Intersectional inclusion for deaf learners: moving beyond General Comment no. 4 on Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT
This paper discusses the meaning of inclusive education for deaf learners in a way that acknowledges the diversity of learner identities, and outlines problems with normative definitions of inclusive education as advanced by recent interpretations of Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This discussion calls on us to reconsider how the concepts of inclusion and segregation are understood in education for all learners with intersectional identities. We outline the legislative history of the CRPD and Article 24, show the active involvement of deaf advocacy organisations, and highlight contradictions with this history in the CRPD Committee’s recent General Comment No. 4 on Article 24. We provide examples of innovative models of inclusive education for deaf learners that provide an education in sign language and discuss the implications of these arguments for inclusive education as a whole.

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Introduction
Deaf people and their advocacy organisations have worked for over two centuries to secure the education of deaf and hard of hearing children in sign language (Bragg 2001; Carbin 1996). A large body of research has shown the cognitive, social, and academic benefits for deaf learners who are given access to the ability to learn in sign language with sign language-fluent teachers and in peer groups consisting of other signing children (e.g. Mahshie 1995; Scott and Hoffmeister 2017; Svartholm 2014). Each of these points has faced opposition at different times in history from non-deaf people, who have often sought to deny deaf children the right to use sign language and to associate with one another in educational settings. This is the backdrop to ongoing controversy over the implementation of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) regarding the right to education for deaf learners. Tensions between different
notions of ‘inclusion’ emerged in CRPD negotiations and have re-emerged with the 2016 issuance of General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that explicates rights mentioned in Article 24 and provides orientation for the practical implementation of those rights.

The current iteration of this controversy can be traced back to the disability rights in education movement, where parents and organisations sought to provide education to children with disabilities on an equal basis with their nondisabled peers (Snoddon and Underwood 2014). While the potential benefits of inclusive education are many, in many places inclusion has been applied in practice as mainstreaming disabled children in local schools. In many contexts where deaf children attend school, the majority are placed in mainstream settings without appropriate supports and in isolation from deaf peers (Berry 2017; McKee 2008).

Deaf schools have traditionally been spaces for peer contact between deaf children and adults, and thus as crucial sites for development and inter- and intra-generational transmission of sign languages and deaf cultures (Anglin-Jaffe 2013; Quinn 2010; Senghas and Coppola 2001). During the last two decades of the twentieth century, bilingual education for deaf children had scarcely gained a foothold before a widespread shift to cochlear implants and mainstreaming was used as an excuse to move away from this model (Hollmström and Schönström 2017). In several countries, states, and provinces, there are no longer any deaf schools (Krausneker et al. 2017b; Snoddon 2009). A normative view of inclusion has also limited the role deaf schools can play in ensuring access to bilingual education in the mainstream school system. This point illustrates how the ‘intersectional gap’ within normative discourses of inclusion has failed to confront the reality of children’s intersectional identities, which requires a multidisciplinary framework (Cioè-Peña 2017).

This article summarises the legislative history of Article 24 and shows how the General Comment’s view of mainstreaming as the ‘default position’ for all students in an inclusive placement (Kayess and Green 2017) is contrary to inclusion theory and practice, and to the original intention of Article 24. We present current examples of inclusive education models from around the world, including those in rural settings that work to ensure deaf learners have access to bilingual education in sign language. Finally, we discuss the implications of these arguments for an inclusive education for all children in a broad sense that encompasses issues of belonging and identity development.

**Defining inclusion in the CRPD**

The concept of inclusive education is not explained anywhere in the CRPD and scholars differ in terms of how this right can be enacted in practice (De Beco 2017; Jones 2011). As Cioè-Peña (2017, 907) has noted in this journal, due to a focus on integration ‘true inclusion is not an option’ for many culturally and linguistically diverse children who are disabled. Language rights and disability rights are respectively dealt with under separate legislation and human rights instruments (Cioè-Peña 2017). An exception to this legislative intersectional gap between disabled individuals and members of language minorities is the CRPD, which the WFD was actively involved in drafting in order to promote sign language and deaf cultural rights (Kauppinen and Jokinen 2014).

However, the 2016 General Comment’s interpretation of inclusive education is focused on placement rather than on experience (Jones 2011) and fails to take into account issues
of linguistic rights and cultural identity. The General Comment defines ‘segregation’ as occurring when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities’ (par 4). This betrays a normative turn where a privileged centre is produced that defines inclusion only in terms of placement with nondisabled children and where there can be no ‘choice’ in inclusive education that allows for a range of school placements (Kayess and Green 2017, 67). This view of ‘segregated’ education does not appear in the original text of Article 24, nor was it accepted as a governing principle in the CRPD negotiating process. This may indicate political processes behind the writing of General Comment No. 4 that deliberately chose to rewrite the legislative history of the CRPD (as attempted by Shaw 2014) and influence ongoing interpretations of Article 24.

Since inclusion is the learner’s right to participate and reach their potential within public institutions like schools, deaf schools and other congregated spaces with deaf students and teachers that support collective identity and cultural development and provide bilingual education can often provide a more inclusive education than mainstream or ‘regular’ classrooms (Lindahl 2015; Moraga 2017; Mugnier 2006). However, as we will discuss further below, this is also dependent on the quality of teacher education, including advanced professional training for deaf teachers and standards for teachers’ sign language competence, and on further research and curricular resources for supporting bilingual programmes and programmes for teaching sign language to parents and families of deaf children (Johnstone and Corce 2010; Krausneker et al. 2017a; Meurant and Ghesquière 2017). In addition, congregated spaces that facilitate access to bilingual education need to be configured to include the diversity of deaf learner identities in terms of ethnicity, cultural, and family spoken language backgrounds.

The CRPD drafting process

Representatives of WFD, an international non-governmental organisation representing approximately 70 million deaf people worldwide, joined negotiations surrounding the development of the CRPD because they saw it as an opportunity to achieve their cultural-linguistic goals for deaf children to have the right to a bilingual education in sign language in settings with a critical mass of peers and teachers fluent in sign language. During the drafting of the CRPD, the WFD was the lead (and at times the only) representative for deaf people. The WFD negotiated on its own and in coalition with other international organisations of persons with disabilities as part of the International Disability Coalition. The WFD was closely involved in negotiations over Article 24, since deaf children’s right to sign language and an education in sign language is a crucial prerequisite for the ability to access any human rights.

Observers have noted that the CRPD accords persons with sensory disabilities special status (Arnardóttir 2011); this is sometimes referred to as the ‘sensory exception’ which is the result of an alliance between the WFD, the World Blind Union, and the World Federation of the Deaf Blind (Murray, de Meulder, and le Maire 2018). This exceptional status for deaf, deafblind, and blind children is not new to the CRPD, but already emerged in soft law instruments preceding the CRPD, notably the 1994 *Salamanca Statement and
Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. The ‘sensory exception’ underscores how normative concepts of inclusion force attempts at carve outs instead of transformative change.

During the CRPD drafting process, one organisation pushed to eliminate special education from the CRPD altogether (Arnardóttir 2011). This proposal was opposed by the sensory NGOs, who argued inclusive settings could ‘create de facto segregation in public schools where children who are Deaf, Blind, and Deaf-Blind would be physically present but mentally and socially absent’ (Arnardóttir 2011, 211). The attempt to eliminate consideration of separate educational settings as part of Article 24 did not succeed; the sensory exception had widespread support with the International Disability Coalition and UNESCO, among others. This sensory exception was ultimately accepted as uncontroversial by State Parties and ended up in the final text of the Convention, both via Articles 24 (3)(b) and 24 (3)(c) (Murray, de Meulder, and le Maire 2018).

In light of this legislative history, the next section provides a critique of the General Comment in relation to inclusive education for deaf learners.

Critique of General Comment and parallel arguments

The CRPD Committee failed to incorporate the legislative history of Article 24 and the views of deaf organisations into the 2016 General Comment No. 4. In addition, the General Comment does not adhere to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), governing treaty interpretation. Murray, de Meulder, and le Maire (2018) highlight the failure of the Committee to take consultation seriously, the presence of two competing and contradictory interpretations of inclusion, an error in basic information about sign languages, and the lack of any signing deaf committee members during the drafting of the General Comment.

There are positive aspects to the General Comment, which highlights that cultures and languages of persons with disabilities must be respected within the education system (par. 25). The General Comment also highlights the lack of teaching materials in accessible formats, including sign language (par. 23), and points out the need to employ administrative, teaching, and non-teaching staff ‘with the skills to work effectively in inclusive education environments, qualified in sign language and/or Braille’ (par. 36). It states that teacher education should include ‘learning about the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication such as Braille, large print, accessible multimedia, easyread, plain language, sign language and deaf culture, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities’ (par. 71), but as has been noted elsewhere, this fails to define appropriate sign language proficiency levels for teachers, an issue that frequently contributes to the inferior education of deaf learners (Reuter 2017). The General Comment calls for the ‘recruitment and continuous education of teachers with disabilities’ (par. 37), which is significant since deaf people face barriers to tertiary education and teacher education (Danielsson and Leeson 2017).

However, the General Comment deviates from the linguistic model of sign language that is present in the text and legislative history of the CRPD. Sign language is presented as something which can be given to deaf children via ‘access to training in local [sic] sign language’ (par. 14). Leaving aside the fact that sign languages are not commonly given ‘local’ identifiers but rather regional or national ones, the emphasis on ‘training’
perpetuates misperceptions of sign languages as access tools instead of natural languages to which early exposure to is fundamental for deaf learners. The General Comment lists sign language as a form of ‘alternative and augmented communication’ for learners with ‘communication impairments’ (par. 34[d]), which contradicts Articles 2 and 30 (d) of the CRPD. A reference to ‘effective technology provision and Sign Language [sic]’ (par. 67) in allocating education budgets further implies sign languages are a device to be used in mainstream school settings. This orientation towards sign language is fundamentally at odds with the intent of the CRPD as indicated in the legislative history, in follow-up interpretations by representative deaf organisations involved in CRPD negotiations, and in the plain text of the CRPD itself.

More problematic aspects of the General Comment include the assumed definition of ‘peers’ that is tied to placement in mainstream settings (par. 3). This definition of ‘peers’ as ‘typically developing’ (i.e. non-disabled, non-deaf, and non-sign language using) does not reflect the true meaning of ‘peers’ for deaf learners who share a sign language (Reuter 2017) or for other language minority learners (Cioè-Peña 2017). It also fails to recognise the role of culture and belonging for all learners whose identity development is supported through opportunities to interact with others who share the same language and cultural traits, and the reality that disability identity, including shared history of oppression, can be the basis of a peer relationship (Hall 2002). This point was in fact addressed by the WFD, European Union of the Deaf (EUD), WFD Youth Section, and EUD Youth’s (n.d.) joint submission on the draft General Comment that argued deaf learners are effectively isolated from their peers when they are placed in mainstream settings without other deaf students.

As noted above, the General Comment makes several references to ‘segregation’ (a concept which does not appear in the CRPD itself) in presenting a reductive view of disability identity which does not recognise the role of congregated spaces in supporting cultural production, or address the alienation of children with disabilities that can occur in mainstream settings (Hall 2002, Snoddon and Underwood 2017). The General Comment takes the hardline view that ‘segregation’ is discrimination (par. 13). In line with the General Comment’s advocacy for ‘a single education system in which all students are educated together’ (Kayess and Green 2017, 69), it is urged that ‘States parties … transfer resources from segregated to inclusive environments’ (par. 70). This direct attack on deaf school funding directly contravenes the purpose of Article 24(3) with its acceptance of such spaces as part of an inclusive education system. Another imperative of the General Comment, that ‘persons with disabilities must be able to attend primary and secondary schools in the communities where they live. Students should not be sent away from home’ (par. 27) has the same effect. For deaf learners, ‘community’ and ‘home’ are often concepts tied to belonging to the deaf communities and groups of signing deaf peers that are fostered by deaf schools or other congregated spaces or networks. However, this point is also dependent on how well deaf spaces are constructed to support diverse deaf learner identities. The legislative history of the CRPD shows that an inclusive education ‘system’ can encompass congregated spaces for deaf learners. Restricting the ability to attend these spaces is contrary to inclusion and to Article 24 (3) (Reuter 2017).

The General Comment claims that for disabled learners, ‘the education they receive is of an inferior quality’ (par. 3) in separate or congregated settings. Yet deaf schools, if
adhering to certain quality criteria, are often the only settings to offer bilingual education and support deaf learners’ language and identity development as per Article 24 (3) and (4). The EUD calls for quality deaf schools that

- teach learners bilingually in sign language and written/spoken language at native level,
- employ deaf role models, follow a curriculum at least equal in quality to the one used in mainstream schools, award diplomas equal to those awarded at mainstream schools, and give access to further education. (Reuter 2017, 57)

However, deaf learners also have the right to be included in mainstream schools with appropriate supports. This point speaks to the diversity among deaf learners as well as persons with disabilities as a whole (Reuter 2017).

**Implications: a grounded interpretation of Article 24**

Considering the lack of serious consideration of sign language rights in the General Comment, we outline below an alternative interpretation of the right to inclusive education in the CRPD. This alternative interpretation is (1) more grounded in the intent of CRPD framers, as shown in the legislative history detailed above; (2) more in accordance with the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which is the governing document for treaty interpretation; and (3) more reflective of contemporary thought on inclusive education.

While the educational rights of deaf people as a linguistic minority have received only perfunctory attention in General Comment No. 4, this neglect does not reflect the legislative history of the CRPD nor does it follow standard accepted practice with treaty interpretation, as laid out in Section 3 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (United Nations 1969). This stipulates, among other principles, that the CRPD should be read holistically, that the ordinary meaning of words should be used, and that a word or phrase should be read in context of both the section it is in and of the treaty as a whole (Allain 2009). In addition, clauses should be read ‘in light of the object and purpose’ of the treaty (United Nations 1969). Allain (2009, 6) suggests, ‘Where the CRPD is concerned, its unique character mandates an approach which turns to the “object and purpose” of the treaty, which would be Article 3 (General Principles) and Article 4 (General Obligations)’ which should be read alongside Article 1.

Article 3 outlines key principles which the Convention is said to encompass. While all of the principles apply here, two are immediately relevant to an interpretation of Article 24 focused on sign language rights in education. Principle 4 calls for ‘Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity.’ Respect for the diversity of persons with disabilities as a group also corresponds with respect for diversity within the disabled population. Combined with the prominent place accorded to sign language and deaf culture throughout the Convention, this principle can be read across the text to acknowledge the unique linguistic needs of deaf and deaf-blind people within ongoing interpretations of the CRPD. Principle 8 calls for ‘Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.’ While ‘identities’ can and should be interpreted to mean a diverse array of identities, if one is to take a holistic interpretation of the CRPD Articles that enshrines the concept of ‘deaf culture’ in
human rights law, the concomitant necessity of fostering the ability of deaf children to nurture their cultural identities as signing deaf people, alongside other identities, should be included in interpretations of Article 24.

For the most part, the General Comment does not acknowledge these principles for deaf learners, aside from par. 35 (b) which states ‘Deaf and hard-of-hearing students must be provided with the opportunity to learn sign language and measures must be taken to recognise and promote the linguistic identity of the deaf community.’ The same section refers to the Convention against Discrimination in Education and its support for ‘the right of children to be taught in their own language,’ and to Article 30 (4) of the CRPD which stipulates that ‘persons with disabilities are entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support for their specific linguistic and cultural identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.’ However, the General Comment does not otherwise appear to offer guidance for supporting sign language and deaf culture in education.

Article 4 details obligations by governments in the implementation of the Convention. One obligation is to ensure what is known as the ‘progressive implementation’ of the CRPD in the creation of new laws and policy, and revision of existing laws to ensure compliance with the Convention. An important principle in treaty body compliance is the ‘standstill principle,’ in which governments should not take measures which would worsen the human rights situation of peoples with disabilities compared to what has already been in place. It has earlier been argued that the closure of deaf schools and other spaces in which signing deaf children can congregate violates the standstill principle (Murray, de Meulder, and le Maire 2018). Because of its ideological tilt toward defining inclusion as mainstreaming, the General Comment misses the opportunity to remind governments of a key principle in CRPD interpretation.

Another obligation of the CRPD is Article 4 (3)’s requirement to consult with representative organisations of peoples with disabilities, including children with disabilities, ‘in the development and implementation of legislation and policies’ which concern them. As noted above, the WFD and the EUD, as well as their respective youth section and organisation, educated the Committee on their perspective in public testimony, gave detailed comments on the draft General Comment, and enacted public information campaigns during the adoption of the General Comment. The Committee received no public comment from organisations of deaf people who supported a mainstream-centric approach to inclusion. While Article 4 (3) concerns obligations of governments and not the Committee, the irony of the Committee choosing not to follow an important section of the CRPD should not pass unremarked.

**Deaf culture and sign language in the CRPD**

The CRPD states the first nine Articles are considered ‘cross-cutting’ Articles, applicable to all the following Articles. Of these, Article 2 and 9 make reference to sign language. Article 2 recognises sign languages as languages, a recognition also implied in other articles, including Article 24 (4), which specifies the right of deaf learners to have teachers with knowledge of sign language. Article 9, about accessibility, specifies the right to sign language interpreters to access public services. Article 24 does not preclude the use of interpreters. However, based on the Vienna principles, the Committee cannot simply
add interpreters and stir, in the placement of deaf children in local schools, and neglect other rights specified in Article 24. Research has shown definitively that interpreters cannot replace direct instruction in sign language, deaf peer networks, or deaf adult role models, and that the appearance of access via an interpreter creates the illusion of inclusion (Russell 2010; Winston 2004). While provision of sign language interpreters is an important part of a range of educational options which should be made available to deaf learners (Wheatley 2017), this has limited support from the plain text interpretation of Article 24. The use of interpreters in education is only made apparent in 24 (5) in which access to tertiary education is to be given via reasonable accommodation, which interpreted alongside Article 9 can be read to require sign language interpreting. Nothing in Article 24 precludes the use of sign language interpreters, but neither does Article 24 promote this over a fully accessible sign language learning environment.

The need for sign language-rich environments for deaf children is an integral part of Article 24. This can be seen in 24 (3[c])’s imperative that ‘the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf, or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.’ Article 24 (4) concerns the employment of teachers qualified in sign language. These sections speak to the legislative intent of Article 24 as outlined by Kauppinen and Jokinen (2014) who in the CRPD drafting process argued that accommodations such as interpreters and notetakers must be accompanied by opportunities to study with other deaf learners and teachers fluent in sign language, the provision of bilingual learning materials, and opportunities to study sign language as a school subject.

A reading of the CRPD in accordance with the Vienna Convention should also take into account the interplay between Article 21 and Article 24. Article 21 concerns the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention.

As noted above, Article 2 recognises sign languages. Article 21 further requires governments to take measures as per 21 (e) ‘Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.’ Siegel (2013), looking at the US constitutional context, has argued the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information is a right also closely tied to the educational system and that realisation of this freedom for deaf children necessitates sign language educational settings. The recognition and promotion of the use of sign languages should take place in all arenas, including schools. In New Zealand, deaf community activism spurred a report from the New Zealand Human Rights Commission decrying the lack of access to New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) for deaf learners. The government, recognising its obligations under both its constitutional recognition of NZSL in 2006 and ratification of the CRPD in 2008, realised the need for greater promotion of NZSL in school settings. To this end, in 2015 the Ministry of Education embarked on a $11 million, four-year initiative, with the aims of providing access to school curriculum in NZSL and creating bilingual and bicultural environments for deaf learners in both the home and at school (Manning 2017; New Zealand Ministry of Education 2015).
The requirement to educate deaf children with signing peers in environments which maximise their social and educational outcomes should also be interpreted alongside Article 30 (4), which mentions ‘recognition and support of… sign languages and deaf culture.’ Articles 24 and 30 should be read together. As mentioned above, the General Comment does refer to Article 30 (4) once, but does not go beyond a pro-forma restatement of the text. The General Comment does not fully consider the implications of realising this right to cultural and linguistic identity in educational settings.

**Models of inclusive education for deaf children**

In this section, we seek to describe a diverse array of educational settings that meet deaf children’s linguistic and cultural needs. While each of the different models outlined below have advantages and drawbacks as well as commonalities, and are shaped by the possibilities and constraints of local environments and policies, they offer some guidance for enacting meaningful sign language rights in inclusive education for deaf learners and their families. These rights are also connected to the empowerment of deaf communities as a whole.

**Bilingual deaf schools**

Recent surveys of inclusive education models include longstanding deaf schools in the USA and Europe (Fevlado 2015; Krausneker et al. 2017a). The California School for the Deaf, Fremont, with 430 pupils, and the Maryland School for the Deaf, with 500 pupils, provide a bilingual education in American Sign Language and English for deaf learners from preschool to grade 12 and employ a high proportion of signing deaf teachers and administrators (Fevlado 2015). Both schools follow the same curriculum as other public schools in their respective states while providing inservice bilingual training for teachers and language arts classes for ASL. The Maryland School for the Deaf permits siblings of deaf students enrolled at the school to attend school on Mondays and Fridays (Fevlado 2015), thereby implementing a model of ‘reverse inclusion’ where hearing learners enrol in deaf schools (Antia and Metz 2014). In this way, the school fills a fundamental gap in supporting family relationships and communication while allowing hearing learners access to a bilingual education in sign language. A notable example from Europe is Manillaskolan in Stockholm, Sweden, founded in 1809, where 50% of the teachers are first-language users of Swedish Sign Language and/or are deaf (Krausneker et al. 2017a). The school was among the first in the world to implement a curriculum including sign language and the study of sign language as a subject (Krausneker et al. 2017a). Like many other deaf schools around the world, Manillaskolan has a much smaller student population than the first two schools mentioned above, and strives to provide high-quality bilingual education while coping with declining enrolments (Holmström and Schönström 2017). In many countries in the Global South, deaf schools are in need of further initiatives to support the provision of bilingual education, such as training opportunities for deaf teachers (Johnstone and Corce 2010).

These examples testify to the importance of maintaining deaf schools that adhere to quality criteria as exemplary providers of bilingual programming that enable learners to reach their potential and participate fully in the school and community in accordance
with Article 24. Furthermore, bilingual deaf education is connected to deaf-led movements
to teach sign language to hearing parents of deaf children, and deaf schools are frequently
providers of sign language classes and other outreach services for parents (Snoddon in
press). For example, in Norway all parents of deaf children are entitled to 40 weeks of
sign language classes, which are often undertaken close to a resource centre (Krausneker et al. 2017a). In their contribution to the formation and maintenance of deaf communities
and sign languages, deaf schools also provide value to deaf learners who do not attend
these schools. However, the authors of this paper recognise that around the globe, there
is a broad range of deaf schools, and many do not adhere to the quality criteria mentioned
above or provide an education on par with that of nondeaf learners and thus do not meet
the criteria for inclusive education.

**Simultaneous enrolment in deaf school and local mainstream school**

Deaf schools can also support inclusion for learners at mainstream schools, as when learners simultaneously enrol in a deaf school and a local mainstream school, attending
different classes in each school that are variously taught by a signing teacher in congrega-
tion with deaf peers or accessed via a sign language interpreter in a mainstream setting.
This occurs with the A.C. Møller School in Norway, which enables various arrangements
for learners who live both nearby and farther away (Krausneker et al. 2017a). These
arrangements include learners who live farther away being able to stay at the school for
several weeks per year in order to access a peer group and receive intensive teaching
support (Krausneker et al. 2017a). In this way, the school provides a model for
serving other deaf learners in rural communities around the globe and demonstrates
the importance of deaf schools for all deaf learners, even those who are not enrolled on
a full-time basis.

**Co-enrolment models**

Co-enrolment models frequently involve the deployment at a mainstream school of a
teaching team (often deaf-hearing) who simultaneously instruct a classroom of hearing
(non-signing) and deaf learners in signed and spoken language, sometimes with
support of a nearby deaf school. Often, sign language teachers and interpreters are also
available (Lamothe 2017). Such a model is implemented in Hong Kong kindergarten
and primary schools (Fevlado 2015; Tang, Lam, and Yiu 2014) and in a primary school
in the Netherlands cooperating with a nearby deaf school (De Klerk, Hermans, and
Knoors 2017). Tang, Lam, and Yiu (2014) report that bilingual co-enrolment models fea-
turing deaf and hearing students learning together in a regular school with a deaf and
hearing teaching team are present in Spain, Italy, and Taiwan, in addition to the USA.
In Canada, the Manitoba School for the Deaf, which is a small school, has opened its
doors to hearing learners and incorporated spoken English programming in its curriculum
as it transitions to a bimodal bilingual education model (Priestley, Enns, and Arbuckle
2018).

While co-enrolment models may be seen as more inclusive than deaf schools by virtue
of combining ‘the best of two worlds’ and their placement of deaf learners in schools or
classrooms with nondeaf learners, research suggests that this model has limitations in
terms of enacting an inclusive education. A principal concern is the subordinate role of deaf teachers, who are often employed as assistants rather than full members of the teaching team, and the lack of sign language fluency among hearing teachers (O’Neill 2017). This point reinforces the importance of supporting teacher education for deaf signers and the ability of deaf teachers to secure employment in mainstream schools (Wheatley 2017), as well as high levels of sign language proficiency among hearing teachers. Another concern is the lack of sign language skills of nondeaf pupils. Often for those pupils, sign language is not a part of their curriculum or only provided as an option in an extracurricular programme (De Klerk, Hermans, and Knoors 2017; Meurant and Ghesquière 2017). As discussed above, this problematises the meaning of ‘peers.’ Moreover, deaf children in those programmes often remain in the minority in each class and in the school, and in some cases it is not possible for hearing signers who are siblings of deaf children or children of deaf parents to join the programme. Furthermore, academic achievement of deaf learners has been shown to be lower than that of hearing learners co-enrolled in the same school (Antia and Metz 2014).

**Mixed models: co-enrolment and bilingual classes**

Other models employ aspects of both co-enrolment and bilingual classes in a mainstream school. In Poitiers, France, a bilingual immersion programme in partnership with one elementary and one secondary mainstream school (Fevlado 2015; Lamothe 2017) shows a ‘collective inclusion’ initiative involving a small group of deaf children being placed together in a mainstream classroom of hearing learners with a hearing teacher and signing deaf co-teacher or teaching assistant. This mixed model differs from the ‘full’ co-enrolment model described above in that sometimes deaf children are in separate classes; for example, for language courses. A similar model is implemented in Namur, Belgium (Meurant and Ghesquière 2017), although there are differences between each model concerning the number of deaf teachers and the number of hours deaf and hearing children are in the same or separate classes.

**Bilingual classes within a mainstream school**

Another model of inclusive education may involve the formation of bilingual classes for deaf learners within a mainstream school, as with École Jean Jaurès in Toulouse, France where deaf and hearing learners are taught in the same school but in separate classrooms (Fevlado 2015; Krausneker et al. 2017a).

**Discussion**

Education for deaf learners provides a historical and comprehensive discussion that has applicability for many groups of learners, both those who are identified under the CRPD as well as those who fall outside its remit. Social justice discourses have long focused on inclusion into the mainstream as a fundamental goal. However, it may be that recognition of the right to spaces that do not explicitly set out to assimilate into existing normative educational settings can also be seen as inclusive. The concept of segregation can also encompass the forced placement of students in schools and
programmes that do not recognise diversity and that do not provide the necessary social and instructional environments for students to succeed. Indeed, this was an argument made by the WFD in CRPD negotiations, which led to the development of Article 24 (3) and 24 (4). An intersectional approach to inclusion, which acknowledges both linguistic and educational rights, is currently lacking. In the case of deaf learners, we need to consider that particular models of deaf education may provide a road map for delivering high-quality language education in a way that is not only more cost-effective and feasible at the individual level, but also critical for the collective cultural rights of deaf communities. This also assigns bilingual deaf schools with some collective responsibilities for consultation and training of educators from other programmes, and representation of deaf students at policy tables. These spaces provide resources and language model also valuable for deaf children who do not attend these schools, whether due to geography or other factors. If these collective responsibilities are to be adhered to, it is critical that funding is provided to ensure model schools and programmes are able to deliver quality education to deaf learners.

This article acknowledges an intersectional approach that takes into account individual deaf learners and their circumstances will see many students who are deaf attending mainstream programmes. The reasons for this vary but include the privilege that families need in order to access bilingual deaf schools and programmes, including the resources to move if the programmes are not in their community. Students are also likely to identify with multiple communities, including the deaf community and their own family cultures surpassing language, race, and ethnicity as well as family make-up, including siblings and guardian structures. Broader political and historical factors including racialisation, colonialism, migration, and economic inequality also contribute to how bilingual models of deaf education are taken up in practice. These factors also contribute to the identity formation of students and can impact the degree to which deaf education models are a good fit for individual children.

At the heart of an inclusive education model is not a placement, but an experience (Jones 2011). All students have a right to an appropriate education regardless of the choices that are offered to them. While particular models of bilingual education can provide important sites for collective identity within deaf communities, they should not be interpreted as a replacement for the responsibilities of all schools to provide an appropriate education. There is a need for a broad range of options which fit the situations of a diverse array of deaf learners. The examples in this article provide a case for defining inclusion by experience of students rather than by a placement or location alone. We call on scholars, as well as inclusion advocates, to fully consider the broad range of options available to ensure meaningful access to quality education.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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