in education and providing detail about the lives of Deaf people in today’s Ireland.

One section of the book concentrates on the mechanics of acquisition and the production of sign language giving clear and concise examples of how sign language is acquired and expressed. This explanation of the process highlights the differences between spoken and signed production using clearly illustrated diagrams and photographs.

Although most of the book is both easy to read and clearly explained, the section on the spatial dynamics of verbs is challenging and people without a degree of understanding of linguistics may find this chapter difficult. However, persevering to the end of the chapter, where it comes together, is worthwhile.

One of the chapters focuses on the perceptions of hearing and Deaf people in contemporary Ireland. This richly detailed chapter gives a clear insight into the different views of Deaf and hearing people and their experiences of growing up within a state education.

As well as examining the past and the present, the book also takes a look at where sign language will be in the future in terms of language policy and planning. Although Ireland has a strong Deaf community, the chapter on the future predominantly represents the findings and views of hearing people. This raises a question as to why Deaf people did not have a greater role in this chapter.

The book is well constructed and each chapter has a bibliography. There is also an excellent foreword that accurately describes each chapter. At the back of the book there is an interesting synopsis of the main contributors to the book. It would have been interesting to know whether the contributors themselves were Deaf or hearing.

In conclusion, I enjoyed the journey through time in Ireland’s schools and the Deaf community and all the contributions relating to language. It was interesting to see how much has changed in a relatively short time.

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DEAF TOOLKIT: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF DEAF CHILDREN IN EDUCATION, FROM A USERS’ PERSPECTIVE


The Deaf Toolkit is an uneasy combination of research project, policy document, and sign bilingualism manifesto. With this project DEX aimed at an
appraisal of current educational practice, but within the highly specific framework within which DEX operates: DEX not only considers that deaf children are ‘seriously undervalued’ (p. 7), but also that there is a need to break ‘out of the circle of normalisation [. . .] via the government’s mainstreaming strategy’ (ibid). DEX passionately believes that sign bilingual education must be the way forward, and so the seven performance standards that are proposed have bilingualism, Deaf identity, and access to both the mainstream society and to the Deaf community at its heart.

It is not really a ‘toolkit’, in the sense that the document does not allow managers to apply its contents practically; the document is too cumbersome and contains a great deal of specificities. To my mind it is also too short on clearly articulated criteria and performance indicators to be useful to that end. Indeed, shortly after a brief description of the history of deaf education and a discussion of the contemporary national framework for the education of deaf children, the document elaborates into a research report of a project funded by the Community Fund that investigated four English local education authorities and visited 34 schools (of which six are in Norway and Sweden). The research also included interviews with 62 deaf children, 30 hearing children, and 34 questionnaire responses from parents. But the document is not really a convincing research report, either.

The literature review makes brief reference to an unpublished literature review apparently conducted elsewhere as part of a dissertation project conducted at Bristol University. There is therefore no consistent descriptive overview of the relevant literature: there are a few selected comments in reference to the dissertation, followed by seemingly incidental references to other contributions. The description of method, and the expose of data both follow a similarly confused pattern: while clearly a great deal of effort was expended in contacting subjects, visiting schools, and sending out questionnaires, there is no rigorous methodological handling of the data that were collected. Regrettably, there is no coherently argued connection from the data to the derivation of the performance measures.

Despite these criticisms, the merit of the document is in the original intent: DEX’ assertion is that (ex-)’users’ of educational services should drive the policy agenda. And from its privileged perspective DEX foregrounds clearly defined linguistic rights, foremost among which is the right to be educated within a bilingual context that will give learners access not only to the curriculum and the society in which they live but also, and explicitly so, to the Deaf community. Combined with recent studies reporting on the state of inclusion — in particular Mary Brennan’s (2003) eloquent challenge to the premises of inclusion on practical linguistic grounds — the Toolkit absolutely contributes to mounting evidence of a linguistic access bottle-neck within both the logic and the tactics of educational inclusion.

As practitioners and researchers alike we should all be interested in the experiences and feedback of those who have been deaf learners. The Toolkit
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certainly raises the bar in critically considering the sincere belief, among those who have passed through the system, that their particular experience makes them privileged observers of classroom and school practice.

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REFERENCE

AND THE JOURNEY BEGINS


This is the autobiography of a remarkable profoundly deaf man, Cyril Axelrod. He grew up a ‘white man in a black country, Jewish among Catholics and profoundly deaf in a hearing world’. This fascinating book traces these three journeys in his life as they intertwine and influence each other. It paints a vivid and lively picture of his Jewish family life, his spiritual journey to priesthood and his work developing services for and with deaf people.

He was born in 1942 in South Africa, the only son in a practising orthodox Jewish family. His deafness was diagnosed at three. Almost immediately, he was sent to be a weekly boarder at a Catholic school for the deaf in Durban. This may have had an influence on the spiritual journey which so strongly affected and directed his life. He describes objectively but movingly his early struggles with language and communication, both spoken and signed, and the effect on his family life.

He faced the growing complexities of life as a member of a Jewish family for whom the Catholic Church would become the focus of his spiritual life. He studied at Gallaudet University and in Durban and was ordained as a Catholic priest in his early twenties. Later he joined the Redemptorists Order.

His early work with deaf people was as a chaplain in a school for black children in a rural area in Africa. His first challenge was to learn enough African Xhosa language to communicate with teachers and children both in Xhosa and in their tribal sign language. Everywhere he worked he continued to study the signed and spoken languages of the community with which he was involved.