EDUCATIONAL TRENDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN SPAIN: THE CASE OF THE DEAF

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Abstract – *Following a brief account of Education and Special Education in Spain, I will start the paper by pointing out the different views of understanding deafness, both in hearing and deaf people. I shall then focus on the Spanish situation regarding the education models for the deaf, drawing a distinction between models regarding language (oralism vs. bilingualism) and models regarding education (special education vs. inclusive education). The paper will end with a vision of the education for the deaf paying special attention to the fact that school teachers and administrators have a very early and intense role in the lives of deaf children. It will point out that early intervention is a desirable goal, but carries some dangers regarding deaf children's social and emotional development.*

Introduction

*I*n almost every society on earth the child is regarded as a member of his/her parent's group. In that respect, deaf children occupy a unique position: they make up the only cultural group where the socialisation process takes place preferentially from child to child, rather than from adult to child. As a sociologist, this has been the aspect that initially attracted me towards the research I am presenting. Furthermore, as a sociologist interested in education, I was also attracted by the conceptualisation of deafness over time (that is, the way of answering the question what is deafness and what does being deaf imply?), and by the people involved in the education of the deaf. The intention of the present article is to focus on the fact that there are various ways to understand deafness and each of them inspires a syllabus influenced by specific aspects of understanding.

The Spanish education system

Bonal & Rambla (1999) in their article 'The recontextualisation process of educational diversity: new forms to legitimise pedagogic practice', present briefly the recent changes in Spanish education policy and the transformations that, over

the past two decades, Spanish education policy has undergone. Indeed, after a period of centrist government (from 1977 to 1982), which had to address the growth of educational demand, the arrival of the socialist government in 1982 brought about the introduction of a new culture of state intervention. Education became, for the first time in 50 years, a subject of public interest; successive regulations and expenditure policies aimed to overcome the former dual educational system divided into a private, mainly religious sector, and a poor one of inferior quality. During the 1980's, goals such as equality of educational opportunities, expansion of public education, democratic parental participation, professionalisation of teachers and quality of state schools became the central objectives that characterised state education policies and discourses.

Interestingly enough, socialist governments had to address the democratisation process in education while the rest of the advanced capitalist societies were cutting back on public educational and social expenditure. The simultaneous process of consolidation and the crisis of mass schooling in Spain, as in other Southern European countries, has led to a specific sort of policy changes. Education policy was thus marked by the contradiction between the need to meet very heterogeneous demands (arising from the high plurality of policy networks involved in private and public sectors at a regional and national scale) and the necessity to overcome traditional economic shortcomings.

This contradiction had to be addressed as Spain entered the European Union in 1986 and therefore its policy options were framed by the need to bridge the gap with northern European countries. From the mid-1980's, the Spanish educational policy had to face simultaneously the mandate of modernising (improving the quality of schooling to catch up with European standards) and democratising the education system. In 1987 the Spanish Ministry of Education launched the first proposal for a complete reform of the education system (MEC, 1987). Successive policy documents (like the White Paper published in 1989) initiated both the real and the symbolic educational change which was supposed to bring Spain into line with the most advanced European countries. To achieve this, both curriculum and school structure were to be changed.

The Education Reform Acts passed in 1990 (*Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo,* LOGSE 1/1990) and 1995 (*Ley Orgánica de Participación, Evaluación y Gobierno de los Centros Docentes,* LOPEG 9/1995) culminated in this change. The following list summarises the most significant aspects that have changed formally:

- The extension of compulsory education until 16. Primary education has been fixed from 6 to 12 years old while secondary education has been divided into a compulsory track (from 12 to 16) and a post-compulsory one (16 to 18). The

division between the academic and the vocational track is postponed until the age of 16. In addition, it is assumed that, although not compulsory, infant education (3 to 6) should be universally provided.

- A formal policy to re-examine the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. In the former system basic education finished at age 14 and provided different qualifications for achievers and under-achievers. VET was the only option for those who could not pass this basic educational level. In those circumstances, VET was not a valid option neither for family expectations nor for an employer's selection. The 1990 Education Reform Act abolished the double qualification system and established new compulsory secondary education (12-16). Past the age of 16 there is no qualification condition to pursue the academic or vocational track. The new VET system is now shaped by a 'new vocationalist' discourse based on a new relationship between education and work. The 'new worker' was to be trained according to the new challenges of the production system. The use of information technology, capacity for team-work, flexibility to move inside the labour market and eagerness to learn are skills to be taught.
- A significant reform of the curriculum structure and content, especially in compulsory secondary schooling was also taking place. The new secondary curriculum structure includes a basic common curriculum and a variable (optional) curriculum. Students are now able to choose 35% of their subjects from the options offered by their schools. Schools have the autonomy to decide what type of content can be offered as part of this variable curriculum. School decisions on curriculum must be based on a pupil's needs and interests. Some of the subjects can be designed to reinforce basic content, other subjects aim to widen some aspects of the common curriculum while others may be designed to introduce new specific content. In addition, the following cross-curricular subjects have to be included in the school content: education in equal opportunity, peace education, health education, environmental education, consumer education, moral education and traffic education.
- A major development of school autonomy in curriculum and economic decisions. Schools are followed to decide on the variable curriculum and have more freedom to allocate resources. The deregulation policy grants schools grater flexibility to search for supplementary to public funds.
- The introduction of a new teaching culture. New official and pedagogic discourses introduce a new reform language and the need to overcome former 'anti-pedagogic teaching styles. Schools were encouraged to change their teaching strategies towards a more child-centered education. Concepts like *curriculum adaptation, pupil context-based content, cognitive skills* and so on redefine the teaching style and require a significant retraining of teachers.

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These changes represent the formal official state responses to the new educational mandate. For the first time since the restoration of democracy in 1977, the state has shown a capacity for actively defining what education should be.

Special education in Spain

In recent years a new understanding of special education and the students to whom it is directed has been taking shape. A number of different experiences in education – in this country and around us – have given rise to this change. There has been a series of conceptual changes of an educational and sociological nature which propose a different interpretation of deficiency and educational practices and consequently new schemes to improve the education of 'special students'.

The phrase 'students with special educational needs' suggests, according to Díaz-Estébanez and Valmaseda (1995), a new way of understanding education. The change has been from classifying students into two large groups – 'deficient' and 'normal' – and educating them accordingly, to adopting a scale or continuum reflecting the learning problems – temporary or permanent - which a variety of students manifest. The emphasis is placed on the capacity of the school environment to meet the educational needs which certain students have. The intention is to understand deficiencies in terms of special educational needs, and appreciate that each student, regardless of his/her personal characteristics, has the right to receive a normalised education. By 'normalised' we understand that which is carried out through the most normative means possible, in agreement with each culture, to bring about or maintain certain personal behaviour characteristics as near as possible to the cultural norms of the society where the person lives. (Wolfensberger, 1972, in Díaz-Estébanez &Valmaseda, 1995, p. 47).

Normalisation of people with deficiencies starts from certain basic principles:

a) The conviction that every person is able to learn and thrive in his or her personal human development.
b) Although physical integration in itself does not bring about social integration, it is nevertheless a necessary condition for this to take place.

The idea of special educational needs as well as that of normalisation appear to be closely related to the advantage of initiating activities with 'non-handicapped' friends. These interactions would favour social relations between students with and without handicaps and would likewise increase the social acceptance of the former in respect to the non-handicapped. An education for all adapted to the needs of each is the intention. This has allowed, since 1985, the

inclusion of the majority of these students in ordinary schools, where they can receive a normal education in the company of non-handicapped peers.

It is obviously difficult to disagree with these principles. However, they cannot be developed in a homogenous way for all students since different needs require different responses. In the case of students with hearing disorders there is a wide range of factors which must be taken into consideration when analysing their needs in order to come up with an appropriate response.

A word on terminology

A variety of terms have been used to describe the educational arrangements for children with special needs in recent years, such as 'integration', 'mainstreaming', and so on. In the case of Spain the change has been more one of words than one of meaning regarding this issue. Through the 1980's the process of integration (in Spanish *Integración*) became widespread and with it the closure of special centres. However, very often the term *integration* was interpreted in its simplest way, as a physical placement. The Education Reform Acts passed in 1990 (LOGSE 1/ 1990) introduced the concept of educational *diversity*; it was the response to the new educational culture which establishes new bases for understanding equal opportunities as well as quality of schooling.

The word *diversity* appears to be very helpful for improving education. A 'good' school must be flexible enough to attend to diverse needs and interests. Achieving equality is no longer offering the same curriculum and applying the same teaching strategies to everyone, but diversifying them depending on the pupil's profiles.

Another element which adds greater confusion is the linguistic one. It is very common to translate the Spanish word *integración* both to 'integration' when speaking in general terms and 'inclusion' when referring to education (i.e. 'inclusive education'). Moreover, we often retain the word 'mainstreaming' when we quote references from American authors. The three terms will therefore be used interchangeably in this text.

The case of the deaf

The case of the education of the deaf is especially interesting within the framework of special education for two reasons: firstly because the disability affects one of the special senses, impeding in the task of socialisation and making more difficult the natural communication between parents-children. (It has to

be taken into account that 90% of the deaf are born into hearing families. Obviously, in the case of deaf children of deaf parents, deafness is not necessarily a handicap, because it does not interrupt the process of socialisation if there is sign communication, participation in and support by the deaf community).

Another aspect I also consider important is the tendency to begin education earlier for deaf children than for their hearing counterparts. This trend towards early intervention is seen as a positive influence, a 'head-start', for children with special educational needs. Thus, in the 'ideal' cases, school teachers, speech therapists, administrators and so on have an earlier and more intense role in the lives of deaf children, as compared with children in conventional educational settings. However, while early intervention may be a desirable goal, there are certain dangers in transferring a major responsibility away from the home. One danger is that the parents may experience a delay in feeling responsible and competent in relation to their own child, and these feelings may even be permanently affected. Another is that cognitive as well as educational tasks may be overemphasised for deaf children relative to their social and emotional development.

The social construction of deafness

Differences between hearing and deaf people are typically constructed as a simple matter of hearing loss. For most people this is the common sense of the matter: deaf people cannot hear, and all else about them seems to follow naturally and necessarily from that fact. As Bayton (1996) points out, the result of this assessment is that the relationship between hearing and deaf people appears solely as a natural one. However, the meanings of 'hearing' and 'deaf' are not transparent. As with gender, age, race, and other categories, physical differences are involved, but they do not carry inherent meanings. Therefore, they must be interpreted and cannot be apprehended outside of a culturally created web of meanings. In fact, the meaning of deafness has changed over time, although most hearing and many deaf people are not aware of this; it has, that is to say, a history. And since deafness is usually conceived by hearing people as merely a lack, emptiness where hearing and sound ought to be, 'the effect is that deaf people and their means of communication become blank screens for the projection of cultural prejudice, fear and hope, faith and ideology' (Bayton, 1996, pp. 1-2).

This is why it is possible to assert that deafness, as well as being a physical phenomenon, is also a cultural construction. In the first part of this article I would like to expose what I consider to be the hearing and what the deaf view of deafness.

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The hearing view of deafness

For most hearing people, deaf people are incomplete. They are different but not merely that: their difference is also a deficiency (which is probably the shared characteristic of everything perceived as 'other'). Hearing is defined as the universal, and deafness, therefore, is an absence, an emptiness, a silence. Silence can represent innocence and fertility, and it can represent darkness and barrenness. In both cases it is empty, and in both cases it needs to be filled. Images such as light and darkness, society and isolation, sound and silence construct a hierarchical relationship in which deaf people are said to lack what hearing people alone can provide.

As Bayton (1996, p.25) points out, the absence that defines deaf people was framed as a place in which they lived: a 'Ghetto of Silence', a prison from which they could not without help escape, a blankness and ignorance that denied them humanity. Deaf people were trapped within this place of darkness, but the problem was not only that the deaf could not see out but that the hearing could not see in.

However, 'silence' is not a straightforward or unproblematic description of the experience of deafness. Two reasons may be presented: First, only very few deaf people hear nothing; most deaf have hearing losses that are not uniform across the entire range of pitch: they will hear low sounds better than high ones or vice versa. Sounds will often be quite distorted but heard nevertheless. And secondly, for those who do not hear anything, what does 'silence' signify? Unless they were once able to hear and then became deaf, the word is meaningless as a description of their experience. (Even for those who were once able to hear, as the experience of sound recedes further into the past, so too does the significance of 'silence' diminish.) In short, silence is experienced by the hearing as an absence of sound. But for those who have never heard deafness is not an absence.

This assessment brings us to another observation: As used by hearing people, 'silence' is a metaphor rather than a simple description of the experience of deaf people. Deaf people may use the analogy of visual clutter to understand noise, and blind people may use tactile sensations of heat and coolness to approach the idea of colour. Such analogies, in the absence of direct experience, can promote understanding because they juxtapose equally complex phenomena; neither is reduced by the comparison. On the other hand, hearing people may plug their ears and sighted people may close their eyes and then, speaking of silence and darkness, use these experiences to try to understand deafness or blindness. But these are metaphors: a complex set of cultural and social relationships is simplified into a concrete physical phenomenon: absence of sound.

It has been the hearing view of deafness that generally supports the tendency to concentrate the education of deaf pupils in the oralistic methods and minimise

the use of Sign language among deaf people. Oralists believed (and proved with some extraordinary cases of prelingual deaf children) that deafness could be redefined in such a way as to fully integrate deaf people into hearing society on an equal basis. They too believed in the almost infinite plasticity of human beings. If deafness were, indeed, nothing but a social construction, if deafness were merely a cultural creation, then this point of view would make sense on the basis of an abstract principle of rights and equality and proclamations of sameness.

The deaf view of deafness

Being deaf is, of course, more than a social construction. It means most fundamentally that one occupies a different sensory world from those who hear. In these terms I can summarise what I am trying to define as the 'Deaf view of Deafness'. According to the deaf view of deafness, an oralist approach means that many deaf people have access only to a limited or simplified language during the crucial early years of language development and education.

In the work of Reagan (1990), entitled 'Cultural considerations in the education of deaf children', we found an alternative model of deafness and deaf education. Rather than focusing on deafness as a pathological medical condition, he considers the deaf as an oppressed cultural and linguistic minority. The aim of this approach is to depathologise deafness. As Woodward (1982, p.7) has cogently put it, 'what is being attempted is to describe Deaf people from the point of view of Deaf cultural values [so that] differences between Deaf and Hearing people can be seen as cultural differences, not as deviations from a Hearing norm'.

The hearing view of deafness is concerned almost exclusively with the audiological features of deafness and, as a result, emphasises what the deaf person cannot do (or cannot do as a hearing person would do), in short, it assumes what might be termed a 'handicapped' or 'pathological' model of deafness. The deaf view of deafness, on the other hand, is concerned with social, linguistic, anthropological, and cultural aspects of the deaf experience. Indeed, given some hearing loss, the actual degree of hearing loss is not particularly important or significant within the Deaf culture.

Aims of the deaf children's education

Just as the category of 'deafness' is not fixed and absolute, neither is the category of 'disability'. It can be, and indeed has been, defined in a variety of different ways throughout history, within particular societies and in any given

social context. Before considering the ways in which the notion of disability is created (or constructed), I need to define what is meant by the term. This will indicate why it is far more common for hearing people to think of the deaf as disabled people rather than thinking of them as members of a cultural minority.

The label of 'disability'

Two decades ago, Wall (1979, p.35) pointed out that labelling a child as 'disabled' or 'handicapped' was based on an inevitable and somewhat dangerous simplification, based upon two very highly questionable assumptions. The first is that the mainly medical diagnostic labels are themselves reasonably precise and exclusive, suitable for categorising children for administrative purposes and for estimating prevalence. The second, less overt but more damaging in its consequences, is that these diagnostic labels are necessarily related to possible remedial physical treatment or to the likelihood of favourable psychological and educational development.

The fact of the matter is that most of the categories used are as much determined by the particular viewpoint of the specialist using them as they are by the causal nature of the symptoms on which they are based. They tend to be masqueraded as diagnoses when in fact they are descriptions or labels attached to a salient feature. It is probably as much because of this as for any other reason that estimates of the prevalence of any condition vary from country to country and from one study to another (Wall 1979, p. 36).

Labels of medical origin and medical diagnostic categories imply the use of the disease model – a pathological condition coupled with a physical remedy. This is, of course, often appropriate to the physical aspects of a handicap. There is however no direct or linear relationship between a physical condition and psychological or educational consequences and remedies. If such a relationship is assumed, openly or tacitly, it can easily result in a deterministic attitude as to what can be achieved in a disabled child's development.

Are deaf children taught to be disabled?

According to Marschark (1993) deaf children on average are relatively more restricted in their range of experience; they tend to have more concrete and informationally deficient linguistic interchanges with others, and do not have as many available sources of content and social knowledge as hearing peers. In a real sense then, many of the interactions observed between deaf children and their early environments appear to orient them towards the concrete, the

superficial, and the immediate. Such patterns held primarily for deaf children of hearing parents, especially the children of parents who – for whatever reason – had minimal or late communication with their children. Deaf parents on average are found to have greater expectations for and involvement in their children's education. They also follow and apply more consistent child-rearing practices. It is therefore difficult to separate child from parent related factors in the successes and failures of deaf children. 'We can be sure only that the two interact in a variety of ways, and then we can try to identify the dimensions that appear most salient in determining the course of psychological development in deaf children' (Marschark, 1993, p. 237).

Three factors now appear to stand out as having a crucial influence on deaf children's competence in dealing with the educational institution. One such factor is *early language experience* (Johnson *et al.*, 1989). All evidence from deaf and hearing children alike, regardless of its mode, points to the need for effective early communication between children and those around them. Obvious in some sense, the need for symbolic, linguistic interaction goes beyond day-to-day practicalities and academic instruction. The deaf children who appear most likely to be the most competent in all domains of childhood endeavour are those who actively participate in linguistic interactions with their parents from an early age. From these interactions they not only gain facts, but also gain cognitive and social strategies, knowledge of themselves and others, and a sense of being part of the world. In social as well as academic domains lack of ability to communicate on the abstract and the absent prevents children from realising their potential.

A second essential factor for normal development is *diversity of experience* (Tervoort, 1975; Watts, 1979). It is through active exploration of the environment and through experience with people, things, and language that children acquire knowledge, including learning to learn. The operating principles for development are unlikely to be innate. They derive from the application of basic perceptual; learning becomes a self-motivating and self-sustaining pursuit. In the absence of diversity there are no problems to solve and so no need for flexibility.

A third prerequisite for child development is *social interaction* (Calderon & Greenberg, 1993; Lederberg, 1993). The relationships of deaf children with others have frequently been characterised as impulsive, remote, and superficial. Deaf children with deaf parents and those whose hearing parents are involved in early intervention programmes, however, show relatively normal patterns of social development. Beyond the biological and cognitive functions of social interaction, children use such relationships to develop secure bases for exploration and to identify with others who are like them; moreover, they use others for instrumental and emotional support. Social relationships make children part of peer and cultural groups; they also lead to self-esteem, achievement motivation, and moral

development. Children who are denied such opportunities early in life because of child-related, familial, or societal factors cannot fully benefit from other aspects of experience.

The Spanish administration: the autonomous communities

The state of Spain currently presents administrative characteristics that affect legislative decisions in questions of education. Spain is organised administratively into 19 Autonomous Communities (AC's). Most of these AC's have had educational powers transferred to them; that is, they have the capacity to legislate and administer in educational issues, based upon general legislation that is common to the whole of the State. For example, decrees covering minimum levels of education throughout the country are drawn up by the Ministry of Education and, on the basis of these, each AC then develops its own basic curricular design. This explains why, even when the organisation of the educational provisions for deaf students has, in general terms, followed approaches put forward by Central Government, each AC has carried out its own interpretation and development thereof. This in turn has facilitated the emergence within the country as a whole of a wide range of significantly diversified educational responses to the needs of the deaf. In the study presented, while giving specific and concrete examples, I shall be referring to Catalonia.

One of the Autonomous Parliaments that has pioneered a reassessment of Sign language in the education of the deaf has, in fact, been the Catalan Parliament. The Catalan Parliament passed a Proposal (non-binding) for the Promotion and Diffusion of an Understanding of Sign Language (*Propuesta no de ley sobre Promocion y Difusión del Conocimiento de la Lengua de Signos*) (n. 228/16 May 1998), the text of which urged the Executive Council of the Autonomous Government, the *Generalitat*, to adopt bilingualism in the education of deaf children. The wording of this proposal was as follows:

There is a need to:
1. Progressively adopt bilingualism, spoken language and sign language within the ambit of education in Catalonia, as a means of integrating people with serious hearing deficiencies so that, in accordance with their specific educational needs, such people may have ever-increasing opportunities to gain access to society as a whole and to the worlds of employment and culture.
2. Maintain where possible, in accordance with assessment tasks and individualised monitoring by CREDA (the Centre for Hearing Deficiency Educational Resources), their schooling within the ordinary educational system.

3. Promote research into the issue of sign language [...]
4. Offer training courses in sign language [...]
5. Promote campaigns aimed at heightening awareness and providing information to the parents and tutors of this group with respect to what can be achieved by sign language and its applications on the educational system.
6. Initiate whatever action may be required so that the technique of interpreting signs is recognised within the ambit of professional or vocational training.

Another peculiarity of the Spanish State is that three of the 19 AC's have co-official languages: Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country. This complicates the question of the education of the deaf in terms of the approach taken, according to whether such approaches are in a monolingual or bilingual context. In Catalonia, the sign language used is LSC (Catalan Sign Language).

Brief historical account of the education of the deaf in Spain

It is interesting to know, if only superficially, the history of deaf education for two reasons (Bellés, 1995): Firstly because it seems that deafness has always being a 'puzzle' for the hearing. Secondly, it gives the opportunity to know the problems, worries and decisions in the education of the deaf. Many of the present day worries are similar to those of centuries ago. Nevertheless, knowing the history of the education of the Deaf enables us to find new answers to old questions.

In order to present a history of the deaf and of the institutions that have protected them, in the last two centuries, I will imagine someone with a significant degree of hearing deficiency, who has the power to travel through time. This person will begin the journey in Barcelona of the end of the 18th century, and will travel through various stages of the 19th & 20th centuries without leaving the confines of the city. At each stop, our imaginary friend will be educated for a number of days at the same educational centre, allowing for an assessment of the distinct educational offer presented by this centre down through the years.

The centre I have chosen for this special journey is the Pere Barnils CREDAC in Barcelona (known by different names at different times). As an institution, its history covers almost 200 years. For this reason the diachronic study of the various curricula followed at the centre helps us analyse the close relationship between the various concepts of deafness (according to each period) and the educational programmes that each of them have respectively generated.

The characteristics of this special person (intelligence, degree of hearing deficiency, etc.) will be constant throughout. But society, represented by the

school, will evaluate the repercussions of this person's deafness in ever-changing ways, because the concept of 'deaf' will differ from period to period. And so the educational needs required will never be understood in the same way. Here is the story of a truly unusual journey:

1799: The society that surrounds me considers the deaf to be incapable of receiving education. As things stand, I hardly need mention that there are no schools for the deaf in Barcelona.

1800: This year sees the first institutionalised educational experience for deaf boys and girls in the city, financed by the City Council. They refer to us, biblically, as wretched and miserable. The redemption of this spiritual misery, of these souls lacking in external projection is exactly what the school aims to achieve. Our educational needs, therefore, which certainly exist, are focussed on and satisfied by a study of the catechism.

1861: Our education continues to be seen in terms of a social charity. We are still those wretched, forlorn creatures. But the redemptive ideas that have always been our teachers' guiding light have started to take a more earthly turn, namely, in the direction of preparing us for life. The level of knowledge imparted is extremely basic, with no intention whatsoever of equalling the standards of those who can hear. Like our more fortunate fellows, we too are capable of being educated, but our expectations are far more limited.

1922: In recent years we have received our education in the school for the 'Blind, Deaf-Dumb and Abnormal', also known as the 'school for the defectives'. But now we go to our very own school, a fact that is due to the notion that each of the three groups has its own educational needs. This is the era of 'Defectology'; boys and girls are categorised by their 'defect' according to the labels corresponding to their deficiency. Now that we are no longer those pitiful souls, but rather a kind of 'sick' student (with a slight chance of being 'recuperated by society'), our educators no longer wear cassocks; instead they wear white coats, like doctors. Teaching has become 'scientific', and strictly 'oralist'.

1976: Throughout the 1970's an important change was in progress. Attempts were made to connect the curriculum followed in our special centre with the standards of the General Basic Education (EGB). Our teachers have begun to suggest that we should learn things at the same level as those without hearing difficulties. For the first time it has become conceivable that deaf people can study to obtain the Primary Education qualification.

1984: Throughout the opening years of the 1980's, the process of 'integration' has become more widespread. This in turn is bringing about the closure of special centres, as these do not provide us with one of the aims that have now become priority: our integration into society. These days we are known as 'students with auditive deficiencies' and we are still given the chance to become more 'normal' the closer we get to our general culture via the auditive-oral route.

1989: For some time now they have been trying to draw up a more diversified educational programme as a means of providing a qualified response to our individual needs. This involves trying to avoid large gaps in content and ensuring significant learning periods. Our chances are still limited, unfortunately, as we do not have sufficient spoken language skills: as educational levels increase for us, so do the difficulties. That is why they are trying to make the general programme adequate, but this translates into a highly schematic curriculum in comparison to that followed by our peers who do not share our hearing deficiencies. Some teachers start to use a bimodal resource with those of us who do not have strong oral abilities.

1993: The use of the bimodal resource has opened the door to considering the use of Sign Language without prejudices as a vehicular language and a language for instruction within the school. Unfortunately, we do not always know enough signs to follow ordinary programmes in as complete a way as we would like.

1999: The bilingual modality is being established in schools and we now learn LSC (Catalan Sign Language) from when we are very small children. The curriculum at the centre is divided into two ambits: The ordinary curriculum, which is developed within the classroom, with a deaf teacher competent in Sign Language, and the specific curriculum (Sign Language, written language and spoken language), which is developed in a specific group for the deaf. Furthermore, from the centre itself, there's a move to provide attention to our families who, in large part, do not have hearing deficiencies.

The journey through time has finished. In the section which follows I shall pay special attention to the legislative reforms and educational policies aimed at integrating deaf pupils, and the corresponding changes which have taken place in recent years in Spanish Deaf Education.

Legislation regarding special education in Spain

Spain is known to trail behind in the effort to integrate students with special educational needs into mainstream education. In the case of deaf pupils the effort

began almost two decades ago. We can therefore refer to one generation of deaf pupils who have completed their compulsory education within this system. There are now a few studies evaluating the results of this type of schooling in Spain (Marchesi, 1987; Fernández Viader, 1999). From them it becomes clear that while the concept of inclusive education was based on the desire to adapt positively to adversity and defend the right to education for all, the concept of inclusion was frequently unfairly interpreted for the deaf.

Even today the terms 'inclusive education' and 'physical placement' in the classroom are often muddled. Certain education policies which came to be considered 'inclusive' for the deaf neglected the importance of being able to engage in communicative and social interactions with equals, including other deaf pupils and deaf adult models.

To understand this change in the meaning of the term 'inclusive', first it is necessary to look at the situation prior to the generalised mainstream education in Spain.

The Integration Law and its effects on hearing-impaired students generalised mainstream education in Spain began in 1970 with the *Ley General de Educación* [General Education Law]. This law mentions for the first time the integration of retarded and disabled students into mainstream schools, with a view to their future inclusion into society in accordance with each case. The integration model which the law adopted, first assured the physical placement of these children. It stated that their education would take place in special centres only when their degree of difference made it absolutely necessary. All other students with disabilities would be offered the possibility of schooling within the regular system. From then on the organisation of schools with disabled pupils was modified with the intention of finding solutions supporting the goals of integration (Fernández Viader, 1999, p.194). As a result, many deaf pupils were schooled in hearing schools but under teachers who were hardly trained in deaf education. It is however certain that the application of the law introduced important challenges in special education besides changes in terminology. Instead of a deficit model arose a model of special educational needs. Nevertheless, and as it often happens, legislative changes preceded the preparation of the teaching staff and the updating of education techniques. The funds granted, especially those intended to support human resources, were insufficient to help achieve the objectives. Moreover, existing legislation on teaching appointments in the state school system frequently created obstacles when new teaching staff was introduced. This affected negatively any innovation that required specially prepared teachers in the subject.

In 1982, following the Italian experience which passed Law 517 on Integration in 1977, a new Law was passed, the LISMI – *Ley 13/1982 de Integración Social de los Minusválidos* [Social Integration Law for the Disabled]. This law declared

that all disabled children could attend a regular ordinary school in order to secure full equality and social integration in the future. The development of the law was complemented in March 1985 by a Royal Decree which supported progressive integration of pupils with special educational needs into the normal school system within an eight-year period. It begins with primary school ages and/or the first level of compulsory basic education and, year by year, proceeds with the remaining levels of compulsory education. The decree undertook the commitment to provide the means and the most favourable conditions for inclusive schools as teaching staff and parents expressed the intention to participate in the project.

It is worth questioning however whom the law refers to by the term 'pupils with special education needs'. In the Curriculum of Primary Education (*Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament d'Ensenyament*) the following classification has been established:

1. Those pupils who show problems in their development and/or learning difficulties significantly greater than the majority of their peers.
2. Handicapped or disabled pupils who find it difficult to use ordinary means available in the area schools for pupils of their age.
3. Pupils who due to family or social reasons are at risk of being included in category 1 and/or 2 if the necessary help is not provided.

As pointed out by Llombart (1994, 9ff), students with severe hearing impairment are included in category 1, that is, as pupils with cognitive and learning problems. But their supposed handicaps are not intrinsic limitations. There exists an external factor which has become a real obstacle in their development. This factor is the system failure to include Sign Language in their curriculum.

In any case, if sign language were not considered a normal resource, these pupils would have to be included in category 2. However, if, as it often happens in other countries, Sign Language is considered a normal skill for these students, the definition applicable is that of category 3. They become students with learning difficulties and possible developmental problems if the appropriate resources (sign language) are not supplied. So that's why the expression 'pupils with serious and permanent educational needs' is only true when the education solutions offered are seriously and permanently inadequate.

So since 1985, in order to provide options for the educational needs of the deaf, various types of schools have been organised:

– Special schools for the deaf;
– Special classrooms (full time) for deaf pupils in hearing schools;
– Special classrooms (part time) for deaf students in hearing schools;

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- Ordinary classrooms where a deaf student spends the whole day. There may be another deaf student in the same class but there is no deaf adult;
- Ordinary schools where a deaf student is the only deaf person in the school.

In addition there are several other variations among these categories. At the same time many schools for the deaf have been losing students and the majority of them are closing down. This has not occurred in a homogenous way throughout Spain because the development and interpretation of the law in each Autonomous Community has been different and also because each region has its own history of deaf education. Although there are cases where projects for inclusive education for the Deaf arose in the schools themselves, the majority were initiated and ordered by the Central Administration.

Moreover, certain educational administrative authorities interpreted the objectives of the Integration Law very broadly. Therefore, as Fernández Viader noted (1999, p. 196-197), 'all disabled children *may* attend a normal school' was often interpreted as 'all disabled children *must* attend a normal school'. Such an interpretation undermines the very intention of the law and violates the right of a child to be 'different', a right which the law is meant to respect and protect.

There is no doubt, as Diaz-Estébanez & Valmaseda (1995, p.46) have pointed out, that over recent years a new understanding of special education has taken shape. We have moved from the classification of students into two large groups, 'deficient' and 'normal' to the idea of a 'continuum' of needs indicating a diversity of learning problems – temporary or permanent. The emphasis has been placed on the potential ability of the school to meet the educational needs of the students. The ideal solution is to interpret 'deficiencies' in terms of special educational needs, while underlining that each student, independently of personal characteristics, has the right to receive a normal education.

So it is the professionals in the educational world – hearing people in great majority – who have the responsibility to define what the needs of each deaf student are. They decide on the means employed to satisfy these needs. This responsibility may become a kind of power as they decide what can and cannot be used. The danger is that they may promote solutions which please the hearing more than the deaf. The question remains: Can a hearing teacher think and act as a deaf person?

The Salamanca Declaration: new conceptions of deaf students

Since the passing of the Royal Decree in March 1985 there has been support for 'an education for all adapted to the needs of each'. The effort to apply this principle led the way to the placement of the majority of deaf pupils into

mainstream schools. They could receive normalised education along with their hearing peers. However, the great diversity among hearing-impaired pupils has not always been respected.

Simply stating that a deaf person suffers from hearing loss is not useful in educational terms; neither from a pedagogical viewpoint, nor a linguistic viewpoint, not even a sociological one. It appears more useful to distinguish between two groups of students with hearing deficiency: Those who are capable of acquiring oral language by auditive means through speech therapy and relevant technical support, and those whose degree of hearing loss does not permit them to acquire oral language by auditive means. They have to rely on vision as their principle means of communication and information access.

It is this second group of pupils – those with grave hearing loss – which presents the greater challenge for education, and constitutes the principle target of the bilingual education projects appearing in our country. To understand how and why such alternative solutions (i.e. bilingualism) are being created alongside the placement of deaf pupils in mainstream schools, we should return to take up the legislative argument.

After the Integration Law of 1982, the most common educational placement for the deaf during their initial stage of schooling was to place them into ordinary schools. Three types of curriculum modifications were made for each pupil: Curriculum Adaptations at the Centre, Curriculum Adaptations in the Classroom, and Individual Curriculum Adaptations. These 'adaptations' are still in force today.

There were a few teachers in ordinary schools who were especially involved with the hearing-impaired pupils, although official policy at that time did not include any credits in deaf training (they were incorporated in 1991). Perhaps this is why in various Autonomous Communities there had been developing teams for psycho-pedagogic assessment, support services and centres with specific resources to aid teaching staff with deaf pupils. In addition, teams of specialists were formed to provide direct attention to these pupils. The majority of these specialists, however, were clinically trained in deafness and consequently throughout the first decade of the law's application, assessment of the experts was mainly directed towards rehabilitation and speech correction.

Since 1993, as Fernández Viader has noted (1999, p.208), arguments which favour bilingual education for the deaf began to be taken seriously. At the request of certain professionals and some families, sign language interpreters were introduced in classrooms of compulsory secondary education. These early experiments encouraged various groups to undertake bilingual projects for very young children and at the moment six bilingual projects in compulsory elementary education are being developed.

In fact the Projects for Bilingual Education (*Proyectos de Educación Bilingüe*, PEB) have taken shape in accordance with the conclusions of the World Conference on Special Education Needs: Access and Quality (June 7-10, 1994). This was held in Salamanca and organised by the Spanish government in cooperation with UNESCO. At this congress – represented by 92 governments and 25 international organisations – the Declaration of Salamanca was approved, in which the importance of sign language as a means of communication for deaf students is clearly set forth. 'It must be guaranteed that all the Deaf have access to education in the Sign Language of their country' [...] and 'for specific communication needs of the Deaf and the Deaf/Blind, it is advisable that teaching be carried out in special classes or in classes and special units in mainstream education'. (Art. 21)

After this meeting a Royal Decree on the ruling of special education of students with special needs, *Real Decreto de 28 de Abril de ordenación de la educación especial de los/las Alumnos/as con Necesidades Educativas Especiales* (BOE n.131: 2/6/95) was published. This states explicitly: The educational administration will foster the recognition and study of sign language and encourage its use in teaching centres where there are pupils with special educational needs associated with a severe or deep auditory incapacity. It must also promote the training of support staff and tutors of these pupils in the use of oral and visual systems of communication and in the command of the sign language.

Six months later, in December 1995, the cabinet approved the Royal Decree 2060/1995 which establishes the position of *Técnico Superior* [Advanced Specialist] in the interpretation of Sign Language and the corresponding minimum training. The said decree established official recognition of the interpreter of the Sign Language as a professional in his/her full right. In a number of Autonomous Communities the first courses for these interpreters have started.

At the same time changes in initial teacher training were introduced. So in 1991 credits in deaf education for all teachers, regardless of their specialisation (infant education; special education; hearing and language), were introduced. The problems still remain as there are still too few qualified deaf teachers despite the fact that their number is increasing under the instruction of deaf consultants.

Conclusions

From the 1970's, attention paid to deaf students' education in Spain has been characterised by a tendency towards inclusion in ordinary schools, in an effort to avoid segregation. The breakdown of school as a place of homogenised teaching, the importance of differentiated teaching, the consideration of students as active, learning subjects, and the recognition that schools need to respond to all students,

whatever their problems (social, physical, etc.) were all reasons, to support integration of deaf students in ordinary schools.

Nevertheless, the concept of educational integration does not have precise and immutable limits. It is a dynamic and changeable process that can vary from one Autonomous Community to another, and which can adapt itself to a variety of styles in its organisation and realisation. The characteristics of each student, the priorities of a given educational centre, parental involvement, and above all, the different ways of conceptualising deafness, by society and by teachers support this differentiation.

Because there are diverse ways of conceptualising deafness and the role of deaf people in society, it is important to explain the conceptual referential framework we draw on: from the hearing point of view, or from the perspective of the deaf. This needs to be considered alongside specific educational requirements for deaf students.

In this sense, educational professionals – mostly without hearing difficulties – have the responsibility to define what the educational needs of each deaf student are, and to determine the ways in which these requirements can be met. Such responsibility can be understood as a form of power, since they decide exactly 'what is needed and what is not' for the deaf students. This power should be used wisely. There should be a fostering of educational responses that not only please the non-deaf, their outlook and their values, but which also, and principally, satisfy deaf students and the deaf community as a whole.

Finally, it is important not to forget the fact that school teachers and administrators have an earlier and more intense role in the lives of deaf children than children in regular educational settings. While early intervention is a desirable goal, there are some dangers in transferring a major responsibility away from the home. One danger is that there may be a delay in parental feelings of responsibility and competence in relation to their own child. Another is that cognitive and educational tasks may be overemphasized for deaf children relative to social and emotional development.

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