

BOOK REVIEWS

Open your eyes: deaf studies talking, edited by H-Dirksen L. Bauman, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 336 pp., \$24.95(paperback), ISBN 978-0-8166-4619-7

In the summer of 2000, I participated in the International Congress on Education of the Deaf (ICED) in Sydney. One day, sitting at an outdoor restaurant having lunch together with deaf and hearing friends, my deaf friend called our attention to some persons sitting at a neighbouring table, ‘Hey, isn’t that? ... And they are speaking, they don’t use sign language!’ The interesting issue was not that they were prominent deaf scholars from two of the leading American universities for deaf students, who, in a previous plenary session, had presented lectures in sign language about policy issues on deaf educational research. Of real interest was the fact that they were communicating orally, without using sign language.

When reading the book *Open your eyes: deaf studies talking* I recalled the event nine years ago. What at that time occurred as a unique event is today more common and less sensational. As such, the story also reminds us that the life of deaf people has changed, particularly concerning how it is perceived with regard to issues of language, culture and identity. Earlier dichotomous categories applied to language (sign – oral), culture (deaf – hearing), and identity (real – non-real deaf) seem less relevant today. Along with these changes, the field of Deaf Studies has developed as an international multidisciplinary academic field. Where key perspectives some decades ago focused on how deaf people are different, the key question today is how deaf people ‘are being’, and how studies of deaf people can contribute to the understanding of what it is to be human.

The book is a result of the Deaf Studies Think Tank, a three-day symposium at the Gallaudet University, Washington, preceding Deaf Way II in 2002. This was an international celebration of deaf scholarship, arts, performance, advocacy and development attended by more than 9000 people from 121 nations. The book explores the field through presentations of 19 papers by some of the important researchers during the last 30 years. It is edited by H-Dirksen L. Bauman, a professor of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University.

The structure and the content

The book is organized in six thematic parts: framing Deaf Studies; deaf perception and community; language and literacy; places and borders; intersections and identities; and the question of disability. In addition, there is an introductory chapter and a postscript, both written by the editor, H-Dirksen L. Bauman.

The introductory chapter gives a broad and, in my view, very insightful and balanced presentation of key concepts and perspectives within Deaf Studies. The author traces the roots of Deaf Studies back to writings by deaf individuals in France in the late 1700s (Branson and Miller 2002). The use of the term Deaf Studies as an academic field of study occurred for the first time in 1971. As for the French writers, key perspectives within Deaf Studies are related to the language and social discourses of deaf people. The linguistic turn in research from 1970–80 represents an important dimension in defining the borders of Deaf Studies. Interestingly, this gives less space for early writers on deaf culture, such as the sociologist P. Higgins (1980) and the psychologist J.D. Schein (1989). Nor is much of the educational research included within Deaf Studies, because in the words of Bauman, they focus ‘very little on the cultural dimension and theoretical critiques of existing social structures’ (9).

When the book was in preparation in 2006, a new protest revolt occurred at Gallaudet University. While the 1988 ‘Deaf President Now’ movement focused on the issue of selecting a deaf president at a deaf university, the protest in 2006 was far more complicated. In one sense, it was about a new person nominated to be the next president. She was regarded as ‘not deaf enough’. At the same time, Gallaudet University was accused by the government of not upholding the necessary standard of a university. Therefore the US government downgraded Gallaudet University and put it on probation for 12 months. In the postscript chapter, the editor gives an interesting account of these events, and uses the actual situation to reflect on the perspectives on Deaf Studies presented in the book.

Part one, ‘Framing Deaf Studies’, presents three articles that reflect on the state of Deaf Studies, putting the field into perspective. In his article ‘Talking culture and culture talking’, Tom Humphries reflects on the development of deaf culture and challenges with regard to implications of a deaf culture. During the last four decades, the concept of deaf culture has become widely recognized within the deaf communities in the world. The paper argues for a shift of focus from ‘How are we different?’ to ‘How are we being?’ This is a perspective reflected in several of the essays in the book. Paddy Ladd describes in his paper ‘Colonialism and resistance: a brief history of deafhood’ what he calls ‘a second phase of deaf studies’, emphasizing a more explicit deaf epistemology and ontology that – in his view – increases the space for a holistic development of Deaf Studies. Tracing roots from the French Enlightenment writers, he presents a notion of Deafhood that can be defined as an existential conception of a deaf way of being-in-the-world. In his paper, ‘The deaf convert culture and its lessons for deaf theory’, Frank Bechter advocates listening to deaf culture talking, through genres of traditional ASL storytelling. Deaf Studies need not prove that deaf culture is a culture like any other; rather it should argue for what is unique and instructive about this culture and its language.

In the second part, ‘Deaf perception and community’, the papers follow up the search for a deaf epistemology. The papers discuss a visual approach to the world, particularly in regard to its influence on the formation of deaf communities. The questions concern the relations between ways of sensory perceptions and community affiliation. Long before the introduction of the metaphor of culture, deaf people named themselves as ‘the people of the eye’, and the visual domain has contradicted the auditory. Taken together, the three papers contribute to a deaf epistemology as an element in the formation of communities and the relations between vision, hearing and embodiment and cultural formation. In ‘Upon the formation of a visual variety of the human race’, Ben Bahan discusses visual practices from various approaches.

His argument is that if we only emphasize sign linguistic approaches, then we lose the importance of deaf ways of being in the world as visual and bilingual people who are in touch with language, culture and literature. In his paper, Joseph Murray discusses 'Coequality and transnational studies: understanding deaf life'. He addresses the importance of studying transnational relations in order to understand the structures in the lives of deaf persons. Across nations and continents, deaf people have a common experience of being member of a visual community in an auditory world. Through presenting different approaches to the study of deaf communities across nations, the aim is to identify what unites deaf people and to be able to answer questions like 'What is the most deaf about being deaf?' In her essay, 'Sound and belonging: what is a community', Hilde Haualand takes an opposite approach, turning away from the visual. She accounts for how sound and hearing are integrated in ordinary (and metaphysical) conceptions of what it is that constitutes language, belonging and community. The essay presents an interesting analysis of belongingness (related to expressions like the Norwegian, 'høre sammen', meaning 'feel a togetherness') as a basis for communities. She notes that the ordinary community is biased in its stress on the meaning of sound in relation to the constitution of community and language.

The third part, 'Language and literacy', extends the critique of dominant ideas about vision, community, and language. While Deaf Studies earlier have discussed language as a key cultural marker, the perspective in this part is extended in order to investigate Western traditions for the construction of language and literacy. Deaf Studies both extend traditional understandings of language and literacy and, at the same time, new categories are developed. In 'On the disconstruction of (sign) language in the Western tradition: a deaf reading of Plato's *Cratylus*', H-Dirksen L. Bauman presents a philosophical approach to words/signs as representations of meanings based on an analysis of Plato's *Cratylus*, one of the Socratic dialogues. In 'Turning literacy inside out', Marlon Kuntze calls for the portrayal of literacy in new ways. In his paper, he shows how studying ways that deaf children acquire the properties of literate thought, provides a strong argument for renovating literacy's basic definitions. In 'Critical pedagogy and ASL videobook', Lawrence Fleischer presents a project facilitating video texts for children as a strategy for increasing access to ASL-texts.

The fourth part, 'Places and borders', investigates internal borders, from physical and cultural borders around deaf settings to borders around and between deaf identities. The notion of border is a particular challenge for the deaf community because there are no traditional borders to demarcate the community. Historically, these arenas are related to the deaf school and deaf clubs, but the importance of these are substantially (at least in the USA) reduced in the last decades. Today only 10 per cent of deaf children attend traditional residential schools and deaf clubs are closed all over the USA. The papers in this part present some of the diversity in the deaf community. The complexities related to the establishing of borders can be used in an analysis of the complexities of identity formations. In her paper, 'The decline of deaf clubs in the United States: a treatise on the problem of place', Carol Padden analyzes the rise and fall of deaf clubs in the USA. The paper criticizes some of the traditional arguments regarding the fall in the number of deaf clubs. Instead of explaining the reduced support in terms of the introduction of new communication technologies, it is argued that conditions related to the labour market and a development of a new deaf professional identity, are more important factors. While

the leading deaf persons earlier engaged in regional deaf clubs, prominent deaf people are now affiliated to organizations based on a deaf professional identity. In 'Think-Between: a deaf studies commonplace book', Brenda J. Brueggemann discusses the meaning of living and researching 'in-between'. The paper takes its point of departure in the deaf/Deaf distinction, a distinction she finds unfruitful and problematic. Instead she argues for new approaches to research in and about the space between the fixed identities. In 'Border crossings by hearing children of deaf parents: the lost history of codas', Robert Hoffmeister presents a broad discussion of the role of being a CODA (child of deaf adults) between a deaf and a hearing world, based on his own experiences and literature. A key argument is that a CODA has to negotiate between confusing, alienating and contrasting conceptions. The notion of border is emphasized and how this creates problems for communication between deaf parents and the marriage partner and grandchildren is explored.

The fifth part, 'Intersections and identities' expands the discussion on borders and deaf identity politics by looking at deaf identity within the contexts of audism. Instead of inspecting identity as a single dimension, identities are conceptualized as a complex phenomenon always dependent on various intersectional dimensions. Taken together, these papers emphasize a developing discourse on diversity within the deaf world. The four papers analyze deaf identity constructions within different contexts. In 'Dysconscious audism: a theoretical proposition', Genie Gertz analyzes identity construction among deaf persons from deaf families, Lindsay Dunn, in 'The burden of racism and audism', compares deaf and black identity constructions, Arlene B. Kelly, in 'Where is deaf HERstory?', investigates the absence of a feminist perspective on Deaf Studies, and Mj Bienvenu, in 'Queer as deaf: intersections', discusses deafness with regard to gay people.

The sixth part, 'The question of disability', raises questions regarding the use of the concepts of disability and identification in Deaf Studies. In line with how deaf persons traditionally have used the notion of disability, Deaf Studies has also dissociated from the relevance of using disability with regard to deaf persons, not least because other disability groups do not share a common language and culture. As a consequence, we have seen different approaches to the notion of inclusion among deaf communities and disability groups, because the concept 'least restrictive environment' for many deaf persons is conceptualized in terms of traditional residential schools. In his paper, 'Do deaf have a disability?', Harlan Lane takes a point of departure in the concepts of deafness and disability and presents arguments against the common notion of classification of deaf persons as disabled. He claims that disability is not something a person has or not, it is an attributed label and normality is something socially constructed in somebody's interests. Therefore it is a dilemma that deaf persons have to be registered as disabled in order to gain access to social benefits and to education in traditional schools for the deaf.¹ His main argument is that deaf people will profit from a construction of deafness within a cultural frame and by rejecting the disability label. In 'Beyond culture: Deaf Studies and the deaf body', Douglas C. Baynton presents a different approach to disability. Like Lane, he rejects a medical model of disability, but he claims that a social model of disability is compatible with a cultural understanding of deafness as belonging to a minority group, and at the same time, it can account for dimensions of deaf experiences that the cultural model is unable to do. The use of different models therefore contributes to more complex and complete accounts of what it implies to

live as a cultural deaf person with a hearing loss. Therefore using different models can supply and make ground for an elaborated understanding. In the third paper, Lennard J. Davis, in 'Postdeafness', take a different stance. He rejects both disability and ethnicity as a model. Instead he asks rhetorically why deaf people want to identify themselves in terms of an increasingly suspect model of identity based on cultural ethnicity: 'The very idea of a singular, unproblematic identity is crumbling' (320). He claims that the ethnic argument about a true or a genuine deaf person is an imitation of the worst dimensions of a racial definition of people. Therefore he recommends the search for a third position, a position that accounts for deafness and deaf identity on their own terms, using flexible and non-hierarchical models of being. Instead of working within the concepts of identity thinking, we should search for a theory of subjectivity within collective and situational processes.

Concluding comments

The book, *Open your eyes: deaf studies talking*, is a voluminous work, 336 pages in addition to the preface and an index. It presents the 'key concepts and debates in Deaf Studies, offering perspectives on the relevance and richness of deaf way of being in the world', as stated on the back cover. Moving beyond proving the existence of deaf culture, the book shows how culture contributes vital insights on issues of identity, language, and power and, ultimately, challenges our culture's obsession with normality. In my view, the book represents an important contribution to Deaf Studies literature because it introduces the reader to the complexity of the field through interesting papers by key actors within the field. The book is well-edited and the different papers, some traditional, others more provocative and challenging, communicate well with each other.

In spite of this, some critical issues have to be mentioned. From a Scandinavian perspective, it is a paradox that the book mainly presents American (US) researchers. One of the arguments in the book is that Deaf Studies has turned into a global concept, exemplified by the fact that representatives from 121 nations participated at the Deaf Way II in 2002. In light of this, it is disappointing that only two of the 19 authors are non-American (Paddy Ladd from UK and Hilde Haualand from Norway).

As an educational researcher, I also miss research on educational issues. I do not find the argument put forward by the editor in the 'Introduction' chapter – '[research on deaf education] focus very little on the cultural dimension and theoretical critiques of existing social structures' as a valid argument for leaving out educational research within Deaf Studies. It is true that much research on cognitive and language development is conducted within a medical and technical frame. But this is not an argument for leaving out educational studies within communication, literacy, and participation. In present days, when 10 per cent of deaf students are attending residential deaf schools (cf. Padden's paper), it is of particular importance to listen to and recognise critical educational studies within the field of Deaf Studies.

For whom should this book be recommended? First of all, I think the book will be valuable for Master and PhD students working on issues within Deaf Studies. The book represents an updated supplement to a field that misses literature intending to conceptualize trends across various traditions within Deaf Studies. In addition, the book is relevant for researchers interested in topics related to identity and culture

within disability studies. Personally, I found the two chapters 'Introduction' and 'Postscript' the most interesting parts of the book. In these two chapters, the author managed to put the key concepts and traditions of Deaf Studies into a solid analysis of the present situation.

Note

1. As regards this, the Norwegian system (s. 2–6 in the Act of Education) presents a radically different approach to the education of deaf students.

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Families raising disabled children: enabling care and social justice, by Janice McLaughlin, Dan Goodley, Emma Clavering and Pamela Fisher, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 228 pp., £52.00(hardback), ISBN-13 978-0-230-55145-9, ISBN-10 0-2305-5145-9

This is a book about parents raising disabled children. It is a book that explores the lived realities of parents of disabled children, an everyday life that, as the authors successfully demonstrate, is very complex and highly contextual. It is an everyday life that is strongly connected to parents' relations to professionals, as well as other parts of public space. Maybe most of all, this is a book that challenges and argues against longstanding ideas about families of disabled children. Particularly the stereotypes of parents raising disabled children as primarily suffering or in grief, or as either suspicious 'part of the problem' or heroic, self-sacrificing family-members, are challenged.

The book consists of 228 pages, including an extensive list of references and an index. It reports from a comprehensive project, founded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) named 'Parents, Professionals and Babies with Special Care Needs: Identifying Enabling Care'. Given the rich data and extensive use of different theoretical perspectives, it sets out to be much more than a project report. It is an important contribution to theoretical understanding on families with disabled children, as well as the welfare system and professional practises.

Throughout the book, the authors illustrate how disabled children, as well as their parents, in different ways have to face narrow expectations of normality, public expectations of the normal parent and the normal child, and particularly medical understandings of normality and disabled children. These are understandings and expectations that has consequences in the everyday life of the families with children that are defined as outside the normal. However, the authors also illustrate how parents, in their experienced everyday life, reconstruct and negotiate the meaning of