the necessity to achieve access to the socioeconomic benefits of society at large (Becker and Arnold, 1986; Erting, 1978; Lou, 1988; Meadow, 1972; Padden, 1980; and Schein, 1968). Some researchers following the social model theory such as Johnson and Erting (1982) following the social model Theory propose the theoretical position that deafness is an ethnic phenomenon and not primarily a physical disability. Such an approach fails to recognize that deafness strikes randomly. Deaf people come from all sorts of backgrounds. They have different socioeconomic status, races ethnicity, education, religions and political affiliations. However for many of those born deaf or deaf from an early age, by adulthood they become demographically distinct (Benderly, 1980) forming a social group, strongly cohesive and highly endogamous (Schein & Delk, 1974). This cultural view of deafness is in a way a result of the relatively recent discovery of sign language as a language in its own right and not as a visual form of English, Shona or Ndebele coupled by the pride and group identity from within the Deaf community.

2. What is Deaf Culture?

In an attempt to define Deaf culture one needs to know what culture is in the first place. Carmel (1991) observes that culture is an immense concept. As Bonner (1980) points out, "There are probably few words that have as many definitions as culture." One of the earliest used definitions of culture was by Tylor (1871) who saw culture as a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. More recently culture has been defined as a design for living (Geertz, 1973) which consists of whatever one has to know and to believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members (Goodenough, 1970). It is the experience, knowledge and values of the group (Rutherford, 1988).

Recently the concept of culture has been used in connection with deaf people. This is because of works of such people as Stokoe (1976). Padden (1980) gives the following working definition for culture as it relates to deaf people:

> A culture is a set of learned behaviours of a group of people who have their own language, values, rules for behaviour, and traditions. A person may be born in a culture ....., or a person may grow up in one culture and later learn the language, values and practices of a different culture and become "enriched" into the culture (Padden, 1980).

Padden's definition can be very misleading. It gives a check list which if a candidate passes can claim to be a member of that culture. This is problematic because one can learn the behaviours of a culture and become very good of them but that does not necessarily make the person a member of that culture. Padden's definition is like a "quick fix" to an immense problem. The question that remains unanswered is why then did Padden's view of culture became so popular in defining Deaf culture. One possible answer is that Padden's definition gives a working framework through which one can observe, check and recognize deafness as a culture in its own right.

Within this framework it is readily observed that many deaf people are bicultural. They are members of the mainstream culture and they also belong to the Deaf culture. Because of the existence of Deaf culture it is easy to be misled and see all deaf people as homogeneous. Deafness is not a prescription for a certain life style,

set of mores and beliefs or even communication preferences. All deaf individuals make unique adjustments to living that take into account their degree of deafness and their reactions to different social environments (Stewart, 1992). Some deaf people are members of the Deaf culture while others are not. A lot will depend on the circumstances of the individual deaf persons including their intrinsic personal characteristics. For instance, only 25% of the deaf people in the United States use American Sign Language.

Indeed, what makes deaf people a cultural group instead of simply a loose organisation of people with a similar sensory loss is the fact that their adaptation to life includes language (Rutherford, 1988). An environment created solely by some sensory deprivation does not make a culture. This is why we do not talk of a "Blind culture" although blind people like their deaf counterparts, have the common sensory loss of sight. However this is not to say that this similarity in circumstances does not affect blind people. It actually provides a bonding, a unifying factor for blind people. Their common experiences as blind people bind them together. They share common problems and have many similarities in the way they solve these problems but still this does not form the necessary elements of culture. This is because blind people do not have one common language of their own. Blindness alone does not make them into a cultural group. For deaf people their situation is different. Whereas their experiences as people with disabilities are similar to those of blind people, they have a common language that they use to construct a culture of their own. They are a cultural group because they use sign language as a language for deaf people.

3. Sign Language:

Culture is transmitted and learned through language which is learned within the context of culture. Thus, language and culture are inextricably bound (Rutherford, 1988). Sign language represents an important value to Deaf culture. It is through language that the thoughts, values and customs of a culture are expressed. Language is the vehicle of culturating children within any society. Within the Deaf culture sign language is the vehicle for communication. It is a gestural language in which the signs are developed through a natural evolution based on the communicator's needs. In Zimbabwe it is the Zimbabwean Sign Language of the Deaf community. In the United States of America deaf people use the American Sign Language (ASL). Fant (1974) defines American Sign Language as "the language

used by typically deaf adults when communicating among themselves." This definition can be generalized and applied to define other sign languages such as the Zimbabwean Sign Language, the British Sign Language and the Australian Sign Language. All these sign languages are used by typically deaf adults who can be defined as people with a hearing loss who tend to socialize with other deaf people. The principal components of all sign languages include space, directionality of movement and inflections. These components in conjunction with the four basic sign parameters (hand shapes, positions, orientation and movements) convey information through signs (Caccamise and Newell, 1983). Thus, the Zimbabwean Sign Language is a complete language with its own syntax semantics and lexicon that differ from English, Shona, Ndebele or any other spoken language for that matter. It operates totally independent of speech and audition. Linguistic information is transmitted through hands, fingers, body, and facial features.

The speakers of a language are partners in an agreement to see and think of the world in a certain way but not the only possible way (Brunner, 1956). Language provides unity among its users. They have a common platform and a common vehicle to share ideas with. The strength of sign languages is that they have evolved to meet the demands of a visual-spatial medium. They are efficient and desirable, for example, for their capacity to convey abstract concepts, depict the complexity of real world issues, and portray the emotions of the speaker (Stewart, 1989). Deaf people have a strong identification with sign language since it is part of their culture. The age at which the deaf child is introduced to sign language may signify the beginning of socialization into the Deaf community (Meadow, 1982).

Deaf Community:

Sociologists define a community as a general social system in which a group of people live together, share common goals and carry out certain responsibilities (Padden, 1980). We often think of geographical physical proximity as a crucial feature in this operational definition. While this is true when discussing communities in general it does not apply when defining Deaf communities. This is so because the boundaries of Deaf communities are not physical but conceptual. The boundaries of the deaf communities are based on things such as common interests, common language and the need for identity. Conceptual communities such as the Deaf community exist despite great physical distances that can separate the members.

In industrial countries such as the United States, national associations of the deaf have been in existence for more than a hundred years. Some of these national associations have branches both at state or provincial level and at local levels. They help to keep the deaf community together by holding meetings and functions. In Africa, national associations of the deaf have been established in the last decade or so. In Zimbabwe we have the Association of the Deaf (ASSOD) as the national association.

At the local level, Deaf clubs provide a place where members of the Deaf community meet and socialize together as a group. Being among their type gives a sense of identity, pride and solidarity. There are sports organisations for the deaf as well. In Zimbabwe the Soccer Team for the Deaf in Highfield was well known particularly in the eighties. For a long time now many deaf people have met outside Liberty Cinema in down town Harare every Friday evening to hang out with colleagues and just chat. In the United States, the American Athletic Association of the Deaf has been helping American deaf people to participate in the World Games of the Deaf since 1935. There are also many social groups such as religious groups, alumni associations and community social groups (Meadow, 1972; Rutherford, 1988). Membership in Deaf communities is restricted mostly to deaf people and to those who have been "uncultured" into the Deaf culture by the mere fact that they spend most of their time with deaf people. Some of these people would include hearing people who have deaf parents, spouses or children. It is in these communities that Deaf culture is nourished.

5. Marriages:

Most deaf people marry other deaf and statistics show that 85% of marriages by deaf people are endogamous (Schein and Delk 1974). There are two possible explanations for this. The first possible explanation is that they are more comfortable to be with another deaf person who understands Deaf culture and with whom they share the same experiences. It is therefore a choice of a deaf individual to have a deaf spouse. The second explanation is that most people marry someone they have known well. In Zimbabwe many deaf children go to separate schools for deaf children and spend most of their time with other deaf children with little exposure to non deaf children. As adults they continue to socialize in communities of deaf people and expanding the number of deaf people they know. Because of this socialization pattern, choice of a spouse is restricted and therefore deaf people end up marrying

each other. When deaf people marry they bring to t he marriage personally established rules for behaviour, and personal social, religious and cultural values and preferred communication modality (Jacobs, 1980; Higgins, 1980). One advantage of endogamous marriages is that usually the couple come to the marriage already with a common communication modality. This makes adjustment during marriage easy. Many other deaf people marry hearing spouses. Again this is a question of choice by the couple. The socialization process plays an important role as well.

. Parenting:

Research reported in Quigley and Kretschmer (1982) shows that among deaf children the best sign language learners are those of deaf parents. These children grow up in a" normal linguistic environment". They are socialised to language by an older generation who can feed them with vocabulary and syntactic structures continuously. By observing and practising with adult signers these children learn increasingly complex signs and sentences on a regular basis. Thus these children may parallel the stages in linguistic development that Vygotsky (1986) has described as moving from undifferentiated meaning to an ability to manipulate speech and thought in a native way. We do not know for sure whether or not mastery of sign language at an early age facilitates the learning of a spoken language such as English at a later age.

Deaf children of deaf parents do not only enjoy linguistic advantage over deaf children of hearing parents, they also experience normal child rearing practices by their parents. In hearing families the birth of a deaf child causes many psychosocial problems for the parents. These problems in turn affect them in the way they bring up their deaf child. It is important for hearing parents to get support at an early stage. For those parents at denial stage they need assistance to learn to accept the deaf child while for those who already accept the child need support in programs that help them with good parenting approaches and how they could talk with their child. Deaf parents view deafness as a normal characteristic. They possess it and the fact that their child has deafness like them is no big deal. This gives deaf children of deaf parents an advantage over peers who have hearing parents in that they develop more normally in psychological, cognitive, linguistic and familial areas (Furth, 1966; Moores, 1978; Meadow, 1980).

. Implications for education:

The existence of a Deaf culture in Zimbabwe has several implications for education. Whereas in the past the main discussion in the education of the deaf was what communication methods to be used in the education of the deaf, the presence of Deaf culture and in particular that of sign language has made many educators see sign language as particularly important medium for school learning. Deaf children communicate easily and naturally when using sign language. The American Sign Language for instance can express almost any kind of thought. This makes it suitable for use in education. The Zimbabwean Sign Language can easily evolve to the same level if it gets more recognition, respect and use in education by both deaf students and their teachers. The services of sign language interpreters cannot be ignored especially for deaf children in inclusive classes in regular schools. This should not be mistaken to infer that all deaf students use sign language for communication and in their school learning situations. There are many deaf people who do not believe in sign language and there are organizations for the deaf that do not encourage the use of sign language but they try to make the deaf child learn through speech reading, audition and vocalization. In the United States the Alexander Graham Bell Association is a good example of such an organization. An education system that goes all oral as the historical position of the education of the deaf in Zimbabwe has been or that goes all sign language as is now advocated for by the Association of the Deaf (ASSOD) fails to recognize this fact. Like in all other educational practices the needs of the child should determine the education program. The education system should have a smorgasbord type of education with a variety of programs so that it can meet the different individual needs of each deaf child.

Most members of the Deaf culture argue that deaf children should be educated in separate schools for the deaf as opposed to other options such as inclusion and some pullout programs. They mainly base these arguments on political and social claims. It is true that residential schools for deaf provide informal opportunities at the boarding place for deaf children of deaf parents to teach other deaf children sign language (Schein and Delk 1974). Holt (1994) analyzed test scores of deaf and hard of hearing students in the United States trying to establish the relationship between program type achievement. The study established that there is a very high correlation between inclusion in regular education classrooms and high test scores. The less the deaf child is included in the regular class the lower were their test scores and the more time they spent in the regular class the higher their test scores

were. Many other statistical comparisons have made similar findings (Allen, 1986, Allen & Osborn, 1984; Holt & Allen, 1988; Kluwin & Moores , 1985). These findings make the arguments for separate special schools for the deaf and hard of hearing pedagogically weak. Schools for the deaf should only be used for those students for whom this is the most beneficial option for education and not for political and social reasons.

It has already been established that deaf children of deaf parents have linguistic, psychological and familial advantage over deaf children of hearing parents. As a result they have a higher academic achievement. By the end of their schooling they read about one grade higher than deaf children of hearing parents. Given the linguistic and psychosocial advantages that they have, they should be reading at a much higher level than the current level of grade four (Moores, 1978). This is a challenge that researchers should look into . Something is amiss here.

7. Conclusion:

This paper emphasizes the fact that deaf people have a culture of their own which is different from the mainstream culture of hearing people. Deaf People have their own language, attitudes, values and behaviours. For a long time now, the education system in Zimbabwe has ignored the existence of this culture in the use of sign language in the classroom for learning and teaching. Such an approach is clearly counter productive. Many deaf children who would otherwise benefit if sign language was used for instruction are losing. The proposal here is to have an approach that accepts the existence of deaf culture and the fact that different deaf children would benefit from the different programmes (oral, signing and total communication). It is for this reason that the use of sign language together with other communication approaches is increasingly becoming popular in the education programs for the deaf internationally.

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