Ethnicity, Ethics and the Deaf-World...continued on page 4

One of several erroneous constructs encountered by professional sign language practitioners is the commonly held belief that Deaf people are disabled. As professionals, we recognize the importance of incorporating new findings from the field of sign language studies into our practice, including an increased understanding of the cultures in which we find ourselves.

To that end, I received permission from Dr. Harlan Lane to share with readers of the AVLIC News his online keynote presentation (Supporting Deaf People, 2011). In his paper, Dr. Lane outlines the ancestry of ASL signers and supports the characterization held by most Deaf people that they self-identify as members of an ethnic versus a disabled group.

Lisz Keallen, AVLIC Second Vice President

Ethnicity, Ethics and the Deaf-World
A Paper for the “Supporting Deaf People” Conference
Harlan Lane, Richard Pillard, Ulf Hedberg
Northeastern University, Boston University, Gallaudet University

This talk is based on a book we have just published, entitled The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry (Oxford Press, 2011).*

It has become widely known that there is a Deaf-World in America, some half-million citizens whose primary language is American Sign Language and who identify themselves as members of the Deaf-World. The English terms deaf, hearing-impaired, and deaf community are commonly used to designate a much larger and more heterogeneous group than the membership of the Deaf-World. Most of the 20 million Americans who are in the larger group communicate primarily in English or one of the spoken minority languages; they do not claim to be members of the Deaf-World, nor do they participate in its organizations, profess its values or behave in accord with its mores; rather, they consider themselves hearing people with a disability.

* Subscript D indicates a Deaf person. Harlan Lane (H) is a psychologist, Richard Pillard (H) is a family studies expert, and Ulf Hedberg (D) is an archivist and genealogist.
**The AVLIC News...**

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Volume 27, No. 2, Summer/Fall 2011
Editorial Note

Hopefully this issue of the AVLIC News will be a treat for everyone! Immediately following an intriguing edition focusing on the topic of audism, “Ethnicity, Ethics and the Deaf-World” provides new perspective on Deaf people and their culture. A huge thanks goes out to Harlan Lane, Richard Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg, who graciously allowed their paper to be printed in the AVLIC News.

Saint John, New Brunswick hosted the first ever Maritime Deaf Wellness Conference in June of this year. The conference drew a crowd of Deaf and interpreting participants from all over the Maritimes and Ontario; the conference even attracted folks from Service Canada. Workshops were varied, covering topics from interpreting in mental health & legal settings, to Deafhood. The review included in here is sure to spark an interest in similar events for other communities.

Part and parcel of the AVLIC News is celebrating achievement. This edition recognizes the Leona Parr-Hamel Certificate of Recognition from George Brown College and the Douglas College David Still Memorial Award. Of course the issue would not be complete without an update from the Board, with the launching of the new AVLIC website at the top of the list. We would also like to send a big thank you to Patty Conrad, as she steps down from the editorial team to pursue other endeavours. Her expertise was greatly appreciated and will be missed.

This Spring-Summer edition of the AVLIC News promises reading that will inspire great conversation, promote new vision, and keep you in the professional loop.

Happy reading!
The Editorial Team

Theme for the Fall-Winter issue of the AVLIC News

This edition of the AVLIC News is intended to provide inspiration for article submissions. Each issue features a theme, however submissions not related to the theme are always welcome. We particularly welcome article submissions from members of the Deaf community - AVLIC membership is not a requirement for anyone considering a submission. Also if you have suggestions for future themes, we look forward to hearing from you.

Remember: if it is of interest to you, it is of interest to the AVLIC News!


Deadline for submissions: November 30, 2011

Communication via technology used to be primarily e-mails. Now it's facebook, skype, smartphones, BLOGS, VLOGS, and virtual classrooms! Surfing the web has taken on a whole new meaning for those of us on the fringes of an ever-expanding cyber network. The Deaf community has embraced it; the interpreting community is drawn to it. At work our smartphones have become our best friends, or have they? How do we tap into the world of social networking while at the same time maintaining professional boundaries? The next issue of the AVLIC News is devoted to technology, social networking and the impact on our profession. Bring your expertise and insight to the pages of the AVLIC News.

E-mail submissions to avlicpublications@gmail.com
Note: new e-mail address
This presentation concerns the smaller group, the Deaf-World. When we refer to Deaf people in this article, we mean the ASL signers who populate the Deaf-World. We aim to show that the Deaf-World qualifies as an ethnic group, not a disability group, and that a failure to understand this is at the root of major ethical issues in the relation of the majority with this minority – issues such as genetic counselling and screening, and pediatric cochlear implants.

We will first present the case that the Deaf-World in America is an ethnic group and then examine the ethical issues from that perspective.

The Figure shows the criteria that have been advanced by social scientists for characterizing a social group as an ethnic group.

**Is the Deaf-World an Ethnic Group?**

Properties of Ethnic Groups: Distinct

- Collective name
- Customs
- Feeling of community
- Social structure
- Norms for behavior
- Language
- Values
- Art forms
- Knowledge
- History
- Kinship

**Collective name** – The Deaf-World has one.

**Feeling of community** – The members of ethnic groups characteristically feel a strong sense of belonging to the group. Americans in the Deaf-World do indeed feel a strong identification with that world and show great loyalty to it. This is not surprising; the Deaf-World offers many Deaf Americans what they could not find at home – easy communication, a positive identity, a surrogate family. The Deaf-World has the highest rate of intermarriage of any ethnic group – some ninety percent.¹

**Norms for behavior** – In Deaf culture, there are norms for relating to the Deaf-World: for decision-making – consensus is the rule, not individual initiative; for managing information; for constructing discourse; for gaining status; for managing indebtedness; and many more such norms.
Distinct values – Deaf-World members actively value their Deaf identity, which the hearing world stigmatizes; they value their sign language and act to protect and enrich it; they value cultural loyalty, the residential schools, physical contact, and more.

Knowledge – Deaf people have culture-specific knowledge such as who their leaders are (and their characteristics), what’s up with rank-and-file members of the Deaf-World, important events in Deaf history, and how to manage in trying situations with hearing people. They know Deaf-World values, customs, and social structure.

Customs – The Deaf-World has its own ways of doing introductions and departures, of taking turns in a conversation, of speaking frankly, and of speaking politely; it also has its own taboos.

Social structure – There are numerous organizations in the American Deaf-World: athletic, social, political, literary, religious, leisure, and many more.

Language – Competence in American Sign Language is a hallmark of Deaf ethnicity in the United States and some other parts of North America. A language not based on sound sharply demarcates the Deaf-World from the Hearing-World. The signed language of the Deaf-World is the core of Deaf-World authenticity.

The Arts – First there are the language arts: ASL narratives, storytelling, oratory, humour, tall tales, wordplay, pantomime, and poetry. Theatre arts and the visual arts address Deaf culture and experience.

History – The Deaf-World has a rich past, recounted in storytelling, books, films, and videos. Members of the Deaf-World have a particular interest in their history. A sense of common history unites successive generations.

Kinship – Some scholars maintain that the core of ethnicity lies in the cultural properties we have examined, so kinship is not necessary for the Deaf-World or any other group to qualify as an ethnic group. Others say kinship should be taken in its social meaning as “those to whom we owe primary solidarity.” Certainly there is a strong sense of solidarity in the Deaf-World; the metaphor of family goes far in explaining many Deaf-World norms and practices. So by this criterion – solidarity – ASL signers are kin.

What kinship is really about, still other scholars contend, is a link to the past; it’s about “intergenerational continuity.” The Deaf-World does pass its norms, knowledge, language and values from one generation to the next: first, through socialization of the Deaf child by his or her Deaf parents; and second, through peer socialization of Deaf children who have no Deaf parents. So in that sense – intergenerational continuity – members of the Deaf-World are indeed kin.

When we think of kinship, yet other scholars maintain, what is really at stake is biological resemblance; in that case, members of the Deaf-World are kin since Deaf people resemble one another biologically in that they are visual people. Finally, many students of ethnicity would insist that ethnic groups have at least a claimed bond of blood, through hereditary links among its members, and shared ancestry.

In response to those scholars who insist that ethnicity requires shared ancestry, either real or mythical, we reply that a majority of the members of the Deaf-World are Deaf due to heredity, so they inherited their
ethnicity, which they owe to a small number of shared ancestors. What percent of ASL signers are Deaf due to heredity compared to all other causes? Based on polling by the Center for Assessment and Demographic Studies at Gallaudet, we estimate that three-fourths of Deaf ASL signers are Deaf due to heredity.2 So, most ASL signers are hereditarily Deaf, but do they share ancestors? We have been investigating the founding Deaf families in New England, in particular those located on the island of Martha’s Vineyard and in Maine. Our book contains over two hundred indexed lineages that extend in some cases over three hundred years. Tracing those ancestors back to their American progenitors and beyond revealed that nearly forty clan progenitors on Martha’s Vineyard and in Maine had ancestors in the county of Kent in England.3 Kent apparently had Deaf people and a sign language quite early on. That sign language was no doubt brought to the Vineyard by settlers, and it likely played a role in the shaping of ASL. Shared ancestry is the rule rather than the exception in the Deaf-World pedigrees we have examined. Let me be clear: members of the Deaf-World do not have only Deaf ancestors in their pedigrees; they have many hearing ancestors who passed along the Deaf trait as surely as if they had been Deaf themselves.

Many scholars in the field of ethnicity believe that these “internal” properties of the ethnic group we have just reviewed must also be accompanied by an “external” property, a boundary separating the minority from other ethnicities – in particular, the majority ethnicity. Does the Deaf-World in the United States occupy its own ecological niche? Does it look to itself for the satisfaction of certain needs, while looking to the larger society for the satisfaction of other needs?

In Figure 2 we have identified activities that are primarily conducted by Deaf people for Deaf people.

Many of these activities are related to language – always a powerful creator of boundaries between ethnic groups, but especially so in the case of Deaf people, since hearing people are rarely fluent in visual language and Deaf-World members are rarely fluent in spoken language. Next, Deaf-World cultural, athletic and social activities are organized and conducted by Deaf people with few or no hearing people involved. There’s a lot in this list we could discuss, but the important point is this: the Deaf-World looks to itself for many of its activities; it collaborates in a few with the hearing world, and leaves the really broad responsibilities such as law enforcement to the larger society. In this, it is like other ethnic groups.
We conclude that the American Deaf-World today meets both the internal and external criteria for ethnic groups.

Our research into Deaf ancestry in New England has led us to the hypothesis that this Deaf ethnicity arose out of intermarriage among the Deaf founding families, forming large Deaf clans.

Such Deaf-Deaf marriages were important links among Deaf families, for the children of those marriages would have the combined heritage of both their parents’ extended families, including their genetic heritage. Figure 3 presents the kinship network resulting from marriages between the Curtises and the Rowes, two Deaf families in Maine in the mid-nineteenth century. The solid lines show families linked to one another by Deaf-Deaf marriages. For example, George CurtisD married Nancy RoweD and in so doing linked the Curtis and Rowe families (also linked by the marriages of Ebenezer CurtisD, George CurtisD, and Benjamin RoweD). The Campbell family was linked to Curtis-Rowe by Abner CampbellD’s marriage to Olive CurtisD and then to Ann CurtisD. The Reed family joined the Curtis-Rowe-Campbell cluster as a result of Benjamin RoweD’s marriage to Lucy ReedD. The Whitcomb and Person families joined the network through the marriages of Adin ReedD. George CampbellD brought the Gibson family into the network with his marriage to Sarah GibsonD, which in turn linked up with the Wakefield family, and so forth.

The dashed lines show connections through the parents of those Deaf-Deaf marriages. When a couple marries, they link the groom’s family to the bride’s family, including linking the groom’s parents to the bride’s parents – and thus the family circle expands. For example, George RiggsD’s marriage to Margaret ChandlerD also linked the Riggs and Campbell families, since GeorgeD’s father was a Riggs and MargaretD’s mother was a Campbell. Parents’ families are linked in the diagram provided there is at least one Deaf person in each of the families.
In all, the figure presents fifty-two families with Deaf members that were linked to one another. Deaf families were also linked by mixed marriages, such as that of George CurtisD’s hearing sister, Sophia, to Deaf leader Thomas BrownD, but those are not included in the diagram. These linkages among Deaf families – both marital and parental – shaped the everyday lives of the family members, who traveled to be together, socialized their children together, tended to the ill, sought work for the unemployed, and so on.

Abetted by institutions such as the first school for the Deaf, the first Deaf organization and the first Deaf ministry, the Deaf population of mainland New England came to see themselves as a class apart from the hearing world, a group with its own distinctive language, culture, and physical makeup. Deaf publications show clearly that the members of this ethnic group took pleasure in their shared identity.

The movement to replace signed language in the Deaf-World began in the mid-nineteenth century and was formally established in the 1880 Congress of Milan. That movement stifled Deaf ethnicity but could not extinguish it. Ultimately, Deaf ethnic consciousness blazed anew as a result of the American Civil Rights Movement, and it continues to grow today with the flourishing of Deaf activism, Deaf arts and Deaf Studies. Deaf people are entering the professions in large numbers, especially professions that serve Deaf people. This expanding Deaf middle class reflects the growth of Deaf enrollments in college programs, many of which are affirming of Deaf culture.

Developments in the larger society present both challenges and opportunities for all ethnic groups. Although there are forces that promote Deaf separatism, most Deaf people have hearing parents; moreover, hearing society both restricts and facilitates what Deaf people can achieve, so the Deaf-World seeks engagement and a degree of bilingualism. Deaf clubs have been dwindling while other venues for Deaf association have developed. Perhaps vlogs on the Internet, e-mail, pagers and video telephony reduce the need, to some extent, for face-to-face communication. The “mainstreaming” placement of most American Deaf children in the local schools has led to the closure or reorientation of many of the traditional residential schools for the Deaf. Increasing numbers of Deaf students receive cochlear implant surgery. Many such children require a command of ASL in order to communicate with their teachers or interpreters and to converse with other Deaf people, but programs of implant surgery often discourage the use of ASL – thus the centuries-old struggle between minority and majority language continues.

We have concluded that it is appropriate to view the Deaf-World as an ethnic group. Thus we will apply the label “ethnic group” to ASL signers, and that will lead us to do appropriate things: learn their language; defend their heritage against more powerful groups; study their ethnic history, etc. Laws and treaties protecting ethnic groups then apply to the Deaf-World. Is it also appropriate to label members of the Deaf-World a disability group? Despite all the evidence that disability is constructed in a given society at a given time, many writers, apparently unaware of disability studies and medical anthropology, simply adopt the naive materialist view when it comes to disability: 4 if you don't hear, you must have a disability.5

In Deaf cultures, being Deaf is seen as normal human variation, while in hearing cultures it is a disability.6 There is no point in asking who is right. Is it better to have a culture with three gods and one wife or a culture with one god and three wives?7 Disability categories vary from one culture to the next and, within a culture, from one era to the next.8 We suspect that all ethnic groups find in their cultures a positive value assigned to their unique physical traits. If a group of pygmies were to visit the U.S., would their entire ethnic group be considered disabled by short stature? No, in their eyes and in ours, they would be seen as short compared to
us but normal for their ethnic group, not disabled. Likewise for Deaf ethnics: most are gifted in vision and limited in hearing, but normal for their ethnic group, not disabled.

It is not necessary to add disability to Deaf ethnicity in order to explain, for example, why the Deaf speak a visual language. Deaf people are “The People of the Eye” – that given is a foundation of their ethnicity. In societies where signed language use was widespread because of a substantial Deaf population—on Martha’s Vineyard and Bali for example—being Deaf was apparently seen as a trait, not a disability.9 Deaf scholars nowadays are on record as rejecting the disability construction of ethnically Deaf people.10 On its website, the National Association of the Deaf accurately portrays the view of Deaf-World members as “there is nothing wrong with them, and… their culture, language, and social institutions are just as fulfilling as the ones experienced by the mainstream society.”11 Urban and rural Deaf interviewees in six countries of the European Community have called for recognition of Deaf people as a linguistic minority rather than as a disabled group.12 The World Games for the Deaf (now “Deafl ympics”) has, for much of its history, declined incentives to join the Paralympics. For most Deaf ethnics, the idea that all Deaf people are deficient “simply does not compute.” 13 Deaf scholar Tom HumphriesD explains:

“Disabled” is not a label or self-concept that has historically belonged to Deaf people. “Disabled” is a way of representing yourself, and it implies goals that are unfamiliar to Deaf people. Deaf people’s enduring concerns have been these: finding each other and staying together, preserving their language, and maintaining lines of transmittal of their culture. These are not the goals of disabled people. Deaf people do know, however, the benefits of this label and make choices about alignment with these people politically.14

Disability advocates have suggested that the Deaf deny they have a disability in order to avoid the stigma of that label.15 However, there are numerous reasons, without invoking stigma, to expect Deaf-World members to reject the idea that they all have a disability. The key to understanding why “disabled” is a poor fit to “Deaf” is found in language. Deaf people are aware that when they are together, or with hearing people who know ASL, there is no impediment, but when they are with other ethnic groups, the impediment is based on language. Thus the issue is more a language issue than a disability issue.

Language changes everything. It was the catalyst that created an ethnic group out of a visual people and that created a culture with myths, memories, and symbols – a culture that values its ethnic identity. During the civil rights era in America, when Deaf people came to see that they speak a natural language, they also came to see their identity in a different light, one that exposed self-derogatory talk about ASL “gestures” and Deaf “afflictions” and “impairments” – talk that had been, in any case, borrowed from hearing people or addressed to them. Many in the Deaf-World say they are content to be Deaf despite the burdens of minority status, and they welcome having Deaf children.16 All ethnic groups want to see their group perpetuated. In contrast, many disability leaders say that, although they want their physical difference valued as a part of who they are, they welcome measures that attenuate or remove their disability and reduce the numbers of disabled children.17

The consequences of an ethnic conceptualization of the Deaf-World go well beyond academic studies; the quality of Deaf lives (and the lives of those who relate to them) is in large part determined by how Deaf people are conceptualized. Are ASL signers simply hearing people manquées, beset by a genetic mutation passed on through intermarriage, or are they members of an ethnic group whose common descent, language
and culture can be traced across generations? The conceptualization of any ethnic group is a powerful force in self-acceptance and acceptance by others, and a lens through which relations are perceived and managed between majority and minority.

In recognizing Deaf-American ethnicity, what obligations are imposed on the majority in its dealings with the Deaf-World? Contemporary ethical standards with regard to the treatment of ethnic minorities are captured in part in the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*. The treaty calls on governments to protect and foster the existence and identity of linguistic minorities; it affirms the right of such minorities to enjoy their culture and use their language; it asks that governments take measures to ensure that persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities to learn the minority language. Most fundamentally, members of the Deaf-World ethnic group have a right “to participate in decisions on the national level affecting their minority.”

None of these provisions has been honoured broadly in the experience of ethnically Deaf Americans. The failure to conceptualize sign language speakers as an ethnic group is, we believe, an important reason for the failure to apply to them the ethical standards that concern ethnic groups. We propose to present three examples of the potential rewards of adopting an ethnic perspective on Deaf ethnicity.

In 1990, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the cochlear prosthesis for surgical implantation in children; the device converts sound waves into electrical currents that are delivered to a wire implanted in the child’s inner ear. Deaf organizations worldwide have deplored the surgery, contending that Deaf babies are healthy babies with no need of surgery, that the surgery has medical and psychosocial risks, that children are too young to give consent and their parents’ consent is not fully valid as parents are often uninformed about the Deaf-World and, finally, that it is, in principle, injurious to the Deaf-World to implant large numbers of Deaf children.

The program of childhood cochlear implantation in America and elsewhere has as its primary goal to enable Deaf children to acquire the spoken majority language. In their efforts to achieve this goal, surgeons, audiologists and special educators commonly instruct parents not to use sign language with their children, nor allow others to do so. If their goal of replacing ASL with English could be achieved on a wide scale, the consequence, however unintended, would be ethnocide, the systematic extinction of an ethnic minority’s freedom to pursue its way of life. An implant scientist quoted in the *Atlantic Monthly* claimed that ethnocide will indeed be the likely consequence of programs of cochlear implantation: “The cochlear prosthesis on which I have worked for years with many other scientists, engineers and clinicians,” he wrote, “will lead inevitably to the extinction of the alternative culture of the Deaf, probably within a decade.” The author likens Deaf culture to Yiddish culture and concludes, “Both are unsustainable.” Is it self-indulgent nostalgia to want to protect Deaf culture and Yiddish culture? When ethnic diversity is sustained, so is society’s adaptive potential. Moreover, most of us recoil at the idea of undermining an ethnic group, because it is morally wrong, because it has led to crimes against humanity, and because we want our own ethnicity protected from powerful others. If our society generally has failed to recoil at the prospect of Deaf ethnocide, it is because most fail to recognize Deaf ethnicity. Furthermore, if Deaf ethnicity were more widely recognized, parents could have a more positive understanding of their Deaf child, they could see more clearly why interacting with Deaf adults and promoting ASL use is so important, and they could weigh more carefully and wisely the risks and benefits of cochlear implantation.
The recognition of Deaf ethnicity also orients us differently to Deaf education. The Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe calls on educational systems to ensure that “persons belonging to those minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught in the minority language.” The use of the ethnic minority language is a human right as well as a wise educational practice. If teachers could communicate with their Deaf students in the language of their ethnic group, a language the students can readily understand, many more Deaf students would be prepared for important roles in our post-industrial society. Moreover, it is the law: schools with large numbers of pupils whose primary language is not English are eligible for federal funding and must conform to court rulings that require, transitional at least, employment of the minority language, of minority role models, and of a curriculum that reflects minority heritage. Because parents who carry the Deaf trait unexpressed can pass on the physical element of Deaf ethnicity but frequently cannot pass on language and culture, it becomes essential for the children in this ethnic minority to interact early on with Deaf peers and with adult Deaf role models. If the opportunity to learn an accessible natural language is withheld, those children will spend years being language-less, reduced to using primitive home signs. An ethnic conception of the Deaf child, however, could foster early recognition of the need for Deaf language models; it could lead parents and parent-infant programs to ensure early language learning; and it could lead schools to exploit that sign language mastery for effective instruction in the dominant language and all else.

Further, the ethnic conceptualization of the Deaf-World casts a new light on efforts to control Deaf reproduction, efforts like genetic screening and prenatal testing to avoid Deaf births. Is it ethical to undertake a program of medical intervention aimed at reducing the membership of an ethnic group, a program contrary to the wishes of that group? Deaf-World members are commonly opposed to genetic testing for the purpose of restricting Deaf births and are equally pleased to have a Deaf child or a hearing child. The tendency to see pathology and not ethnicity in the Deaf-World fosters demeaning and outmoded forms of speech such as citing the risk of having a child belonging to that ethnic group or the need for therapy to avoid or remediate ethnic identity. If the Deaf were widely understood to be an ethnic group, eugenic measures to restrict the birth of Deaf ethnics would be seen as conflicting with our fundamental values.

There are many more issues in ethnic relations between the mainstream and the Deaf that would be altered to mutual advantage by the ethnic perspective. The comprehensive promise of such a paradigm change has been well described by Deaf scholar Tom HumphriesD: “Acceptance of Deaf ethnicity removes one more obstacle to a clear understanding of who Deaf people are (and are not). This alters the relationship between Deaf and hearing people and creates opportunities for Deaf people to bring about change.”

There is reason for hope that the Deaf can bring about change: history shows that a society can adopt a different conceptualization of a people. Native Americans were once seen as savages, black Americans as property, and women as utterly dependent. What then are the prospects for a corresponding re-conceptualization of members of the Deaf-World, from disabled individuals to members of an ethnic group? The case for Deaf ethnicity built by the social sciences is powerful. Increasingly, linguists take account of ASL, sociologists of the social structure of the Deaf-World, historians of its history, educators of its culture and so on. It remains to reform those other professions that simply have an outdated conceptualization of the Deaf-World. Just as we once considered American Sign Language to be primitive gesturing but now recognize it as a sophisticated natural language, so those who view ASL signers as individuals with an impairment can come to see them as members of an ethnic group and, on that score, enriching and enlarging our sense of our own humanity.


6 H. Lane, “Do Deaf People have a Disability?” in Bauman, Open Your Eyes, pp. 277-292.


8 P. Conrad and J. Schneider, Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness To Sickness (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1980).

9 Groce, Everyone Here. When Groce asked her informant to say who were “handicapped by deafness when she was a girl on the Island,” she replied emphatically: “Oh, those people weren’t handicapped. They were just deaf”; quotation from p. 5. See also: Lane, Pillard, and French, “Origins.”


19 United Nations, Article 2, # 3.


The beautiful city of Durban, South Africa, was the site of the most recent World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) conference. Some 160 participants from 50 different countries made the journey in order to be part of a very special conference. WASLI was thrilled to be able to return to South Africa, where we were formed just six years ago, and this conference saw 17 African countries represented. Do look at our website (www.wasli.org) and facebook pages to learn more. Some highlights of the event include:

The general meeting saw some changes ratified to the Governing Document, as well as squeezed in short regional meetings, and our North American region was able to have all three countries present. Nigel Howard, incoming regional representative, took note of the exceptional ideas of participants and we look forward to working with you to realize some of the goals put forward. Thanks to all delegates from Canada, USA and Mexico - your commitment to international cooperation and development is clear.

Over the past 18 months, there has been a task group focused on producing guidelines for countries about educating interpreters. That paper is now completed and will soon be available on our website. I encourage each of you interested in international development to review the philosophical statement and principles that have shaped the document, and to find ways to share it with others.

The general meeting also saw a new board elected to carry on the work of the next four years. The executive includes:

- Jose Luis Brieva, Colombia, Vice President
- Susan Emerson, Australia, Treasurer
- Awoii Patrick Michael, Uganda, Secretary

Within our slate of regional representatives, Stuart Anderson of Scotland joins Nigel as the second Deaf rep. Stuart will represent Europe, Jose Ednilson Jnr of Brazil will take on the Latino America region, while Igor Bondarenko from Ukraine begins working with Transcaucasia & Central Asia. Emiko Ichikawa of Japan continues to represent Asia, Sheena Walters from Australia will focus on the Australasia & Oceania, Samuel Begumusi was chosen from Uganda to represent Africa, while Selman Hoti continues to work with the Balkans.

Zane Hema and Liz Scott Gibson were conferred with lifetime membership, which was so well deserved given their tremendous work with WASLI since its inception. Our opening ceremonies showcased a 46-person Zulu Dance Troupe, followed by Markku Jokinen, World Federation of the Deaf president, who opened our conference. Bruno Druchen, president of Deaf South Africa, and chair of the WFD Congress, also brought greetings, prior to Colin Allen (now the current president of the WFD) delivering an inspirational keynote address on the theme of unity among interpreters and Deaf people, nationally and internationally.

Our welcoming reception was held by the pool of the Southern Sun Elangeni Hotel, overlooking the Indian Ocean, where we again enjoyed the dance troupe, had the chance to meet new friends and reconnect with old friends underneath the stars.

Dr. Risa Shaw and Dr. Steven Collins, both of Gallaudet University, coordinated the selection of papers and posters, and while neither was able to be with us, we so appreciated the variety of presenters and the range of topics showcasing research and practice. Brendan Costello (Spain) and Mary Thumann (USA) will be editing the conference proceedings over the next few months so watch for the opportunity to purchase your copy.

For many delegates, this was the first time they had access to this level of information about our work. The two days of presentations were interspersed with country reports from our delegates. Learning about events in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Zambia, Saudi Arabia, Panama, Chile, Ukraine, Costa Rica, Cambodia, Japan, Sweden, and Mexico, to name but a few, was so enlightening. We have much in common, and there is so much work to be done to bring equity to services for Deaf people globally. We will never forget our delegate from Zambia speaking about coming to WASLI as a series of “firsts” - first time on an airplane, first time to see the ocean, first time to a conference, first time to have access to training, and first time to see the face of WASLI changing lives. Special thanks to Canadian delegate Farah Ladha for organizing the reports and liaising with the delegates – you did an
awesome job!

English and International Sign were the official languages of the conference, and Dr. Christopher Stone, from the United Kingdom, pulled together an amazingly talented group of IS interpreters. The interpreters all volunteered their services, and offered access for both Deaf and non-deaf participants who may not have been familiar with English. There were three Canadians on the team: Nigel Howard, Debra Russell, and Ava Hawkins.

WASLI also enjoyed some wonderful media coverage, including photos, facebook updates, tweets, and videos. Our thanks to Nicole Montagna (New York) and Patrick Galasso (Vermont) and their team for making sure that the sights and sounds of the conference were shared globally.

WASLI was invited for the first time to bring greetings to the WFD general assembly. I was thrilled to be able to do that, and our entire board looks forward to working with the WFD board on shared projects over the next four years. One of the major projects will focus on interpreting access during natural disasters. When I am in Australia attending the Australian Sign Language Interpreters National Conference (ANC) in August 2011, I will meet with Colin Allen to begin our discussions.

The photos from our closing gala dinner show the spirit of friendships born from our various “heart languages” and shared profession, regardless of our linguistic and geographic differences. Many delegates dressed in their national costumes, which created a colourful background upon which to take photos, exchange parting messages and celebrate the experience of interpreters coming together from around the world to share their knowledge, passion, and commitment to developing interpreting throughout the world.

The new board is now focusing on transition issues, and moving to creating the next strategic plan for WASLI. We are such a young organization and there is much to be done. I hope you will find ways to contribute to WASLI’s growth, and support activities in the North American region. Take out an individual membership, participate in raising sponsorship dollars for other countries, pay the membership of an interpreter in a developing country, and learn about the committees that await your talents! Please feel free to be in touch with any of us serving on the board, and especially your regional representative, Nigel Howard, at northamerica@wasli.org.
From June 15th to the 19th, 2011, Saint John, NB, was host to the Maritime Deaf and interpreting communities for their first-ever conference of this type. The conference was sponsored by the Saint John Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. (SJDHHS) and the South-East Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. (SEDHHS), with some funding from the Greater Saint John Community Foundation. The focus of the conference was “Community, Culture and Wellness” bringing together interpreters, Deaf community and service providers. Participants joined us from our maritime provinces and from as far away as Toronto and Ottawa, ON.

The event kicked off with a two-day (Wednesday and Thursday) mental health workshop by Karen Malcolm for interpreters and Deaf community members. The Deaf community involvement in the professional development and learning experience brought added insight to the learning experience. One interpreter commented that “having the discussion in ASL certainly was a major plus to see how the Deaf see and use the language in those situations, and what a helpful tool that is to us as interpreters.” During the workshop, Karen had many different scenarios that brought the participants through the whole interaction of the mental health setting, from the introduction of consumer, interpreter (including DIs) and mental health practitioners, right through to the end of the appointment. Not only were the participants fortunate to be able to practice with Deaf community members (non DIs), but they also were able to practice and learn these skills together, with DIs and ASL/English interpreters present.

Day three (Friday) was followed up by two half-day workshops: “Legal Interpreting” by Deb Russell, and “Right vs. Right” by Karen Malcolm; again, participation from both communities was essential to the learning environment. Deb was able to bring an understanding of consecutive interpreting to our community and the benefits of a more accurate interpretation in all settings, but most specifically within legal settings. The “Right vs. Right” workshop provided an understanding of Dean and Pollard’s “Demand and Control Schema” to the interpreting community, as well as helping the Deaf community to understand that interpreters make many decisions throughout the interpreting process that have no
right or wrong answer. As a matter of fact, many decisions are both right and right, and many factors (demands) come into play when choosing the action (control) the interpreter will take. Many of the Deaf community members walked away realizing the interpreter’s job is much more difficult than first thought. While these workshops were being provided, a full-day workshop on “Deaf Youth Leadership” was also being held with Nigel Howard, who was delayed out of Newfoundland due to fog and arrived just in the nick of time.

Saturday and Sunday brought on the main event, “Deafhood,” by Nigel Howard. This event was very well attended by all sectors. Even representatives from Services Canada were in attendance at the workshop and came away with a new vision of Deaf individuals, as well as an understanding of the social-linguistic viewpoint regarding communication, Deaf culture and deaf education. Their first action upon returning to their workplace was to send an e-mail to their supervisors asking for some modifications to how they deliver service on the front lines.

Nigel’s global view of Deafhood was fascinating, educational, inspirational and empowering, to say the least. Our conference logo, the “Three Sisters Lamp” a favourite tourist stop at the base of Prince William Street in Saint John, NB, took on a whole new meaning during Nigel’s presentation. We chose this local icon, with its post containing three red lamps, as it best represented the partnerships between the Deaf community, the service providers and the interpreting community, while at the same time representing the three facets of our conference: Community, Culture and Wellness. During Nigel’s presentation, he spoke of the visual cues that Deaf people use to navigate their way through life. This brought a whole new significance to our local icon, as it too is a visual navigational tool used by mariners in the past. If the three red lamps appeared individually, sailors would know they were heading straight into the harbour; however, if only one or two could be seen, sailors knew they needed to alter their course. Needless to say, this icon has become a valued reminder to us all as we journey through life in partnership together.

During the conference, Deb Russell and Karen Malcolm worked extremely hard as they played a dual role, trading in their presenters’ hats to interpret for the service providers attending the workshop. Their commitment to the Deaf and interpreting communities is greatly appreciated; thanks to you both!

On Saturday evening, a “pizza night” social event was held at the dorms, and a great time was had by all. The pizza night was hosted by the “Bridging the Gap” committees: Association of Visual Language Interpreters–New Brunswick–Saint John Association of the Deaf (AVLI-NB-SJAD); Association of Visual Language Interpreters–New Brunswick–Fredericton Association of the Deaf (AVLI-NB-FAD); and Association of Visual Language Interpreters–New Brunswick–Moncton Association of the Deaf (AVLI-NB-MAD). Unfortunately, as is often the case in Saint John, NB, the weather was not cooperative, and we had to hold the event indoors; however, the weather was not enough to spoil the mood, as we chatted long past the close of the event.

A big thank you goes out to the conference organizers, Lynn LeBlanc, SJDHHS; Shelley Williams, interpreter; and Cathy Patterson, Options Employment Outreach, along with the many volunteers who helped out during the event. Without the participation of volunteers from the Deaf and interpreting communities of Saint John, Fredericton and Moncton, this event would not have been possible.

Thank you to all who participated!
LEONA PARR-HAMEL - CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION
from George Brown College, Intervenor Program

Leona Parr-Hamel (1964 – 2010) graduated from the Douglas College Sign Language Interpreting Program in 1989. During the next two decades, she served the Deaf, hard of hearing, and Deafblind communities with an endless supply of passion, dedication and professionalism.

In recognition of her commitment to the individuals she served, this certificate was established to honour Leona's expressed wish that the community ensure that there would be skilled interpreters and intervenors dedicated to work with people who are Deafblind.

Leona came to work every day with a smile and a delightfully contagious laugh that brightened everyone's day. She was all about giving of oneself, teamwork and how best to serve people. Her legacy will be her immeasurable love of interpreting, her profound respect for the communities she served, her warmth and sensitivity, her positive and genuine nature, her generosity of spirit and the limitless joy she brought to everyone and anyone who called her friend, colleague or family.

Leona's motto was to “do with, not for,” thereby empowering Deafblind persons to lead the independent lives that they so craved. She was non-judgmental, and this award recognizes those who put in numerous volunteer hours because they want to, not because they have to. That was Leona: an advocate for the community, who recognized that all members were people first and foremost – before the vision, before the hearing loss.

The recipient of the certificate will be a student in their graduating year who has gone above and beyond to improve their sign language skills. A team of faculty advisors, with experience in the Deafblind field, will select the recipient. The certificate will be awarded annually at the interpreting program graduation ceremony.

P.O. Box 1015, Station B, Toronto ON M5T 2T9 416.415.5000 www.georgebrown.ca
April 26, 2011

To the Board of AVLIC,

On behalf of the Intervenor Program and the graduating class of 2011, we extend our sincere thank you to AVLIC for the contribution to the program. The award in memory of Leona Parr-Hamel is greatly appreciated and will serve as an incentive for our students for years to come, as well as keep Leona's memory and her accomplishments alive.
Your support is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,
B. J. Reid

Betty Jean Reid
Intervenor Program
Professor/Coordinator

The Leona Parr-Hamel - Certificate of Recognition from George Brown College presented to Adriano Aguiar by Monique (Bozzer) LeDrew
On May 26, 2011, staff members from the Interpreting and Braille Services Department at Vancouver Community College gathered as the first annual Leona Parr-Hamel scholarship was presented in her memory. The award recognizes a student from the VCC ASL and Deaf Studies Program or a graduate currently enrolled in the Douglas College IEP who shows interest, enthusiasm, and dedication to working with the Deafblind community. This year’s recipient was Heidi Jantz, who graduated from the Douglas College Sign Language Interpreting Program in June 2011.

A touching presentation was given by the Dean of Language Studies, Dale Hunter, who spoke highly of Leona’s character, her devotion to the people she worked with, and her overall presence felt by the college community. Leona graduated from the Douglas College Sign Language Interpreting Program in 1989. During the next two decades, she served the Deaf, hard of hearing, and most of all, Deafblind communities with an endless supply of passion, dedication and professionalism.

Family members were also in attendance while Leona’s husband, Larry Hamel, and mother, Christina Parr, presented the award (see picture inset).

Fundraising efforts are still happening so that this award can be given annually. If members wish to donate, they can visit the Vancouver Community College Foundation at http://www.vcc.ca/about-vcc/support-vcc/donate-now.cfm and hit the “Donate Now – through Canada Helps” button. In the message/instruction box, be sure to mention that the donation is for the Leona Parr-Hamel memorial fund.

Interpreting and Braille Services Department at Vancouver Community College
Vancouver, BC
Douglas College David Still Memorial Award

Hello AVLIC members,

It was my privilege and honour to present the Douglas College David Still Memorial Award this year to an outstanding student, Trevor Leyenhorst. The entire faculty of the interpreting program served as the selection committee, and he was our unanimous choice.

I presented the award at the provincial interpreters’ association general meeting in April. At that time, Trevor was on practicum but he was taking part in the meeting via computer connection. He returned to Vancouver on May 2nd, and I was able to officially give him his cheque.

Trevor is a second-year student who will be graduating at the end of May. Prior to attending Douglas, Trevor started his language studies at the ASL and Deaf Studies program at Vancouver Community College. Over the past three years, he has been very involved in Deaf community activities, volunteering not only as an interpreter but also using his videographer skills at numerous Deaf events. We know Dave would have really appreciated this level of involvement and support in the Deaf community.

Trevor has excelled in his studies. Here is a comment from his recent practicum mentor at a site in the US:

“Great intern. What can I say? He did fine in this setting and his depth of analysis is beyond what would be expected at this stage. He is flexible, professional, asks all the right questions and will be missed by the interpreters he worked with.”

We know that Trevor will be a huge asset to the interpreting and Deaf communities. The David Still Memorial Award serves as an excellent way of publicly recognizing his hard work, his cheerful demeanour and his many accomplishments.

I continue to miss Dave as a valued friend and colleague, and I still keep expecting him to drop by my office in the afternoon to discuss the day’s events.

Yours truly,
Cheryl

Cheryl Palmer, Coordinator
Dept. of Sign Language Interpretation
Douglas College

Cheryl Palmer and Trevor Leyenhorst
The deadline for the November offering of the WTK was September 1, 2011 and for the next June offering will be April 1, 2012. Please remember if you wish to do the WTK during a time other than the regular June or November offerings, scheduling the test requires a minimum of five (5) registering members. The application form can be found at www.avlic.ca under the Members Only > Canadian Evaluation System section. Please contact avlic@avlic.ca for further details.

Phase Two: Workshops

In May 2011 OASLI hosted a CES – Interpretation of Narratives workshop that was attended by eight (8) participants. Thanks go to Courtney Cockburn and Melissa Farias for organizing, Lana Kreiser, for facilitating, and to the feedback specialists for all their work to review the samples submitted by the registrants.

In November 2011 OASLI will also be hosting an offering of the CES – Interpretation of Interactive Interviews workshop. Best wishes to all the registrants on a successful professional development opportunity!

Remember, if you’re interested in hosting either of the CES workshops (Interpretation of Narratives or Interpretation of Interactive Interviews), gather a minimum of six colleagues and contact your Affiliate Chapter’s professional development team to get the process underway. Further inquiries can be made to avlic@avlic.ca.

Phase Three: Test of Interpretation – Certificate of Interpretation

This year’s offering of the Test of Interpretation (TOI) was in March 2011 – offered in eight (8) locations across Canada. Review of the interpretations collected from the registrants by the ASL and Message Equivalency teams resulted in four (4) applicants being awarded the Certificate of Interpretation (COI). Thank you to all the applicants, the TOI proctors, our video specialist and the raters for your efforts.

Congratulations to the Following Members Awarded the Certificate of Interpretation (COI):

• Carmela Castellano-Sinclair – Manitoba
• Ginnie Black – New Brunswick
• Heather Perry – British Columbia
• Liz Scully – Quebec
FROM YOUR BOARD…
Respectfully submitted by AVLIC president Christie Reaume, on behalf of the Board of Directors and committee coordinators

We are very excited about the launch of the new AVLIC website (www.avlic.ca). Extensive time and effort was put into its creation, and we feel it was worth every moment. In particular, we’re pleased its new layout directly achieves some of the goals of the AVLIC 2010 – 2015 Strategic Plan, specifically:

2.1. Improve communication between AVLIC and members by reviewing effectiveness and usefulness of current communication methods. This may involve a number of initiatives including but not limited to the following:

2.1 Web 2.0
• Making better use of website and explore ways to use Web 2.0 interactive tools (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to facilitate member-to-member communication

2.2 Distribution of AVLIC Information
• Improving e-mail news distribution, ensuring relevance
• Improving Fast Facts and e-mails to provide more content in a more concise format (e.g. bullet points, links to website for more details)
• Making it easier to discern personally relevant content (e.g. colour codes)
• Providing bios of Board of Directors

There are some further initiatives from the strategic plan expected for the new website in the coming year, so browse the site often for the latest updates. We would also welcome your feedback on the new layout. Consider sending us your thoughts to avlic@avlic.ca

Summer is winding down now, but there is no time like now to thank Westcoast Association of Visual Language Interpreters (WAVLI) for hosting the 2011 non-conference Annual General Meeting at Douglas College, New Westminster, B.C., on Saturday, July 9, 2011. Unfortunately, we did not achieve quorum, so no official business was conducted. We did, however, still hold an information-only meeting for those in attendance.

Also, during the AGM weekend were other successful meetings, including the Affiliate Chapters’ Presidents’ meeting (Friday, July 8, 2011); the AVLIC Board of Directors’ meeting (Friday, July 8, 2011); and the AVLIC Board of Directors’ post-AGM meeting (Sunday, July 10, 2011). Thank you to all the Affiliate Chapter representatives for your efforts over the weekend!

The summer has not been relaxing for all as work continues by our standing and ad hoc committees. On the horizon for completion are: the revision of the Interpreting in Legal Settings document; additional discounts for AVLIC members negotiated by the Member Services committee; and on-going fundraising efforts by the AVLIC 2012 committee – to name a few.

Here is a more detailed outline of the work being done by our committees towards their mandates this term:

• 2012 Conference Planning Committee (Calgary): Check out the conference website for updates and announcements at www.avlic2012.com. The theme “Creativity & Collaboration: Shaping our Future” promises an exciting conference you won’t want to miss!
• 2014 Conference Planning Committee (Winnipeg): Initial work has begun to plan the conference. The 2014 committee will be working with the 2012 committee to ensure successes from 2012 are repeated in 2014.
• Board & Committee Development: With just one (1) year left in the current term, the focus will be on future board and committee member succession. The committee will be working to ensure there is a full slate of interested members for the 2012-2014
term. Committee members are always welcome for the current term too; please contact Jocelyn Mark Blanchet, board liaison, at vicepresident@avlic.ca if you’re interested.

- Bylaws, Policies & Procedures Committee: Major edits have been underway to update all documents to reflect the new Vision, Mission & Core Values’ and strategic plan. The committee coordinator, Chris Racine, along with committee members, has been working overtime to ensure that AVLIC documents are up to date.

- Dispute Resolution Process Committee: No update at this time.

- Educational Interpreting Issues Committee: No update at this time.

- Evaluations Committee: The committee is pleased AVLIC will host the pilot of the revised Written Test of Knowledge (WTK) in November. Thanks go to the revision contractors for your work over the past year! Ongoing work continues on the Canadian Evaluation System, including the investigation of remote offerings of CES workshops, evaluation of the professional development opportunities undertaken by current COI holders in an effort to assess potential components of Phase 4 Certification Maintenance. See details of CES offerings in the full article submission in this edition of AVLIC News.

- Health & Safety Committee: No update at this time.

- Legal Settings Document Review Ad Hoc Committee: The work of the consultant is nearing completion and the committee is expected to review the updated document prior to its publication date later this year.

- Member Services Committee: This committee continues to be hard at work contacting businesses to ensure that AVLIC members get the most out of their membership benefits.

- Public Relations Committee: With the new committee coordinator getting caught up on the mandate of the committee, plans are being made for projects the PR committee will address over the remainder of this term.

- Publications Committee: In addition to the work on the AVLIC News, this committee is investigating how to make the news of the association more accessible to membership. The committee is working with our website team to ensure we make the most of the new layout.

- Use of the term “Certified Interpreter” Ad Hoc Committee: No update at this time.

In addition to the contributions by the committees, listed above, the Board of Directors has been working on a number of projects. Some of these include liaising with stakeholder groups and organizations of the d/Deaf; corresponding with members regarding local issues; reviewing the need for additional policies and procedures for the day to day operation of AVLIC business; processing membership renewals; and processing of membership applications from potential members who do not readily meet the newly ratified membership criteria (i.e. non-graduates of Interpreter Education Programs).

**Upcoming Scheduled Board Meetings**

January 2012
Board of Directors’ meeting in
Saint John, New Brunswick

July 2012
Conference, Presidents’ meeting,
Board meeting and AGM in
Calgary, Alberta

Summer 2014
Conference, Presidents’ meeting,
Board meeting and AGM in
Winnipeg, Manitoba