

TOPICS IN THE EDUCATION OF D/DEAF AND HARD  
OF HEARING STUDENTS:  
INTRODUCTION TO A SPECIAL ISSUE OF  
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Education's role in the lives of d/Deaf<sup>1</sup> and hard of hearing students – be they children or adults – is inextricably linked to the tragic and appalling history of oppression of the deaf minority by the hearing majority, oppression that spans all countries, cultures, and legal codes. At least in some areas, that oppression occurs to a lesser degree than before. That oppression has ranged from denying deaf people basic human rights and excluding them from having the same legal rights, responsibilities, and protections of the hearing majority. The deaf experience is permeated with disturbing accounts of deaf people being imprisoned in horrifying asylums in which they have been chained and beaten, and being legally denied education, the right to marry, and the right to inherit property, among a long list of prohibitions. It has been common practice to tie deaf children's hands in an effort to prevent them from using their natural language: sign language.

There is no singular sign language. Just as there is a multitude of spoken languages, there are many sign languages. In France, it is French Sign Language (LSF); in the United States and much of Canada, it is American Sign Language (ASL), but

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<sup>1</sup> “Following a convention proposed by James Woodward (1972), we use the lowercase deaf when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the upper case Deaf when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language [...] and a culture” (Padden and Humphries, 1988, p. 2). The term d/Deaf includes both groups as one can be deaf but not Deaf.

in the Canadian province of Quebec, it is Quebec Sign Language (LSQ). In Korea, it is Korean Sign Language (KSL). In Britain and Northern Ireland, it is British Sign Language, but in the Republic of Ireland, it is Irish Sign Language (ISL), and so on throughout the world's deaf communities.

In the 1960s, linguist William Stokoe – then an English professor at Gallaudet University, the world's only four-year liberal arts university for the deaf and hard of hearing – published *Sign Language Structure: The First Linguistic Analysis of American Sign Language*, the initial of several seminal texts based on his research. It unequivocally proved that ASL meets all the linguistic requirements that constitute a language. *Sign Language Structure* and Stokoe's later publications, including *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles, Semiotics and Human Sign Language*, and *Language in Hand: Why Sign Came Before Speech*, have been vital forces in changing the world's perceptions that sign languages are nothing more than “mere mimicry of speech”<sup>2</sup> or nonsensical gestures.

Stokoe's work not only transformed faulty – albeit ingrained – impressions of sign language, but it was a catalyst for change in the approaches employed in educating d/Deaf and hard of hearing students. Still, despite using various pedagogical means for teaching d/Deaf and hard of hearing students, students have had negligible success: generally, d/Deaf students' reading levels are notoriously dramatically below their hearing counterparts' levels. Educational methods continue to evolve as educators, parents, and others vested in the academic achievement of d/Deaf and hard of hearing students strive to increase the scholastic success of those students.

In this special issue of L1, we present current research into a number of such methods being applied in China, South Korea, Israel, Chile, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and the United States.

#### REFERENCES

Padden, C., & Humphries, T. (1988). *Deaf in America: Voices from a culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

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#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Dr. Debra Josephson Abrams, the guest editor for this special issue, is a writer, researcher, and educator. For years she was a college professor of English and ESOL, working with both hearing, d/Deaf, and hard of hearing students. Now she privately

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<sup>2</sup> <http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/Stokoecompliments.html>

teaches d/Deaf adults and is studying to become a sign language interpreter. Her research examines writer's voice in the writing of prelingually deaf honors students.