

Gallaudet University General Studies Requirement (GSR) Program Review

A Review with Deafhood lens

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Introduction

This component of the program review focuses on the Deaf experience — the Deafhood journey of all of our peoples from all communities and identities. Other two reports will be produced by Dr. Nathan Rein and Dr. Nikki Proctor-Walden. They will cover many key points and I will not repeat them here. My portion is focused on Deaf Culture, ASL and healthy identities.

Kelby Brick ('94), a Deaf attorney and currently Director of the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, once told me, "Higher education has long been a passive agent in perpetuating the racial and ethnic inequality in our educational system across the country." ***He has argued that higher education must be customized to educate Deaf and other marginalized students how to overcome such barriers upon graduation.¹ Students must be specifically taught how to address audism and other societal barriers, or the base education will be irrelevant.*** This form of education must be integrated in every single course or activity throughout education programs and institutions. It is not enough for educational programs to merely follow the traditional higher education curriculum and hiring practices because such approach has been shown to set up students to fail prior to or after graduation.²

Also, we need to put a *momentary* collective brake on the rush to teach students English and the ways of hearing world, how to navigate and self-advocate for career and entrepreneurial opportunities. Clearly, we all want to build better, stronger and bigger bridges between the Deaf and hearing worlds of many intersecting identities, cultures and languages.

However, to successfully build a suspension bridge like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, the bridge construction crew must first excavate and drill deep into the bedrock on both sides. If one side is too soft and weak, the bridge will collapse. People would then resort to a rickety rope bridge, limiting the meaningful exchange between two worlds to a few people at a time.

We must dig into our side, find our bedrock first. We must understand ourselves as Deaf peoples with many different signed languages, cultures, and identities. What do these mean to us? What are some of our North Star guiding principles for all of our peoples? We must know these bedrock principles despite century-long deliberate attempts to minimize, limit, marginalize, and outright destroy our communities.

With bedrock excavated and clearly exposed, we can then build a real and meaningful, wide and useful bridge with rest of the world — knowing our values, our principles, our beliefs and bring them on an equal basis for real connections with the world.

¹ "Separate and Unequal: How Higher Education Reinforces the Intergenerational Reproduction of White Racial Privilege." <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/83041/SeparateandUnequal.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&fbclid=IwAR3AkB9jRDeJRx30IWjCLleznTS-1swYwacssKhMlxpDjsBljTTke5clAMQ>

² Article about above report: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/US-Higher-Education-System/140631>

Know thyself (and unpack) before you try to change the world, or you will project your distorted consciousness onto the world at large.

In conclusion, Gallaudet University is fortunate to have a GSR program that addresses many of the interdisciplinary, integrative and essential steps in healing and restoring the lost cultural and linguistic knowledges. Without GSR, I suspect we will see much lower student retention.

Strengths of GSR Program

- Integrative and interdisciplinary approach, despite losing dual teaching capability
- Focused on cultural, linguistic and identity growth when there was none like this before GSR
- Dr. Caroline Solomon, professor said, “I can see that students are clearly more prepared to research, to write up and to present their findings in a professional way due to GSR program. *I don’t want us to go back to the “old way” of silo-ing the courses in each department.*”
- *Herculean effort by a few dedicated teachers along with the coordinator, despite shrinking budget, resources and support*
- Even among the Deaf residential students who are already acculturated and somewhat familiar with linguistics of ASL, they still say the GSR103 should be a required course for all with a couple of caveats.
- GSR104 Real world quantitative reasoning is favorably viewed by many, however, they wish for even more real-world connections — budgeting, negotiating salaries, and more.
- Other strengths are already mentioned in my colleagues’ reports and I concur with them.

Weaknesses of GSR Program

Brene Brown, a vulnerability and shame researcher, says on her breakout TED talk on receiving feedback, “Well, you know that situation where you get an evaluation from your boss, and she tells you 37 things that you do really awesome, and one ‘opportunity for growth?’ And all you can think about is that ‘opportunity for growth’, right?” (Audience laughs).

- **SUPPORT.** Clearly, the resources and budget aren’t there to support GSR program as is.
- **EXPOSURE.** First year students should have exposure to the best professors — and this is now being done with the recent changes. Can this be maintained?
- **LIMITED.** GSR103 ASL and Deaf Culture isn’t sufficient. There needs to be more in-depth understanding, self-examination, unpacking and beyond with all of our Deaf experiences, whether one is mainstreamed, or grew up oral-only, or attended Deaf residential schools. *There are reports of challenges with tracking weak signers with strong signers in this course, especially the requirement for new signers to take 100 and 200 level ASL classes before they can enter GSR103 or GSR103S (this is unusual, apparently potentially watered-down course tailored to fit new signers).*
- **MINIMAL ASL** education on ASL, resulting in superficial feedback limiting one’s growth of fluency and skills in the language.
- **MINIMAL ENGLISH.** Minimal education on written English, resulting in further struggles down the road. The long history of Deaf community’s struggle with written English as our second language is rooted in a deeply fragmented and broken K-12 Deaf education, and Gallaudet continues to be stuck “holding the bag” when our people come in to the University. Further research and identification for quick bootstrapping of useful English writing skills, means to short circuit brain’s processes and finding gains wherever possible is needed. In other words, we need unconventional solution to this problem.

- **CREDITS.** Non-transferability of GSR credits and the confusion of course labeling (My two colleagues will be addressing this issue head on.)

Big Picture Issues — University Wide, not limited to GSR program

CHALLENGES

Mission Disconnect

Dr. Laurene Simms made an excellent point when she stated the problem is that there is no real and meaningful connection between University's bilingual mission and in classrooms, offices, and other spaces on campus. The upcoming release of work done by the Bilingual Taskforce is a definite healthy step forward. *More work needs to be done.*

ASL Proficiency Interview Challenges

There are undercurrent of frustration and angst towards ASLPI and their evaluation results for both Deaf and hearing people on campus. There is little doubt that for most part, ASLPI is effective in measuring proficiency through re-evaluation checks from time to time in where two different evaluators come to same final score.

However, the discrepancy occurs when a Deaf person having never received constant feedback on their signing skills in K-12 years and during college years, other than the superficial vlog feedback — good lighting, appropriate clothing, proper framing and so forth. This is akin to a teacher focused on providing feedback on a written English paper — “Good margins! Appropriate selection of paper color and weight. Font usage is clear,” rather than providing actual writing and grammatical feedback in red ink.

So, when they take ASLPI and receives a score that didn't align with their expectations, they are left stunned and confused. At the same time, they usually do not have the same jarring difference in expectation and reality of receiving their English written and reading scores on ACT or SATs because they have received constant feedback in red ink for all the grammatical, content and contextual errors.

Lack of Bilingual Teaching Skills

Professors may have doctorates, but they aren't necessarily trained to teach, or do they have necessary tools to successfully teach a class, much less than bilingual classrooms.

Gallaudet's faculty comprised of only 50% Deaf, most who probably are white, male, straight, abled bodied and cisgendered. Many hearing professors do not have the fluency and expertise to provide appropriate feedback. Due to a complete lack of formal ASL classes in K-12, even many Deaf professors are not able to do the same as well. They can probably intuitively provide approximate feedback, but not to the degree as trained ASLPI evaluators and diagnosticians can provide.

Inequality (Both perceived and real)

On campus, there is well-deserved pushback on hiring more Deaf people of color, Deafdisabled, DeafBlind, Deaf LGBTQIA and others. There is also an undercurrent of frustration, resentment and tensions between those who are from Deaf families and/or residential schools and those who are from hearing families and/or mainstreamed or orally trained Deaf people. There is a perception and actual practice of favoritism among those who are considered to be a part of the “in” crowd, typically fluent Deaf of Deaf families, residential schools over those who are not.

The pain is real. On Gallaudet campus, much of the space is still held by privileged hearing people, then white Deaf people over all others.

Also, for many, being solitary mainstreamed in classrooms isn't a positive experience. There are a number of Deaf people reporting positive experiences, but they usually exceptions, not the norm. Then we turn around and impose the same treatment upon DeafBlind people. They take classes, oftentimes being the only DeafBlind person in the classroom with Certified Deaf Interpreters and other support services.

Deaf people of color, Deafdisabled and DeafBlind are reporting that they do not feel a strong sense of belonging at Gallaudet University. This ties directly into their academic performance and their success in the world of employment and entrepreneurship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **MEASURE** current attitudes and perception on the following:
 - ASL and English
 - ASLPI and its effectiveness (The program is effective due to proven re-evaluations with consistent results — but what's the perception from the faculty, staff and administrators?)
 - What does bilingualism mean in the classroom? What is considered effective bilingual teaching approach?
 - Measure and re-measure annually or once every two years. This will show progress, or lack thereof, in improving the perceptions and engagement.
 - Acceptance (or lack thereof) of expecting ASL fluency from all and encouraging all to constantly invite feedback and refine their signing skills. This has to do with internalized shame during growing up with language usage.
- **CREATE** a visual Dashboard on Equality and Equity showing the percentages of:
 - Deaf administrators, faculty and staff including custodial and facilities (with breakdowns to Deaf of color, Deafdisabled, DeafBlind, LGBTQIA, Deaf of Deaf and Deaf of hearing)
 - Show each group's combined earnings power as well
 - No editorializing. Just data and numbers.
 - When you measure something, performance improves. When it is measured and reported, the performance improves exponentially. - Karl Pearson
 - Burying the incomplete numbers in the annual reports isn't enough.
- **TRAIN** the professors on bilingual teaching and general teaching best practices
 - How to design a curriculum
 - How to measure student's progress, i.e. formative versus summative
 - Tools for a truly holistic bilingual testing approach
 - Develop the ability to correct evaluate and provide feedback on ASL usage and fluency, just like red marks on English papers.
 - Suggestion: Use ASLPI now-defunct diagnostic services' tools in providing critique
 - Address the pain and trauma, including [rejection](#) [See attached piece on rejection]
 - Gallaudet's department of Education can assist with this University-wide training.

- Soo-Hyun Tak of Department of Counseling also provides excellent training on Derald Wing Sue's Racial/Cultural Identity Development process and multicultural training.
- **ENGAGE** the community in a dialogue on how to create meaningful spaces (or enclaves) for each marginalized group on the campus, which then in turn could potentially strengthen the shared spaces for all as well.
 - Idea: DeafBlind community could have a DeafBlind space floor, wing or a building for their classrooms, dorm rooms and more, designed in their way and thinking. Sighted students can then participate via immersion within their classrooms at specific times and places?
 - Idea: Deaf students of color have a floor or two or even a building to their own, and they are free to make changes to their space that are meaningful to them.
 - Idea: Deafdisabled students clearly need accessibility everywhere on campus, smooth walkways, functional elevators located in appropriate places and more.
 - Do not stop there. We need to learn what they would like to see for their groups.

I am writing this as a white, male, abled, cisgendered, middle class with a Master's degree, clearly there are a lot more that I haven't addressed here. And I still have more to unpack myself as well.

Identity and Culture & Healing

CHALLENGES

- Lack of comprehensive and integrative approach to healing and restoring "lost" knowledge to many of our Deaf students
- No long term tracking of students' acculturation, ASL skill development and healthy identity across the board. JumpStart and Student Success Program may be tracking them.
- Magic Macaroni Cheese Syndrome (Incidental Learning) a big challenge (See attached).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **INCREASE** incidental learning opportunities by adding 360-degree information immersion opportunities to reduce the Magic Macaroni Cheese Syndrome. But how? Increased signage describing behind the scenes of how various things work? Host a community wide discussion on developing ideas for this.
- **ENSURE** Gallaudet offers in-depth courses for all identities of Deaf peoples
- **EXPAND** GSR103 curriculum to make it challenging and stimulating for all incoming students, not just an "introductory" course on Deaf culture and ASL for which a good number of Deaf students from residential schools already offering ASL and Deaf culture classes in their high school programs.
- **INCORPORATE** key elements outside of the classroom with GSR/DST 103. This course serves as a key acculturation and linguistic knowledge building process, but this cannot stop

there. We need to extend this outside of the classroom and incorporate counseling, residence life and other components to better support students of varying educational backgrounds

- **MEASURE!** Measure! We need to track cultural, linguistic and identity development throughout the four-year college program. Perhaps **ASLPI-lite process** for the linguistic portion? What are some of available tools for measurement and tracking this?
- **ADDRESS rejection** which is a huge issue for all of us. Find constructive ways to address the feeling of rejection among typical formation of social cliques, decision making process that are sometimes by necessity opaque to the general public and more. (See attached).
- **DEVELOP** new approaches to healing including group and other types of therapies should be considered due to extremely high percentage of trauma within our community. We need to deal with all -isms head on.

American Sign Language and Signed Languages

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **EXPECTATIONS** of fluency and skill of using ASL should be clear and required from all
- **REDUCE** and detach shame from broken education system on our language use and the drive and ambition to increase one's fluency in both ASL and written English, as well as other signed and written languages.
- **REPURPOSE** ASLPI now-defunct diagnostics program and train more faculty/staff members in this — clearly, not all professors will be capable of providing ASL fluency and skills feedback in video assignments
- **OFFER** Foreign/Domestic Sign Language Classes. In ideal world, I would suggest that Gallaudet resurrect Foreign Language departments to offer multitude of domestic and foreign signed languages
 - But this isn't today's reality with shrinking budgets. Therefore, perhaps a required course or two on understanding and analyzing other domestic sign languages and their history (Black ASL, Plains Indian Sign Languages, LSM and LSQ);
 - And continue to offer various foreign signed languages as electives from time to time, at minimum. I recall JSL and LSQ courses being offered during my time at Gallaudet in 2016 and 2017.

Advocacy, Activism and Community Organizing

- **STRATEGIES** for Self-Advocacy. Alumni reported that s/he wished for far more in-depth training on how to self-advocate in employment, and s/he would have liked to know what some successful self-advocacy strategies are. For example, a Deaf friend of mine related his experience on applying for jobs. He could speak fairly well, but as a strategy, he finds far more effective to request for ASL interpreter up front in the interview and use interpreters for the first six months in order to "train" his co-workers and his employers in the use of interpreters for meetings. Only after six months has elapsed does he feel confident to use his

voice in certain — and limited — situations, often surprising his co-workers. By this point, they have become familiar and comfortable with the use of interpreters, he was able to set clear limits on use of his speaking skills. He learned this the hard way by speaking in the initial interview and in the first days of employment, he finds it far more difficult to convince or persuade the company to hire interpreters. More stories and experiences on what work and what doesn't need to be shared with students.

- **ACTIVISM** and community organizing is a skill that should be taught to all Gallaudet students, including hearing ones. We should include those enrolled in Speech Language and Audiology programs — they should be our change agents in the medical and auditory-speech communities, pushing to end language deprivation and ensuring the birthright to signed languages, Deaf cultures and healthy identities for all.
- **TRAINING** to be led by marginalized Deaf peoples themselves, and we support them.
 - Excerpt from my upcoming book, an idea:

“There are resources out there for this kind of intensive training — and a lot, if not all, of these training is led by the marginalized communities themselves.

May I make a suggestion as a starting point? White Deaf people should respectfully limit their training to those who are open to whites — and we should actively work with Deaf people of color, Deafdisabled, DeafBlind, Deaf LGBTQIA and others in order to support their efforts to receive training with their respective identities. For instance, we could support National Black Deaf Advocates in sending a group of interested Black Deaf people to the University of Rhode Island for their Kingian Non-violence Training program. DeafDisabled could attend trainings by ADAPT, and so forth.

And the white Deaf people step aside.

The Deaf people of their intersecting identities would undergo the training and they would need to navigate, internalize and synthesize ideas, concepts and incorporate into their organizing and resistance within the Deaf world. Only when they become comfortable with their new resistance efforts, do they decide how much and what to share with the white Deaf people.

Remember, each of their group will need a lot of time, space and even financial support to process what is being taught, yet they would need to repurpose or reimagine the teachings to a Deaf intersecting identity way of being.

The white Deaf people in positions of power within the Deaf communities — even though almost always limited but still considerably more than the Deaf marginalized groups — have made these groups wait decades or even centuries for what is justifiably theirs in the first place.

We can certainly, out of solidarity for all of our Deaf family, wait a few more years, if not more, before the marginalized Deaf peoples are ready to teach us.

This is just an idea — instead of taking up space, becoming trainers ourselves — we step aside, create space and they step up to become trainers themselves, creating economic opportunities within all of our communities.

With that training comes confidence and assurances that we can begin to make a meaningful change. The change within the system must happen, however, we must change ourselves within first — unpack, reveal our distorted thinking within and clean them up to best of our ability.
- See Resistance and Activism attached.

These excerpts from my upcoming, unpublished manuscript serve to illustrate several key points in the report, and the Provost can decide whether to share these with specific people or make it a campus-wide distribution along with the report.

Magic Macaroni and Cheese Syndrome™

An excerpt from unpublished (unedited and not yet proofread) draft of upcoming book tentatively titled, “Our Deafhood Journey”

By Marvin Miller

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In 154 years, there is still zero Deaf-owned retail businesses — such as bars, restaurants, cafes, bookstores, coffee shops, dry cleaners, and so forth — in the area surrounding Gallaudet University. Why is this?

I have wondered about the lack of Deaf-owned store fronts across the nation — although this is slowly changing with *Mozzeria*, *Crepe Crazy*, *By Mara* and *Streetcar 82 Brewery* that are Deaf-owned and committed to hiring Deaf employees. Still, this represents a tiny drop in the ocean of commerce in this world. Yet mindful of the fact that hyper capitalism is causing huge, and possibly permanent, damage to our only home, Earth.

Is it because we are incapable? Lacking certain set of skills? Lacking ambition? When we understand phonocentric colonialism, we then understand that all of the above may be true as a result of the destruction and replacement of our signed cultures with hearing dominant’s own.

Yet, there is more to this story which led to my discovery of the Magic Macaroni and Cheese Syndrome™.

In Karen Putz’s book, “The Parenting Journey: Raising Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children” — as shared to me by Bridgetta Bourne-Firl — there was a story about a hearing mother who struggled with her young Deaf son. She would come up to her mother and demand Macaroni and Cheese lunch... now. As in right now.

In the middle of a question and answer session, the mom shared an experience which puzzled her. Earlier in the week, her son went into the pantry and came out with a box of macaroni and cheese. He pointed to the picture of the creamy bowl of macaroni and cheese and tapped it several times.

“You want some macaroni and cheese?” she asked.

“Yes!” He nodded excitedly as she opened the box. He tried to grab the box from her.

“No, wait, Stephen,” she said. “I have to cook it.”

He stamped his feet, tried to grab the box again with an impatient look on his face. She tried to explain the cooking process, but he wanted to have nothing of it. He wanted the macaroni and cheese that was displayed on the box.

The mom looked at me with a quizzical look on her face. “I don’t understand this,” she said. “I never had to explain this to my older girls. They knew the macaroni and cheese from the box had to be cooked.”

“Ok,” I said. “Let’s look at how it’s different for your son compared to your hearing daughters. Let’s say that the girls are playing in the next room. You call out to them, ‘Want some macaroni and cheese?’ and they yell back, ‘Yes!’ They hear you walk over to the pantry and take out the box. They probably hear the rattle of the hard macaroni as it jiggles around in the box. You open another cabinet, grab a pot and then walk over to the sink. They hear the clang of the pot in the sink and the rush of the water as it fills up the pot. You turn off the water and then walk over to the stove. The pot clatters on the top of the stove and then there’s the click as you turn the gas on.”

All the while the hearing kids are playing in the next room, there are a bunch of auditory sounds that may seem like they don’t convey much information, but the pieces gather in their brain and together, they tell the whole story. Deaf and hard of hearing kids may miss this information completely or they may only gather bits and pieces of it.

“Then the kids hear the rip as the box top is sheared off and the hard noodles hit the bubbling water.” I continued. “They hear the drawer open as you grab a spoon and then they hear metal upon metal as the noodles are stirred. Right after you turn off the stove, there’s the sound of the colander settling in the sink. The noodles dribble down into the colander while the water splashes through the holes.”

(And perhaps the kids are privy to a few sharp words as you accidentally hit the hot pot with your bare knuckles.)

“The fridge door opens and you mutter to yourself, ‘Where did I put the last stick of butter?’ The cheese package gets ripped open, the milk hits the pan and everything gets mixed together. There’s the clatter of the bowls and spoons and finally, the masterpiece is set on the table. ‘Come and get your macaroni and cheese!’ you holler to the girls. They walk into the kitchen and dig into the steaming noodles.”

The mom sat there for a minute, completely stunned.¹

This story illustrates the power of incidental learning. Dr. Mindy Hopper, a Deaf professor at NTID, has done research on this and the real impact of missing out information on our Deaf peoples. [Hopper can be an essential resource in this challenge at Gallaudet.]

Audists would argue that this is simply a result of “deafness” itself and it is unavoidable, therefore all out effort must be made to cure, repair and restore our hearing as much as possible.

This is simply wrong. This is not a solution supported or led by Deaf people.

But I digress. This metaphor helps illustrate one of the biggest stumbling blocks we have had to face as a community — we are missing out a ton of information on little things that serve as a building blocks, or rather, steps as a part of larger staircase leading to next level and beyond.

We often run up against a huge wall, with no way to climb up to the next level, and we scratch our heads, “How the hell do I get up there? I see some other successful Deaf people up there, so that means this can be done — but how?”

The Magic Macaroni Cheese Syndrome™ illustrates the real need to educate ourselves in little things as well as big things, and the magic happens when we synthesize both into a clear — or at least a clearer pathway to the top — and add another missing ingredient that was robbed from our collective consciousness when we were phonocentrically colonized by the specialists hellbent on imposing their ideology on us.

What is this missing ingredient? Belief. We need to believe in ourselves, our peoples, our cultures and signed languages and our ability to contribute to the healing of Mother Earth and humanity. Most of us do not believe that — most likely not deep inside. We have bought into the idea that being Deaf is a burden, a cost to be dealt with and something to be barely tolerated and put aside.

1 Putz, Karen. The Parenting Journey, Raising Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children (Kindle Locations 840-870). Unknown. Kindle Edition.

Healing and Deaf Cross

An excerpt from unpublished (unedited and not yet proofread) draft of upcoming book tentatively titled, "Our Deafhood Journey"

By Marvin Miller

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The battlefield depicted in previous chapter comes a better understanding of what has been happening to our peoples for over a century.

In a nutshell, our communities have been picking up the pieces, the wounded, and trying to heal, to make whole again.

An excerpt from the 2011 unpublished "Deaf on Board" media kit where the parents and community fought back against the invasion of oral-only members occupying Indiana School for the Deaf board, resulting in only one Deaf person — Ann Reifel — on the board out of ten seats. Three seats were occupied by oral-only advocates, running counter to the school's mission of bilingual education with strong American Sign Language classes and use of ASL as the language of instruction. This program actually includes speech training!

A complete set of statistics valid as of 2011 at Indiana School for the Deaf.

* * *

Performance at ISD



Percentage of students passing ISTEP at ISD in 2010. This places ISD at bottom 10 out of 1,500 schools in Indiana. ***What gives?***

Reality: ISTEP test scores doubled in one year. Since ISD is a small school, the test results will vary widely between each grade or cohort.



**12 year
old**

The average age of Deaf and hard of hearing students arriving at ISD after “failing” at all other educational placement options. This age is *well past the critical period of first language acquisition* (birth to 7 years old). ISD has to work very hard to close the gap, and many of these latecomers do become athletes, active student leaders, and more.



78%

Passing Grade for English ECA: When students had full access to American Sign Language at home, 78% passed the English End of Course Assessment (ECA).



100%

Passing grade for Algebra: Including students with full access to American Sign Language at home, 100% pass Algebra ECA by 11th grade.

Too little language, too late

Documentation indicates that children who were in a bilingual program for more than seven years performed as well as those from families with native-signing parents. Some parents

chose only a spoken-English approach, and then waited until their child failed before introducing a visual language. This compels a school like ISD to play catch-up.

Source: Superintendent's letter to Indy Star (ISD)

* * *

Think about the average age of Deaf child arriving at Indiana School for the Deaf — 12 years old. This is way past the first five years of natural language acquisition window.

The system has failed that kid, placing them in various school settings, “trying everything” before reluctantly sending the child to a premier Deaf school that Deaf families from all over the country relocate to so they could place their kid here.

The implications for this child's academic, linguistic, psychological, social, and even spiritual dimensions are staggering. The damage is already done.

According to Dr. Sanjay Gulati, a Deaf Harvard professor and a psychiatrist at Cambridge Mental Health center, the research has shown to be so clear, so conclusive that if a child grows up with a limited or no first language, they have brain damage.

Dr. Gulati said, “If you don't have first language, you have brain damage. You will never become fluent in any language.”¹

With this serious issue, we can only begin to guess the impact on mental health and social conditioning the child receives growing up.

Ladd states, “Similar evidence for the Deaf community has been a long time in surfacing, although Deaf people had complained for the whole century about the damaged human beings that were emerging from oralist schools. Recent research suggests that the incidence of mental illness (that is, not the ‘clinical’ conditions such as schizophrenia, manic depression or clinical depression, but trauma-related conditions) among Deaf community members is twice the national average (Ridgway, 1998). Psychiatrists such as Denmark (1981) *point the finger directly towards the oralist system*. As yet, there are no

figures for the mental health consequences of oral mainstreaming.” [Italics mine.]²

I have been informed of more recent studies indicating that the “twice the national average” may be closer to three or four times. At this time, I do not have access to the new research yet.

We have countless stories of Deaf siblings wandering around in the battlefield, lost, dazed, confused, wounded and bleeding until the eventful day they discover — or re-discover — the Deaf communities, often by chance.

They stumble upon our peoples, wounded and bleeding — and in shock — and oftentimes with fear, uncertainty and doubt. They have been indoctrinated by the school system, the specialists — audiologists, speech language pathologists, special education teachers, and administrators — to the point they internalize the belief that to join Deaf community is to have somehow failed.

This failure is deeply embedded inside our Deaf siblings.

They come to us with joy, sense of awe and willingness to learn, yet they come with a world of hurt, an infected set of wounds that continue to ooze forth.

To be clear, I have no intention of offending our dear Deaf siblings caught in middle of the battlefield wrought upon us by the system hellbent on wiping us out or assimilating us. They are hurt, badly damaged and they need our love, support and healing as much as possible, in a speedy fashion.

They are stuck in a situation of absolutely no fault of theirs — even when some of them tell us they “chose” to attend public schools and their parents respected their wishes. This decision is still no fault of theirs at all.

Many stories tell us the average acclimation time for Deaf siblings making their way into Deaf communities is between 4 to 8 years, and some continue to struggle with feeling of not quite belonging long past that.

How do we facilitate a speedy recovery for our Deaf brothers and sisters? First, we must examine the layout of the battlefield.

There is the front line of the battlefield — where much of the fighting happens. Bullets flying, grenades exploding, mortars making their furious impact craters among the trenches. This is where most are wounded or even killed.

Some distance away from the frontlines, there usually is supply lines of ammunition and munitions, materials and equipment. Further behind is sleeping quarters and mess halls where soldiers are fed and rested.

Further away from this area usually is the edges of civilization, cities and towns protected by patrols and neighborhood watches as well as air raid sirens and underground bunkers and shelters.

Even further, the civilization operates “normally” with businesses, schools and life going on as usual — as much as possible. The effects of war is felt to a much lesser degree here. One still can experience a quiet and peaceful environment.

This quiet area is where our strongest Deaf schools are located, including Gallaudet University, insulated from the daily bombings and shootings from the battlefield. The danger of being situated in a quiet and comfortable area away from the front lines? We all are lulled into a false sense of “normalcy”. We begin to believe we are doing fine. We are fortunate to have these schools in a relatively good shape.

We forget, to a large extent, our Deaf family members trapped in the front lines and behind these enemy lines. We move on with our daily lives. We do not feel empowered to stand up and force a meaningful change.

Even worse, we do not believe we can win after century-long war upon Deaf existence grinds on.

What are we missing here in the battlefield layout depicted earlier? Would the cities and towns citizens tolerate wounded soldiers pouring into their homes, bleeding all over their floors and porches?

Of course, our citizens would rise up and help a wounded soldier or two, here and there, but to constantly deal with them day in and day out? Absolutely not. All armies have specially designated facilities with professionally trained people to deal with this.

If we were to look closer at the area behind the sleeping and mess halls, we would find a medic facility — a Red Cross facility — tending to the wounded, with capable and trained medical professionals quickly triaging the wounded and tending to the most life threatening ones immediately then onto the rest. The patients would be stabilized, their bleeding would be stopped and infected wounds would be tended to before sending the patients to specialized care such as surgery, follow up and even mental health counseling for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

These wounded are stabilized as quickly as possible, tended to before they are sent back to their homes, deep in the civilization where they are once again safe from the front lines of war.

The efficiency and speed of Emergency Room (ER) specialists are astounding. The world's first dedicated Emergency Room was founded in University of Louisville hospital in 1911 as a response to growing need in this specialized field.³ Why growing need? For a long time, the family doctors tended to their patients including emergencies, and these family doctors knew their medical history so they could adjust their treatment on the spot. As towns and cities grew, the patients would come in with unknown medical history and the doctors had to adapt quickly.

Adapt they did — developing medical treatments that were least invasive, least allergenic and just enough to stabilize the patient quickly and do further consults and referrals for in depth treatments. I would imagine that back in the day in 1911, the average time it took for teams to stabilize a patient is at least twice or three times of what they are today — an astounding improvement.

*** — portions removed for brevity for this report — ***

This is something that wasn't possible 50 to 75 years ago. Or even 20 years before. The constant evolution of the medicine now enables extraordinary measures to stabilize and recover people from many serious injuries, within minutes.

I want to see the same rapid iteration and innovation within our healing of our communities through establishment of...

Deaf Cross.

A team of Deaf mental health professionals, ASL and Deaf cultures experts trained in multicultural knowledge and intersectionality and others working together to reach out to many of our Deaf brothers and sisters who are in pain — and many aren't even aware of what they are missing until they are much further into their acculturation.

We need to develop a constructive approach in rapidly triaging the wounds, disinfecting them and stitching and/or bandaging them so they can begin to heal quickly. This would require trial and error in identifying which approaches would be effective for the large majority of our siblings.

I truly believe that it is possible to dramatically reduce the time required to heal and acculturate our siblings from an average of 8 years to a year or two, if not less.

Can you imagine officially establishing a national, or even international, Deaf Cross program with offices and specific training programs for our Deaf professionals in all of our residential schools and even in public schools?

Seeing a Deaf Cross sign clearly and visibly within the school building for the offices and service area will send a clear signal that this war is being taken seriously. Imagine state and federal legislators and politicians coming in for a tour and noticing the signs.

“What’s that? Deaf Cross?” They would ask.

“Oh, yes. We had to set up a specific national program to address the serious problem of language and cultural deprivation, damaged self-esteem and confidence, and so forth for the incoming students so they can be healed and reclaim their natural birthright — their membership within the Deaf world.” A school administrator would reply.

One can imagine their shock as they ask, “Why do we even allow this kind of damage to happen in the first place?!”

By developing and clearly labeling the situation Deaf Cross addresses, we are making an unseen tragedy a visible one.

“The first step toward change is awareness. The
second step is **acceptance.**”

— Nathaniel Branden

With acceptance, the action follows. With clarity, the planning becomes precise. We will begin to act in a systematic way, developing processes to address the effects of war.

The challenge is for us to separate the main Deaf Cross services to the Deaf individuals who are actively seeking to reclaim their birthright from those who are actively avoiding this or ignorant of their own birthright, thinking they are fine as they are.

And in a way, they are absolutely correct! Each and every one of us are already a full human being. We have succeeded despite many ideological obstacles placed in front of us — in each of our own way. We do not need this or that to make us a better people, however, there are things about our own history, our own identities, our own communities that need to be shared with each one of us. Without these, we are what Bantu Stephen Biko says, “a people without an engine.”

Parked in one place, rolling down the windows and feeling the breeze — never realizing we have been stuck in one place. We wax the car. We make it shiny. But I can assure you, the car isn't going anywhere.

Not until we understand ourselves in depth. This goes for Black Deaf person, Latinx Deaf Person, DeafBlind person, Native Deaf person, LGBTQIA person and so forth — each one of these need to understand their own cultures, languages, and histories interwoven with their Deaf identity — they are inseparable.

These will need to be addressed by a Search and Rescue operation of some type — but this would not be limited to physical outreach, but a development of educational outreach of various approaches.

The outreach would introduce the world of Deaf cultures, signed languages and healthy identities to our siblings in the mainstream.

At the same time, we also need to ramp up the Deafhood and multicultural/intersectionality social justice training within Deaf residential schools across the nation. We want to encourage self-examination, reflection, and achieve understanding and healthy growth within our current boundary markers.

Deaf Cross will encourage a new field of healing specialists until the war ends, and the battlefields are transformed into farmland where our unlimited potential can begin to grow. Naturally. Organically.

With Deaf Cross, we can finally begin to address:

- Trauma rate of 50%-80% among our peoples
- Language and cultural deprivation
- Mental health as a whole in our communities
- Shame and vulnerability
- The constant pain of rejection

All of these work to actively hold us back from achieving greatness, contributing vastly more than we are currently doing so.

At the same time, Deaf Cross only addresses one part of the bigger picture — we are still at the century plus long war of revulsion, hatred and destruction of our peoples. We can not begin to rebuild until we end the war first.

1 See his video presentation at https://youtu.be/8yy_K6VtHJw

2 Paddy Ladd. Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood (pp. 180-181). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition.

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_department (I know... citing Wikipedia is frowned upon, but... still.)

Rejection: A Huge issue in the Deaf communities

But why do the Deaf experience rejection more painfully?

I do not propose to delve into comparing with other marginalized groups. Each group experiences their own oppression in a different and unique ways, yet the recurring patterns can be readily identified within each group.

Each marginalized group experiences and faces sheer amount of rejection:

- Society refuses to accept them for who they are
- People constantly tell them what they “should be doing”
- Their traditions, values and norms are often openly questioned, shunned or ridiculed
- Assimilation efforts by not seeing their differences

All of this often produces a deep seated shame.

Dr. Brene Brown defines guilt as “I did something bad,” while shame is defined as “I am bad.” Not something that I did wrong, but rather a rejection of self. Brown says in her now famous TED Talks that shame is highly correlated with addiction, alcoholism, abuse, bullying, and depression. The correlation for these with guilt is the opposite.¹

Rejection of one’s natural way of being leads to shame and all of the above. This is a horrible affliction. You do not want this for any human being.

Deaf peoples experience all of the above as well. The society is constantly trumpeting their efforts to change, assimilate or cure us through hearing aids, oral-only methods, cochlear implants, eugenics then now “newgenics”² — or as popularly known as genetic engineering nowadays.

The constant bombardment of these negative and rejecting messages become deeply ingrained in ourselves, even among those who consider themselves to be a healthy, happy and well-adjusted Deaf peoples fluently signing and being a part of their own Deaf cultures.

All of the above is similar to other marginalized groups — yet something is different for us.

What sets us apart from other groups?

Why is it incredibly difficult for our peoples to jump into community organizing, activism, and respond rapidly to external forces pushing us back?

The answer lies within the De'VIA (Deaf View Image Art) artwork by Susan Dupor, “The Family Dog”. In this powerful art, a girl in purple dress is shown lying down in front of a coffee table, panting while everyone else is sitting around, their faces and lips blurred — as if incomprehensible.

Almost all Deaf people, whether they come from Deaf families or hearing families, experience this within their homes — being left out of conversations, laughter, and merriment. When one asks what was said, the usual reply comes, “Ah, it is not that important. I’ll tell you later.”



“The Family Dog” by Susan Dupor. www.duporart.com

You probably can see this from their perspective: Who wants to repeat everything that was just said? Tedious. The rub? If families actually took the time to learn sign language when a Deaf child comes into their family, everyone would understand.

Even World Federation of the Deaf has a campaign with this theme, “With Sign Language, Everyone is Included!”

Unfortunately, with the constant “I will tell you later,” “That wasn’t important,” or simply, “Never mind,” the Deaf person grows up missing out on a ton of conversations that would have directly or indirectly benefited them. This goes back to the Magic Macaroni Cheese Syndrome™ where critical incidental learning is lost.

Educationally, this damages a Deaf person’s ability to digest and process essential information on: cross cultural mediation, social capital building, navigational skills through life, networking, and many others including entrepreneurship.

Personally, even more insidiously, the *I-will-tell-you-laters* corrosively erodes away the self-confidence, the general sense of well being, and builds up resentment, anger, shame and worse, feeds into paranoia.

For a long time, I have always wondered about why Deaf people demanded to know everything from their leaders when it came to community organizing and activism. I recall a time when oralists took over Indiana School for the Deaf board with four seats out of ten, and our community only had one Deaf person on the board. Out of ten. We had nine hearing people making decisions on what was best for us. And four of them were openly hostile to bilingual and American Sign language and Deaf culture.

I very well remember the day we found out. I was substitute teaching at the school that day when Superintendent Dr. David J. Geeslin came in my class and asked me to see him when I was available.

“Sure, I can come over soon — I have a free period coming up in a few minutes.”

Once in his office, he turned to me and said, “I am nervous. I just received a letter from Governor Mitch Daniels on the school board appointments. I wanted to have you with me while we read the letter.”

I nodded. As a president of Indiana Association of the Deaf (IAD), our organization had written letters to the governor asking him to fill the vacant seats on the board with qualified Deaf individuals. We even sent in our recommendations for those individuals.

In January of 2011, we wrote a letter to Scott Jenkins asking for a majority Deaf board members.



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Indiana Association of the Deaf

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Thursday, January 13, 2011

Scott Jenkins
Governor's Office

Dear Mr. Jenkins,

The Indiana School for the Deaf Board needs to have a majority Deaf and hard of hearing representation.

Indiana School for the Deaf has served the Deaf and hard of hearing community for over 125 years, and the school continues to play a critical role in helping our Deaf and hard of hearing children to become all they can be and much more. Alumni of this venerable school has contributed to the State of Indiana as taxpayers, productive citizens of many cities and towns across the state and notably, ISD has produced its own superintendent in Dr. David Geeslin. Many of the alumni are active members of Indiana Association of the Deaf (IAD).

We need a board that is representative of our community. Our community does not have the luxury of having majority influence in any city or town to determine our school's budget through elections. Our community currently has little or no voice in state of Indiana politics, despite the fact many of us are registered voters and we do vote regularly. *We all know we must prepare our Deaf children for a better, more competitive world of work and business. We expect our children to one day become leaders in politics, business and community. As Governor Daniels said, "There is no time to wait." Our Deaf children can't wait. With your help, we will do this together.*

The board currently has 3 nonvoting members, 4 voting members and 3 vacant members. IAD is recommending that Governor Daniels appoint 3 Deaf and hard of hearing people to the board plus replace one public school corporation representative with a Deaf person to give our community a 51%+ majority.

The whole world heard Gallaudet University with the change brought us world's first Deaf university president and 51% majority Deaf and hard of hearing Board of Trustees. Gallaudet has experienced increased financial stability and greater academic excellence.

Indiana can do the same for our community.

We are grateful for your time in reading this and for all good your office do for Indiana.


Marvin T. Miller
President

cc: Dr. David Geeslin, ISD Superintendent
Kim Majeri, PTCO President
Ken Murray, ISD Alumni Association President

A few months later without any response, Jenkins finally responded.

From: "Jenkins, Scott" <scjenkins@gov.IN.gov>

Date: April 7, 2011 2:36:52 PM EDT

To: "Marvin Miller" <president@iadhoosiers.org>

Cc: "Geeslin, David" <dgeeslin@isd.k12.in.us> ,

"Aileen Vasquez" <secretary@iadhoosiers.org>

Subject: RE: 2nd Try: Request for Majority Deaf Board at ISD

Marvin,

I did receive your letter and it was forwarded to the appropriate staff in the appointments division. I apologize for not getting back to you immediately and informing you. Rest assured that the Governor appoints highly qualified people to serve on all commissions and boards. People appointed to these boards bring passion, expertise, and interest to those roles.

I would be more than willing to meet with you and would be really interested in discussing your desire to have a “majority deaf board” for the School for the Deaf. I am particularly interested in understanding how the community actually defines “deaf.” As someone with approximately 20% hearing in my left ear, would I be considered deaf enough to meet this particular litmus test? Are we only talking profoundly deaf individuals from birth who receive no technology assisted hearing like a cochlear implant? Are we talking only those people that meet the previous criteria and have also graduated from a state school for the deaf? So, while your request may seem relatively simple and straightforward, it actually might be very complicated depending on what the community truly desires.

Please send me a set of dates and times that might work for you over the next several weeks and I will make time to meet with you. We are in the last three weeks of a very hectic legislative session, so I apologize for the delay in being able to meet.

Thanks for following up,
Scott

His reply ran up a huge red flag.

Typically hearing people in position of political power aren't aware of the nuances he was pushing back on. Someone had been coaching him, or worse, working with him against our interests.

So it was in May when Superintendent Geeslin asked me to read the letter together, and we did. We saw names and their qualifications as the governor announced his appointments to the school board. We couldn't recognize any of these names except for one: Ann Reifel, a well known and loved Deaf community leader in Indiana. We read through the letter again and names like Mary Susan Buhner — a parent, Scott Rigney — a parent, Lucy With — director of a local education agency in Ben Davis high school area, and Cindy Noe — House of Representative member in District 87.

None of them lit up a bulb for us... until Superintendent Geeslin pointed to Rigney's name, recognition slowly dawning on his face, he firmly shook my shoulder, stared at me in shock.

"That's a pro-oral supporter right there!"

Horror and shock washed over us. Governor Daniels actually appointed people openly hostile to our school and the bilingual philosophy. Shortly after, we learned that Noe is a supporter of HearIndiana, an extremist oral-only organization. Someone did some sleuthing and found out that Lucy Witte made donations to HearIndiana. Mary Susan Buhner has an oral Deaf daughter.³ Scott Rigney's wife used to take American Sign Language classes in her college years, but ironically both have decided to forbid ASL for their own son.

Some time later, the State Budget Director Adam Horst was also seated on the board. A bewildering decision because Horst was responsible for \$1+ billion dollar state budget yet he would find time to sit on a school board with mere \$16 million budget. His friend, Pete Miller, a Six Sigma efficiency expert working for state shortly came on to audit the school from August 2011 to January 2012.

Needless to say, the Deaf community reacted with shock and anger towards Governor Daniels' appointment of our enemies on the board. We also were stunned by the nerve of state appointing 90% members who are hearing, do not use sign language and more than half openly hostile to the bilingual philosophy the school stands for.

At this point, Kim Bianco Majeri — president of Parents, Teachers and Counselors Organization (PTCO), and myself, president of Indiana Association of the Deaf at that time, called for several town hall meetings.

Many showed up at the first meeting at the Greater Indianapolis Deaf Club (GIDC) near the school. The meeting quickly got out of control with a phenomena many Deaf leaders are familiar with — people after people would come up to the stage and vent many of their traumatic memories with oralism, oral-only leaders and their actions. We all were triggered, so we find ourselves reacting from one of the strongest emotions we have.

The meetings have become impromptu group therapy. But without guidance from mental health professionals, these therapy would go no where — other than just to vent their frustrations.

We would valiantly try to keep the meetings focused on development of action plan, identifying volunteers and carrying out our plans. We decided to hold a rally at the state house in June of 2011. We knew that they timed this announcement perfectly, just right before our summer break begins and many families already made their vacation plans so we wouldn't be able to sustain our protests and rallies throughout the summer. The momentum would be lost by fall.

We tried to keep the leadership to a small core of leaders. We even brought in Ryan Commerson, a well known activist who led hunger strike at Michigan School for the Deaf with some degree of success, and he warned us that we had to keep our leadership team to a minimum number — like two or three people, that's it.

“Ooh, that won't go over well with our community. They like to know what's going on with everything,” I would argue. Kim Bianco Majeri wanted to keep the team small, yet she also knew the challenges the idea posed.

Ryan pointed out, “More people you involve in the decision making process, the more chances you will have leaks going out to the other side and they will respond far more quickly than you can.”

He was right. Yet, we had a wide range of players within our community including hearing parents, one of them were posing such a problem for us as well. People kept showing up to our meetings in smaller and smaller numbers, and most were happy to receive information, but not

necessarily to step up and lead. They were happy to point to others who could lead a specific effort.

Community organizing and activism often involves hierarchy and chain of command — rarely they include collective and consensus decision making process because they require more commitment, time and specific kind of training to achieve consensus.⁴

This vexing challenge can be found across the country — in different locales and communities, you will find similar pattern of behavior. Deaf people insist knowing what is going on from their leaders in detail, but they would be happy to hand off the leadership and decision making to someone else. There will be many situations where leaders would need to make rapid decisions, give out instructions to teams or people to be carried out without question.

This rarely happens within our community. Many would counter the instructions by questioning, arguing or suggesting a completely different course of action.

Many years later, this unusual paradox weighed heavily on my mind, and through one of my Deafhood 201 classes in Chicago, this discussion came up and I posed the question, “Why do we feel the rejection so acutely?” This was about when the truth about rejection dawned on me, and the rest of the class as well.

I pointed out that the reactions to rejection shows up — without fail — in these following situations:

- When Deaf kid from mainstream goes to a residential school or Gallaudet University, they are overjoyed to find so many people signing like them, yet rapidly become disillusioned when they can’t fit in one of the groups
- Deaf kids from hearing families feel that Deaf kids from Deaf families look down on them, call them “hearing on head” and turn away from them
- Deaf kids from mainstream (including Deaf kids from Deaf families) would also look down on their residential school counterparts, believing that they received far inferior education as compared to public schools — this can be true or not, depending on locale and schools involved
- Deaf people insist knowing everything from their leaders, and would argue or suggest different ways of carrying out the action

Yet, we are not suggesting that every clique group open themselves to all, are we? That would be exhausting! To be constantly invited to every little group, private party or event.

I don't think this is what anyone is suggesting — yet the pain of rejection is real.

What are we to do?

After discussing with my Deafhood 201 class, ideas emerged — leaders can talk about rejection with the Deaf community and how this affects activism, community organizing and decision making process. We can remind our people that rejection is a huge issue for us, and we can become aware of this while developing action plans and carrying them out.

A leader could open the meeting with, “Hey everyone. We need to develop action plan and move quickly. We will need to have foot soldiers and leaders, and we would need rapid decision making process in place. This means limiting decision making process to as few people as possible.”

Many probably would agree, and they would even suggest who should become one of the few leaders. “But... we must be mindful that we all are very sensitive to feeling left out — rejection is hard and triggering for many of us. Why?”

The members would volunteer ideas on why — and they would come to agreement that this has to do with our upbringing, being excluded in conversations and from groups at schools.

“So, because of this, we have a hard time allowing a few to make decisions on behalf of all of us — we would challenge, question or even argue with any orders or instructions. We would make suggestions on different courses of action.”

Leaders then can say, “This is not sustainable. If we want consensus decision making process, we can - but we would need specific type of training for this. We know that we are a collectivist community. We want to make decisions together, yet the process can be exhausting and time consuming. We need to move quickly. Can we agree on recognizing the pain of rejection, and try to adapt to the new command and control structure in order to best move forward?”

Leaders could then hold general meetings from time to time — only to feel the pulse and update the community — but not rely on that for major decision making process and executing tasks.

This is one possible response to this vexing problem for our peoples. There are others — including commitment on training for consensus decision making processes or trying other forms of organizational hierarchies.

1 Brene Brown on Shame at www.ted.com

2 Edwin Black who authored “War Against the Weak” coined this term, basically pointing out pretty much same people involved eugenics underwent transformation into what we know as modern day genetics.

3 <http://mommy-magic.com/about-mary-susan-buhner/>

4 Diana Leafe Christian mentions this type of training in her book, “Creating a Life Together” on founding an ecovillage or communes.

Resistance and Activism

There are several training programs available for non-violent community organizing and resistance in this country, several by communities of color and disabled people. University of Rhode Island hosts summer training sessions on *Kingian Non-Violence*. This is a two-week program. One can become certified trainer as well.¹ The LGBTQIA activist organization, ACTUP of New York, also hosts pages on non-violent organizing and resistance training.² ADAPT is also a national organization led by people with disabilities, and they do a lot of non-violent organizing and resistance, and they do provide training. Dolores Huerta Foundation also provides training to Latinx and their communities in the principles of community organizing and resistance.³

There are resources out there for this kind of intensive training — and a lot, if not all, of these training are led by the marginalized communities themselves.

May I make a suggestion as a starting point? White Deaf people should respectfully limit their training to those who are open to whites — and we should actively work with Deaf people of color, Deafdisabled, DeafBlind, Deaf LGBTQIA and others in order to support their efforts to receive training with their respective identities. For instance, we could support National Black Deaf Advocates in sending a group of interested Black Deaf people to the University of Rhode Island for their Kingian Non-violence Training program. DeafDisabled could attend trainings by ADAPT, and so forth.

And the white Deaf people step aside.

The Deaf people of their intersecting identities would undergo the training and they would need to navigate, internalize and synthesize ideas, concepts and incorporate into their organizing and resistance within the Deaf world. Only when they become comfortable with their new resistance efforts, do they decide how much and what to share with the white Deaf people.

Remember, each of their group will need a lot of time, space and even financial support to process what is being taught, yet they would need to repurpose or reimagine the teachings to a Deaf intersecting identity way of being.

The white Deaf people in positions of power within the Deaf communities — even though almost always limited but still considerably more than the Deaf marginalized groups — have made these groups wait decades or even centuries for what is justifiably theirs in the first place.

We can certainly, out of solidarity for all of our Deaf family, wait a few more years, if not more, before the marginalized Deaf peoples are ready to teach us.

This is just an idea — instead of taking up space, becoming trainers ourselves — we step aside, create space and they step up to become trainers themselves, creating economic opportunities within all of our communities.

With that training comes confidence and assurances that we can begin to make a meaningful change. The change within the system must happen, however, we must change ourselves within first — unpack, reveal our distorted thinking within and clean them up to best of our ability.

Once we begin to believe that we can change the system for good — that we can achieve the victory long desired by the Deaf peoples for the past century plus — watch out.

Remember, we all grew up within broken K-12 Deaf education, indoctrinating us to obey and respect the authorities almost no matter what. We internalized negative beliefs about being Deaf — we should be as hearing-like as much as possible: face and body mannerisms, how we speak, lip read, and even how we sign — more English-like or fingerspelling, even better. The system has shamed all of us to conform.

The shame is real. This self-limiting belief, or should I say, collective-limiting belief has held us back from pushing, what Alinsky says, “a negative hard and deep enough it will break through to its counter-side.”

Conforming to society’s expectations is a part of a bigger problem. We also were taught to follow the rules. This in turn meant we should follow the laws of our cities, states and country. These laws were enacted through our representatives debating the issues, the ideas and principles. In other words, the laws have been carefully thought out and vetted — or we were taught so.

Unfortunately, there are plenty of times and situations where the laws are unjust, amoral and downright evil. With unlimited money pouring into the political process in the U.S., we can see the corrupting influence of the powerful and super rich.

With basic Constitutional rights in place in the U.S., we are free to demonstrate, protest, rally, sue, pressure and so forth. However, in countries where these basic rights do not exist or their governments are run by autocracy or dictatorship, these avenues are severely restricted and with them, these actions carry deadly consequences.

Yet, we must stand up and resist what we know to be ethically and morally wrong. Even if what we are resisting against is fully legal. In other words, sometimes we need to break laws in order to do the right thing. Remember, what the Nazis did to the Jewish, disabled, LGBTQIA and other peoples — they were legal under Germany's laws.

Despite that, there were a good number of Jewish-led organizations and their allies working fervently to rescue as many of their people, smuggle them out of the country with forged paperwork if necessary. They had to break the laws in order to do what is morally just — to save lives.

For us, crossing that threshold is not easy at all. In fact, the act isn't easy for anyone either. Yet, we need to practice “anarchist calisthenics”.⁴ A way to exercise our power in questioning laws and rules and running counter to them when needed. James P. Scott coined the term, and he shared his experience in Germany.

The idea of “anarchist calisthenics” was conceived in the course of what an anthropologist would call my participant observation.

Outside the station was a major, for Neubrandenburg at any rate, intersection. During the day there was a fairly brisk traffic of pedestrians, cars, and trucks, and a set of traffic lights to regulate it. Later in the evening, however, the vehicle traffic virtually ceased while the pedestrian traffic, if anything, swelled to take advantage of the cooler evening breeze. Regularly between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m. there would be fifty or sixty pedestrians, not a few of them tipsy, who would cross the intersection. The lights were timed, I suppose, for vehicle traffic at midday and not adjusted for the heavy evening foot traffic. Again and again, fifty or sixty people waited patiently at the corner for the light to change in their favor: four minutes, five minutes, perhaps longer. It seemed an eternity. The landscape of Neubrandenburg, on the Mecklenburg Plain, is flat as a pancake. Peering in each direction from the

intersection, then, one could see a mile of roadway, with, typically, no traffic at all. Very occasionally a single, small Trabant made its slow, smoky way to the intersection.

Twice, perhaps, in the course of roughly five hours of my observing this scene did a pedestrian cross against the light, and then always to a chorus of scolding tongues and fingers wagging in disapproval. I too became part of the scene. If I had mangled my last exchange in German, sapping my confidence, I stood there with the rest for as long as it took for the light to change, afraid to brave the glares that awaited me if I crossed. If, more rarely, my last exchange in German had gone well and my confidence was high, I would cross against the light, thinking, to buck up my courage, that it was stupid to obey a minor law that, in this case, was so contrary to reason.

It surprised me how much I had to screw up my courage merely to cross a street against general disapproval. How little my rational convictions seemed to weigh against the pressure of their scolding. Striding out boldly into the intersection with apparent conviction made a more striking impression, perhaps, but it required more courage than I could normally muster.

As a way of justifying my conduct to myself, I began to rehearse a little discourse that I imagined delivering in perfect German. It went something like this. "You know, you and especially your grandparents could have used more of a spirit of lawbreaking. One day you will be called on to break a big law in the name of justice and rationality. Everything will depend on it. You have to be ready. How are you going to prepare for that day when it really matters? You have to stay 'in shape' so that when the big day

comes you will be ready. What you need is ‘anarchist calisthenics.’ Every day or so break some trivial law that makes no sense, even if it's only jaywalking. Use your own head to judge whether a law is just or reasonable. That way, you'll keep trim; and when the big day comes, you'll be ready.”

Judging when it makes sense to break a law requires careful thought, even in the relatively innocuous case of jaywalking. I was reminded of this when I visited a retired Dutch scholar whose work I had long admired. When I went to see him, he was an avowed Maoist and defender of the Cultural Revolution, and something of an incendiary in Dutch academic politics. He invited me to lunch at a Chinese restaurant near his apartment in the small town of Wageningen. We came to an intersection, and the light was against us. Now, Wageningen, like Neubrandenburg, is perfectly flat, and one can see for miles in all directions. There was absolutely nothing coming. Without thinking, I stepped into the street, and as I did so, Dr. Wertheim said, “James, you must wait.” I protested weakly while regaining the curb, “But Dr. Wertheim, nothing is coming.” “James,” he replied instantly, “It would be a bad example for the children.” I was both chastened and instructed. Here was a Maoist incendiary with, nevertheless, a fine-tuned, dare I say Dutch, sense of civic responsibility, while I was the Yankee cowboy heedless of the effects of my act on my fellow citizens. Now when I jaywalk I look around to see that there are no children who might be endangered by my bad example.

We can’t afford to raise another generation of conformists. We just cannot.

The system is designed by white, hearing, sighted, abled, straight, cisgendered and often rich males — and they are designed to keep the very same people in power, despite their diminishing percentage of population.

We must train our Deaf youth to think deeply, ask critical questions, unpack, to truly perceive the world for what it is today and how we can bring about a new world into reality. Clearly, utopian ideals are neither desirable or practical, however, this does not mean we stop striving for a better, more just world. In other words, we must introduce anarchist calisthenics program to our Deaf youth and even the adults, to acclimate them to the real need for meaningful change.

This begins with a clear vision and purpose.

1 <https://web.uri.edu/nonviolence/nonviolence-training/>

2 <http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/NV%20Training.html>

3 <http://doloreshuerta.org>

4 Hat tip to Sarah Miller, who shared this valuable article with me from one of her classes at Columbia University in Chicago.