

Deaf History as transnational history. German influences on the deaf movement and deaf education in Sweden

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This study examines the transfer of knowledge about deafness between German-speaking regions of Europe and Sweden at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. This exchange occurred on multiple levels and played a crucial role in shaping the deaf community.

At that time, deaf education was dominated by hearing teachers, who exchanged knowledge through professional journals and conferences. Simultaneously, there was an exchange of knowledge and experiences between the German and the Swedish deaf communities, though the hearing majority largely overlooked it. For deaf people, national identity was less significant; instead, they focused on the importance of sign languages and how to preserve it. The Swedish Newspaper “Newspaper for the Deaf-Mute” [*Tidning för Döfstumma*] played a significant role in shaping opinions within the Swedish Deaf community. It criticized the growing exclusion of sign language from deaf education and actively defended it against such efforts. For instance, the newspaper published petitions and viewpoints translated from German, which opposed the stigmatizing of sign languages.

The German-Swedish transfer of knowledge was thus marked by both the dominance of oralism in German deaf education and by the support for sign language within the German deaf community and among a few German teachers for the deaf. Swedish teachers undertook educational trips to Germany and studied German

professional literature. Simultaneously, pro-sign language efforts such as those of German teacher Johan Heidsiek, influenced the Swedish debate.

The example of Sweden and Germany thus demonstrates that both deaf education and deaf communities in Europe were influenced by an intensive exchange of knowledge and ideas. These connections were largely based on the cultural and linguistic affinity between Sweden and the German-speaking parts of Europe. A transnational perspective thus helps to transcend national borders, offering new insights into the diversity and complexity of European deaf history.