



The SAGE Deaf Studies Encyclopedia

Deaf History: Southern Africa

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The Republic of South Africa is located at the southern tip of the continent of Africa. It is a diverse nation spread over nine provinces and home to nearly 53 million people with the number of deaf estimated at 4 million or more. The government of South Africa recognizes 11 official languages. However, South African Sign Language (SASL) is not accorded the same official status, though it is officially recognized in the constitution and other legislation, such as the South African School Act of 1996.

The most recent census provides a glimpse of the racial and ethnic diversity that is South Africa. 79.2 percent of the African/Black population is composed of four major ethnic groups—Nguni (composed of the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, and Swazi people), Sotho-Tswana (composed of the Southern, Northern, and Western Sotho Tswana people), Tsonga, and Venda. These ethnic groups represent the broader diversity within the African population, and each ethnic group has indigenous ways of handling the deaf in their respective communities.

White South Africans compose 8.9 percent of the population and include: Afrikaners who are descendants of Dutch, German, and French Huguenot who began colonization in the 17th century; English Speakers from the British Isles beginning in the 18th century; and other Europeans—Greeks, Portuguese, Eastern European Jews, and Hungarians. Colored South Africans are people of mixed lineage (descended from Black slaves brought from East and Central Africa, indigenous Khoisan from the cape, other indigenous Africans and Whites. Two and a half percent of the Indian/Asian population descended from indentured sugar plantation workers brought over in the 19th century from the former Natal. There are 0.5 percent indicated as “other” which are not racially or ethnically defined.

The history of Deaf culture and education in South Africa is influenced by apartheid. Segregation and discriminatory practices based on race and culture characterized the country for hundreds of years prior to its formal legalization in 1948. This unequal treatment affected both language development and access to education by Deaf individuals. In 1994 the first democratic elections were held in South Africa and the African National Congress gained the majority and elected its first Black African president of democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

Claudine Storbek and David Martin provide a historical overview of Deaf history in South Africa that begins in 1860, with missionaries from the Irish Dominican order, a Catholic Order of nuns, and later, the Dutch Reformed Church. The first school for the Deaf in South Africa was established in Cape Town in 1863 by the Irish Dominican order under the leadership of Bishop Thomas Grimley and was known as the Dominican Grimley Institute for the Deaf. As a mission and church school it was an acceptable practice to include Deaf students from all races.

Sign language was used as the method of instruction when communicating with the deaf and this varied based on the missionary order. In the later half of the 19th century Irish Dominican sisters used Irish signs and the Irish one-handed alphabet to interpret church services for Deaf members of their congregations. The German Dominican sisters used German signs, the two-handed European alphabet, and an oral approach to communicating and educating deaf learners.

Education

In 1880, the Milan Congress, with only eight resolutions, formally adopted an oral approach for Deaf education. The term “oral” education, or “oralism,” refers to a philosophy of education

in which deaf learners are prevented from using “manual” signs, which are deemed to be a primitive form of communication and inferior to the spoken word. Teachers were trained using oral methods, considered the more educated and elitist approach to Deaf education, while manual methods of sign language, the basic approach was marginalized as a means of communication and education. This created a conflict known as the modality debate, whether one accepts or rejects sign language and the oral method. This debate still exists today. The modality debate in the Deaf community can be seen among the deaf, educators, extended family and others concerned with Deaf education.

In 1881, the Dutch Reformed Church established the Worcester school for the Deaf and Blind in the Western Cape Province in response to the Milan Congress decision. The Worcester used both oral and hand methods. In 1884, German Dominican nuns established a school at King William’s town in Eastern Cape Province that used only oral methods of Deaf education. These schools were for European deaf children only and did not educate other races. It was not until 1933, that the Nuwe Hoop School for the Deaf established by the Dutch Reformed Church opened for colored Deaf children. Kutlwanong School, located in the Gauteng Province, the first school for Black Deaf children, opened its doors in 1941. Kutlwanong uses the Paget-Gorman System of signing, which was invented in Britain.

There was greater separation and fragmentation of Deaf communities due to homelands policy as a result of the Apartheid system and the Nationalist Party government along with the Bantustan (black enclave) separate development policy. Additional schools for African deaf children were established in other provinces by ethnic group and the spoken language. An example would be the Kutlwanong School moved to Rustenburg and served the Setswana South Sotho and Sepedi speakers; in Transkei the Efata School was established for isiXhosa speakers; Bartimea School at Thaba’nchu for Tswana and South Sothos; Vuleka School at Nkandla for Zulus; St. Thomas in King William’s Town served the Xhosas; Tshildzini School at Shayadima for Venda and Tsongas; Thibola at Witsieshoek for Southern Sothos; the Dominican School in Hammanskraal was for Sothos; and two schools in Soweto and Katlehong catered to urban Black deaf children.

This systemic segregation led to the reinforcement of oralism in white schools, which also had the resources for advancements in acoustic technology aides while the manual system of instruction was the prevalent method in black, colored, and Indian schools. The nonwhite schools did not have the resources for acoustic technology, which some Deaf advocates think brought about a better educational outcome for Black, colored, and Indian students vs. White students. Surprisingly, the better outcome of segregations and the use of visual signing or manual instruction in these schools had two major benefits; first enhanced development of signing skill or creativity and second, a greater sense of, Deaf cultural identity.

Eleanor Ross, Claudine Storbeck, Ruth Morgan and Ingrid Parkin are educators, researchers and leading advocates for Deaf education in South Africa their work along with that of others provides the basis for this historical overview of Deaf education in South Africa and the Deaf school timeline shown in [Table 1](#).

Organizations Representing the Deaf

The South African Deaf community is represented on a national level by the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA), which was founded in 1929, as the South African National Council for the Deaf. The name change occurred in 1995, as the organization redefined itself as a democratic organization after the end of apartheid in 1994. DeafSA fights for equal

opportunities in education, employment and for cultural recognition of the Deaf.

The National Institute for the Deaf, founded in 1881 as the Doofstommen Institute, provides services to deaf of all ages. Part of its Deaf education and self-empowerment programs include a spiritual component.

An important organization representing a segment of the Deaf community is Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action, founded in 1997 as the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA). Its goal is to address the erasure and representation of the stories and experiences of LGBTI people from official archives, histories, and other spaces in Africa. As the scope of its work grew significantly to include a range of activities that aim to create dialogue on same-sex sexuality and gender identity, educate the public, build community among LGBTI people, and to inspire action it changed its name 2007 to Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (while retaining the acronym GALA) to better reflect this development. GALA's programs include HIV/Aids awareness and various topics in support of the LGBTI Deaf community.

Table 1. Historical Overview of Deaf Education in South Africa. This is a timeline of the schools opened for the Deaf population in various provinces over time

<i>Established</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Location</i>
1863	Dominican Grimley School for the Deaf (In 1960s, moved to Houtbay and became oral)	Western Cape
1881	Worcester Skool vir Doves	Worcester, Western Cape
1881	Pioneer School for the Deaf-Blind	Worcester, Cape Town
1884	German Dominican School for the Deaf (later moved to JHB and was renamed St Vincent School)	King William's Town, Eastern Cape
1933	Nuwe Hoop School for the Deaf	Worcester, Western Cape
1933	Mary Kihn School for partially hearing pupils	Observatory, Cape Town
1934	St Vincent School for the Deaf	Johannesburg

1937	Wittebome Dominican School for the Deaf	Wittebome
1941	Kutlwanong School for the Deaf	Roodepoort, then moved to Rustenburg, NW
1954	TransOranje Skool vir Doves	Pretoria
1957	Bosele School for the Deaf	Nebo, Limpopo
1958	Efata School for the Deaf	Umtata, Eastern Cape
1959	Fulton School for the Deaf	Gillits, KZN
1962	Dominican School for the Deaf	Hammanskraal
1962	St. Thomas School for the Deaf	King William's Town, Eastern Cape
1962	Bartimea School for the Deaf	Thaba'nchu, Free State
1962	Vuleka School for the Deaf	Nkandla, KZN
1969	Durban School for the hearing impaired	Durban, KZN
1971	Tshilidzini School for the Deaf	Shyandima, Limpopo
1971	Reubin Birin School for the Deaf	P E, Eastern Cape
1972	Thiboloha School for the Deaf	Witsieshoek, Free State
1973	Sonnitus School for the hard-of-hearing	Pretoria

1973	Carel du Toit Centre	Cape Town
1974	Centre for Language & Hearing Impaired Children	Johannesburg
1978	Sizwile School for the Deaf	Soweto, Gauteng
1979	KwaVulindlebe School for the Deaf	Umlazi, KZN
1980	MCKharbai School for the Deaf	Lenasia, GT
1983	Kwa Thintwa School for the Deaf	Inchanga, KZN
1984	V. N. Naik School for the Deaf	Newlands, KZN
1985	Filadelfia School for the Deaf	Soshanguve
1986	Indaleni School for the Deaf	Richmond, KZN
1988	Noluthando School for the Deaf	Western Cape
1989	Yingisani School for the Deaf	Tzaneen, Limpopo
1991	St. Martin de Porres Comprehensive School	Port Shepstone, KZN
1993	Sidibeng School for the Deaf	Ellisras
<i>Established</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Location</i>
1993	Retlameleng School for Disabled Children	Kimberley, NC

1993	Setotlwane Elsen Secondary School	Polokwane, Limpopo
1994	North West Secondary School	Rustenburg, NW
1994	Sive School for the Deaf	Cedarville, Eastern Cape
1994	Osizweni Special School (regular school established in 1987, but opened its doors for Deaf learners only in 1994)	Leslie
1996	Ka Magugu primary school for the Deaf and blind	Nelspruit
1996	Carel du Toit Centre	Pretoria
1998	Deaf Child Centre preschool	Observatory, Cape Town
1999	NW Secondary school, moved to Leeudoringstad	Leeudoringstad, North West
2001	Katlehong school for the Deaf and blind renamed as Sinethemba and then renamed again in 2007 as Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf	Katlehong, Gauteng
2004	St. Vincenzo School for the Deaf	Welkom, Free State
2005	Silindokuhle School for Specialised education Inkazimulo Kankulunkulu (class for Deaf learners)	Kwalugedlane, Mpumalanga Standerton

South African National Deaf Association (SANDA) is an independent nonprofit, public benefit, national advocacy and consumer organization founded in 2004, managed by Deaf people representing South Africa's more than 4 million deaf. It is dedicated to providing quality services, ensuring public accessibility and increasing awareness of issues affecting deaf people at all levels and locales in South Africa.

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See also Africa, Southern: Deaf Community; Missionaries; Sociolinguistics: Dialects,

Regionalisms, and Ethnic Varieties; Special Education, Philosophy and Models of

Further Readings

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