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Deaf Students in Mainstreamed College Composition Courses
Culture and Pedagogy.

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DEAF STUDENTS IN MAINSTREAMED COLLEGE COMPOSITION COURSES: CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of English

by
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Preface

Mainstreaming for deaf students is an intensely personal subject for me because through most of my schooling I was a mainstreamed deaf student. My interest specifically in English language learning for deaf students resulted indirectly from being mainstreamed; as an undergraduate English major, my interpreters and the only other deaf undergraduate, my first deaf friend, told me how unusual it was for a deaf student to excel in English. They gave me my sign name, formed with the right hand in the sign for "T" resting on the top of the left hand held flat with the fingers pointing to the right of the signer; both hands are then drawn closer to the body. This resembles the sign for ENGLISH.

My skill in English is not as closely related to my deafness as it is for prelingually deaf people; I was already skilled in the language by the time I lost all of my hearing to spinal meningitis when I was ten, about a month and a half before I started sixth grade. After I became deaf I had to learn new ways to continue speaking intelligibly and had to learn completely how to lipread (technically known as speechreading). Spoken English, especially in those early years when I was still learning how to handle it without being able to hear it, was a very fallible form of communication. Reading and writing helped fill the gap, especially in school.

My literacy skills are probably the major reason why I was able to succeed as a mainstreamed deaf student. Nevertheless, my education as a deaf student in mainstreamed classes failed me in many ways. My teachers had not been taught about special needs of deaf students. Most of my
teachers were willing to make adjustments or provide extra help to make their
classes accessible to me. However, I did not always know what the teacher
could do for me. I was also wary of asking for help because I did not want to
be regarded as a burden nor did I want to create the impression that I could
not meet "normal" course requirements. I was also afraid the hearing students
would resent me. I did not try to hide my deafness, but I did try to minimize its
impact on my classmates and teachers. My strategies worked for the most
part. I managed to get good grades and even won some academic awards.

However, when I look back on my education in the mainstream I realize
how much I missed and am somewhat amazed that I managed to do as well
as I did. From sixth grade through high school I did not use an interpreter in
classes, so most of my access to the oral content of classes was through
friends' notes. I am a good speechreader, but classroom lecture and
discussion are impossible to follow perfectly. Speechreading is difficult
enough in ideal situations when the speaker enunciates clearly and faces the
deaf person at all times. Classrooms are not that ideal situation. Once I
started using an interpreter in college I got more out of classes but still missed
out on pre- and post-class discussions, dorm bull sessions, study groups,
special lectures and readings, and so on.

My acceptable oral skills—speech and speechreading—helped me, for
the most part, to circumvent the social isolation that often accompanies
mainstreaming for deaf students. Good oral skills could not solve all of the
problems, though. For instance, not being able to use the telephone certainly
cut into my social life. (The nationwide relay system implemented in the early
1990's makes this less of a problem today.) Being deaf also isolated me from the all-important popular music part of adolescent culture. Most importantly, though, I had to deal with being different from everyone else, and I had to acknowledge that some people would not accept me just because I was deaf. These experiences were also part of my education.

Of course, school was not the only site of my education as a deaf person in the hearing world; home was important, too. Although now that I am grown I know that my parents feared the consequences deafness would pose in my life, they did not express these fears to me when I was younger. They did not deny my deafness, but neither did they let it take over my life. My two brothers and two sisters, all younger than myself, provided me lots of language development I would not have otherwise gotten. My brothers, who are close in age to me, provided me with crucial access to peer language. As part of my speech practice, I spent a lot of time reading to my little sisters. Not having anyone around to talk to was unusual. Without such a supportive home life, the gaps in school might have been more devastating.

Perhaps because my family adjusted to my hearing loss so well, it took me a long time to realize how little most of my teachers understood about deafness and what it means to be a mainstreamed deaf student, although I am sure most learned something from having me in their classrooms. At least I hope that is the case. I do know, though, that my dissertation directors, Professors Carol Mattingly and Sarah Liggett, who have both taught me in the classroom, commented on an early draft of this text that some things I write about never occurred to them when they had me in class.
I want other teachers to be able to hear the concerns of a deaf student, one who happens to have training as a college composition teacher. My stories form an essential part of this text. Most writing on deaf education and deaf writing has been done by hearing people, since for the past hundred years hearing people have formed the voice of authority in the education of the deaf at all levels. Hearing professionals do have valuable contributions to make, and I quote them in my text. Deaf voices need to be heard too, though; mine is one.

In his essay "The Narrative Roots of the Case Study," Thomas Newkirk writes that one of the arguments for using case-study narratives as a knowledge-making tool is that they have "capacity for detailed and individual accounts" (132); by turning my own experience as a mainstreamed deaf student into a case study, I hope my readers better understand what it is like to be a deaf student in predominantly hearing classes. However, I also know that my experience as a deaf student is in many ways far from typical. Therefore, I have introduced other experiences into my narrative. I have tried to "allow discordant voices into [my] account, voices that complicate the moral judgments readers will make" (Newkirk 148). Of course, I am the one who decided which other voices to include. I made the decision to observe residential and mainstreamed high school programs for deaf students as well as a deaf students in a hearing-majority college composition course, and what to report of my observations.

My stories should help make my biases clear to my readers. The whole issue of mainstreaming deaf students is a source of strong
disagreement among deaf people as well as among educators of the deaf even without the addition of related issues such as the complicated sign verses oral controversy. My choices, such as to be mainstreamed, to learn sign language, even to marry a hearing man, are all politically weighted. And, of course, by choosing to write about English language learning for deaf students in the context of mainstreamed college composition, I am at the very least giving my tacit approval for mainstreaming as a viable choice.
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Abstract

Composition theorists have already considered the effect of cultural constructs on writing students and have modified pedagogical practices to meet the needs of diverse students. However, disability has remained an almost invisible category in composition studies. This is unfortunate because our society has historically limited the access of the disabled into society, including the academy. Composition teachers need to understand deafness because poor English literacy skills are one culturally constructed attribute associated with hearing loss. The need is especially great now that legal and social developments are encouraging more deaf students to enroll in hearing majority colleges. Also, high-level literacy is even more important for the deaf than for hearing people, because written English is a channel of communication unaffected by hearing loss. This study examines the problem through personal experience, classroom observation, and review of relevant research.

Elements of both hearing culture and deaf culture combine to give the average deaf high school graduate fourth-grade literacy skills. Most deaf children fall behind in language learning not because they are cognitively deficient but because they do not receive enough meaningful linguistic input. Schooling and hearing culture contribute to their literacy deficit by not meeting the developmental needs of deaf children.

The written English problems of deaf students resemble those of ESL students. The deaf writer's lack of meaningful use of English, coupled with a related poverty of content knowledge, explains the low literacy achievement of
the average deaf high school graduate; deaf students with more language exposure have more advanced literacy skills.

This study also suggests pedagogy to help composition teachers modify classroom culture to integrate deaf students. Since deaf students depend on vision for receiving information, teachers should use all opportunities to provide information visually and cooperate with any support services the student uses. Teacher should facilitate interaction between deaf and hearing students and make sure assignments and class activities are accessible to deaf students. If the course readings are chosen to represent a diversity, the teacher can include readings on deafness and other disabilities. Integration of deaf students into our composition classes should enrich the experience for everyone.
Chapter 1

Why Deaf Students Matter

Deaf students are currently a very small minority in our nation's postsecondary institutions (except, of course, for those few with special programs for the deaf, such as Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf). However, recent cultural, legal and educational changes have increased the number of deaf and hearing impaired students choosing to attend postsecondary hearing schools. The increased number of deaf students pursuing postsecondary education, as well as the legal requirement for all educational institutions to be accessible, means that more composition instructors in more two-year colleges, colleges, and universities will have deaf students in their classes.

The history of composition studies shows that whenever new populations enter colleges—including the first mass entry of middle class, women, working class, and racial minority students—composition instructors have found their old approaches and practices to teaching writing insufficient to serve the needs of all of their students and have met the challenge by experimenting with new ways of thinking and of teaching. The result is better writing courses for all students. The growing population of deaf students is creating similar concerns, especially when we consider that the educational system as a whole has failed deaf students; survey after survey, test after test, shows that the “average” deaf high school graduate has literacy skills on approximately a fourth grade level.
In *Deaf Student Mis-Writing, Teacher Mis-Reading: English Education and the Deaf College Student*, Jacqueline Anderson writes that "hearing college instructors encountering [deaf students'] written essays for the first time are often stunned by the errors and the apparent semantic weaknesses of their texts" (19). This is remarkably similar to Mina Shaughnessy's reaction to the first papers she read by underprepared college freshmen: "the writing was so stunningly unskilled that I could not begin to define the task nor even sort out the difficulties" (vii). Anderson uses a linguistic approach, including error analysis, to instruct composition teachers on how to deal with their deaf students' writing. This is similar to Shaughnessy's (and others') advocation of error analysis so that the instructor knows where to begin helping basic writers or ESL students. Indeed, Anderson writes that "the methods suggested are equally applicable to hearing students, and can be utilized in any mainstream, ESL, or English for Special Purposes classroom" (18) and makes similar claims throughout her book. She is right. Deaf students, in spite of their average poor literacy skills, are just as capable (and incapable) of achieving college-level literacy skills as are hearing students. Thus, although I do discuss common problems deaf students have with written English in chapter four, my primary focus throughout this study is on the cultural reasons why so many deaf students end up with poor literacy skills. I then discuss adjustments we can make in our courses—to a small bit of our culture—to serve these students.

Cultural background is important to our understanding of deafness because, although deafness is a physical disability, it has also been
constructed by society—by a majority hearing society—into far more than the simple inability to hear. In chapter two I will describe what it is like to be deaf in the United States, including what it is like to be part of deaf communities. Chapter three will describe the educational approaches used with deaf students in the United States today both because of education's direct impact on the literacy skills of deaf students and because of how the various methods reflect the larger (hearing) society’s ideas about deafness.

ACCESS

In the United States, education—especially higher education—is one of our society's primary ways of constructing its elite. This meritocracy does not work for oppressed segments of the population. Women, the poor, and racial minorities were once effectively denied the opportunity for advanced education or segregated into their own schools. The disabled are one of the last populations in the United States to gain true access to higher education. The deaf have had Gallaudet¹ for over a hundred years, but it was never meant to serve more than a small portion of the deaf population. In addition, as a small liberal arts institution, Gallaudet has limited programs of study. Congress created the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), begun in 1968 at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), to provide a place for the deaf to get the technical degrees not offered by Gallaudet. Deaf students attend classes at NTID through the level of an associate (two-year) degree; those who qualify to take upper division classes cross-register at RIT and are provided with support services. Smaller programs serving deaf students have been created at other universities, colleges, and junior colleges around the
country to offer organized support to deaf students. However, most
postsecondary programs have, at best, the minimal support services, such as
interpreters and notetakers, required by law to make education accessible to
the deaf. Not all schools fully comply with accessibility laws.

Deaf students who want to attend schools that do not seem to be in full
compliance with accessibility laws can seek legal redress, but such battles
take time, energy, and money—scarce resources for college students. Deaf
students can also file complaints with federal agencies that oversee
enforcement of accessibility laws, but this course of action is similarly not of
much use for a student’s immediate needs. Schools may legitimately have a
difficult time providing appropriate accommodations. For instance, in some
areas it is difficult to find certified sign language interpreters. How far a
postsecondary school must go to meet its legal obligation is not always clear.

In theory, virtually all postsecondary education should have been fully
accessible to the disabled, including the deaf, since the mid-1970s. The
Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates in section 504 that any program or
activity receiving Federal government funds (including those obtained through
student financial aid programs) must make programs accessible to all
otherwise qualified disabled students. Colleges and other postsecondary
institutions thus had to “assure accessibility of programs and activities to
handicapped students and employees” (United States np) for qualified
applicants unless to do so would fundamentally change the nature of their
programs. That is, if the disability would prevent the student from being able
to perform essential elements of the program, the school could then deny
admission. All Section 504 regulations went into effect by 1977, with compliance enforced by the then Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

However, having a law that requires postsecondary institutions to provide reasonable access did not mean the disabled would exercise (or insist on the enforcement of) their rights under the law. First of all, at the time most deaf children were educated in special schools for the deaf or in self-contained classes on the campus of a regular school and thus were not accustomed to attending mainstreamed classes. The law which initiated widespread mainstreaming, PL 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, was not passed until 1975. This law calls for a free, appropriate education for all children in the least restrictive environment possible, and mandates the provision of necessary auxiliary aids (such as an interpreter) to allow disabled children to be mainstreamed into regular classrooms.

As I will discuss in chapter three, there is considerable opposition to mainstreaming among culturally deaf adults, who argue that deaf schools utilizing manual communication are, in fact, that least restrictive environment for deaf children. Hearing parents, on the other hand, have supported mainstreaming as an option that allows their deaf children to reside at home and to learn how to cope in a hearing society. With the support of such parents, mainstreaming as an option for deaf children has mushroomed since the passage of the law. Now over half of deaf children in this country attend local schools. The form mainstreaming takes varies widely from true integration of deaf children into classes with the hearing to deaf children
spending most of the school day in self-contained deaf classes and interacting with hearing peers only during lunch, recess, and non-academic classes such as physical education and art. We are just now seeing the movement of these children into college, since it took some time for mainstreaming programs to become well established.

In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, deaf and other disabled potential college students likely, and quite reasonably, feared not having anywhere near the same career opportunities that their hearing classmates with the same degrees would have. Until the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1991, only federal government agencies and institutions receiving federal funding were required (by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) not to discriminate against the disabled in hiring. The ADA’s provisions mandating reasonable accommodation for disabilities by employers and against discrimination in hiring, throughout the private sector and in state and local governments, mean more opportunities beyond college for the disabled. The ADA differs from other civil rights legislation in that it mandates reasonable adjustments (not simply equal treatment) for disabled employees or customers. With equal access to employment opportunities now a legal civil right, the disabled can file lawsuits and/or complaints with the appropriate government agency if they feel their rights have been violated. It thus seems reasonable to expect that more disabled students will invest time and money to pursue postsecondary education. Now the disabled know that they have the legal right to seek employment in any career not made impossible by their impairment. For example, a blind person could not be an
air traffic controller; a deaf person could not be a voice telephone operator. Deaf job applicants still may have more difficulty finding a job and may still have to convince potential employers that deafness will not prevent them from doing the job. However, just the simple existence of the ADA has served to educate employers that disabled people can do many jobs once denied them, especially with small modifications in job descriptions or in the workplace environment.

Since postsecondary education is crucial for most good jobs today, the disabled now have an incentive to pursue advanced degrees. The deaf have long been trained in school-based vocational education programs to fill blue-collar factory jobs or jobs in the printing trade, all of which are becoming scarcer due to technology and competition from cheaper labor overseas. In addition, many service-sector jobs require good oral communication with customers, a significant barrier for most deaf people. Therefore, more deaf people are realizing that postsecondary education is important for survival in today’s job market. The increasing need for advanced education to increase employability could also convince older deaf adults to return to school, especially since they can now expect to receive necessary accommodations at any postsecondary school.

How many deaf students will actually pursue postsecondary education? That is a difficult question to answer, in part because the college-age deaf population fluctuates more than it does for the population in general based on causes of deafness. For instance, there was a recent bulge in the college-age deaf population because of the large number of children born...
deaf as a result of the rubella epidemic of 1962-1965. Advances in medicine have virtually eliminated once-common causes of deafness, such as scarlet fever, while creating new ones. One example is the increasing survival rate of disability-prone premature infants, which has increased the proportion of the deaf with multiple disabilities. The increasing resistance of bacteria to antibiotics could create a new bulge in the deaf population because certain antibiotics can cause deafness; my own hearing loss results from the antibiotics used to treat my bacterial spinal meningitis. Doctors now avoid the more dangerous antibiotics when possible, but when diseases become resistant to safer antibiotics, they may have no other choice. Obviously, the size of the deaf population, especially those of traditional college-age, affects the number who attend college. For instance, “between 1972 and 1987, the number of students reportedly enrolled in [postsecondary] programs designed specifically for deaf students grew by 230 per cent, from 2,271 to 7,490” (Nash 14). Part of that tremendous growth can be attributed to the “rubella bulge” deaf population reaching college age, but even the rubella epidemic did not increase the incidence of deafness 230 percent; the rest of the growth can be attributed to changing laws and social attitudes. Since our society has continued to become more accepting of and accessible to the deaf, even a shrinking pool of deaf college-age students might still mean an increase in actual deaf students in postsecondary institutions.

The above numbers also probably underestimate the number of deaf students pursuing postsecondary degrees because those statistics include only students enrolled in schools with special support programs for deaf
students. Since most postsecondary schools do not have special programs for the deaf, deaf students at these schools are not accounted for. These are the students I am most concerned about, since schools without special programs for deaf students are also unlikely to prepare instructors to work with a deaf student, and are less likely to provide intensive help outside of class.

WHY COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS SHOULD BE CONCERNED

Though any disabled student could potentially provide challenge to the writing instructor, the deaf may have difficulty in required composition classes for special reasons. Writing will be a problem for many deaf students since "the average severely to profoundly hearing-impaired high school graduate is reading and writing no better than the average 8- or 9-year-old [about fourth grade] hearing student" (Paul and Quigley 20). Problems with spoken and written language acquisition have long been associated with deafness and are the main reason why deafness used to be equated with mental retardation.

However, as I will argue in more detail later, the problems deaf students face in mastering written English, especially the academic English of college texts, are more cultural and social than cognitive. The multiple similarities between the educational (broadly defined) experiences of deaf students and those of African-American students are no coincidence.

Most deaf children are simply not given sufficient exposure to English in accessible format to develop advanced English skills. Processing language information visually might lead to some differences in cognition (although we still do not know enough about the brain to know if language information received visually is processed in the language areas of the brain differently
from language received aurally). However, studies have shown that in acquiring language skills deaf students “appear to proceed through developmental stages similar to those reported for hearing students” (Paul and Quigley 183). Deaf children who grow up in families where a signed language is the language at home develop language abilities (in sign language) at the same approximate rate hearing children learn oral language. In other words, deafness is not inherently related to poor language acquisition. Deafness does make acquiring oral language more difficult, but as I will explain in chapter four, a written language derived from an oral language like English does differ from the oral version of the language, and it is possible to process written language without reference to its oral equivalent.

The cultural basis for deaf students’ difficulties with the standard written English of academic texts becomes further apparent when comparing deaf students to other minority-group students. The academic achievement of deaf students is, for example, quite similar to that of underclass African-American students who grow up speaking a black English dialect. Of course, there are exceptions in both groups, but both deaf children and African-American children get little exposure to standard English beyond the classroom. Both cultures also have strong oral traditions.² The curricula of the schools that mainly serve the members of these cultures are not focused on college preparation and are often poorly designed and implemented; the curricula themselves seem to assume that the students will not go on to college. Furthermore, both groups of students often suffer from inadequate parental involvement in their education.³ Students in both cultures learn not to

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expect success in the majority culture. They expect that, civil rights laws notwithstanding, they will face covert and overt discrimination from the majority culture. Not coincidentally, both deaf students and African-American students often attend what amounts to segregated schools. We should thus not be surprised that deaf students, like other minority students, are more likely to have difficulty with academic writing than students coming from educational and social backgrounds more favorable to the development of academic literacy. And just as we do not attribute the writing difficulties of students from other oppressed groups to the characteristic identifying feature of that oppressed group, neither should we be quick to attribute our deaf students' deviations from standard English to their audiological status.

As Mina Shaughnessy points out in Errors and Expectations, many errors the students she identifies as "basic writers" make "are often rooted in language habits and systems that go back to their childhoods and continue, despite years of formal instruction, to influence their performance as adult writers" (90). Many African-American students grow up surrounded by and using nonstandard forms of English in their families and neighborhoods; deaf children are separated from immersion in any form of spoken English by their deafness even when (as is true about 90 percent of the time) the child's family is hearing. No matter what the communication method(s) used--American Sign Language, a form of signed English, cued speech, speechreading--deaf children miss most incidental exposure to language. Deaf children from families who use visual-based communication at all times (even when not speaking to the deaf child) acquire the best language skills because of the
exposure to accessible language. The “language habits” of the deaf that show up in the nonstandard forms often referred to as “deaf writing” may be the result of interference from another language system (American Sign Language). However, they are more probably caused by insufficient exposure to English language patterns, especially since deaf children whose home language is ASL actually tend to have superior English skills compared to other deaf children.

Paulo Friere and others have argued that control of language, particularly of written language, is one means by which those in power control those who are not. The education of deaf children has always been at least partially controlled by the hearing. The deaf have been fighting for more control; the successful “Deaf President Now” movement at Gallaudet in 1988 brought this struggle for self-determination to the world’s attention, but the battle is far from over. Harlan Lane, in The Mask of Benevolence, which chronicles the paternalism of the hearing towards the deaf, emphasizes the control of education when he writes that

education is the battleground where linguistic minorities win or lose their rights. Starting with an impressionable six-year-old child and continuing for a decade or more, the school shapes values, beliefs, and knowledge. Thus, those who govern look characteristically to the schools as a highly effective instrument of government. (105-106)

Schools have played a much greater role in molding deaf children than is usual because until fairly recently most deaf children were educated in residential schools. Also, restricting any deaf child’s access to information is much easier than it is with hearing children. At the same time, hearing educators of the deaf have long blamed their students’ hearing loss, rather
than their own approaches to education, for the students' poor academic achievement. Control of literacy is of even greater concern for the deaf than for other oppressed minorities because "it is through literacy that the deaf person can share in the linguistic experiences of the society at large, since written language is not distorted by the handicapped auditory sense" (Maxwell 208). When the educational system fails to provide sufficient exposure to English in its accessible (written) form, the deaf become isolated from the hearing world, and even from the ability to administer the many institutions serving the deaf.

While deaf children are missing opportunities to absorb language forms, they are also, of course, missing opportunities to acquire the content expressed in those language forms. Most deaf children grow up in relative isolation from the majority hearing culture. Unlike African-American or other racial minority students who may be physically isolated in ghetto neighborhoods and schools that are effectively segregated by "white flight," deaf children do not need physical separation from the hearing to be isolated from their culture. Research shows that many deaf children's parents talk to them less than they do to their hearing siblings, and that the conversation that does occur is more likely to consist primarily of short, simple statements, requests, or questions, such as "no," "eat!" or "sleepy?" Even deaf children with excellent oral skills are much more isolated that hearing children. My family, for example, emphasized dinner as a time for family conversation. After I lost my hearing if I wanted to be part of the conversation I often would have to ask someone to repeat for me. Many times I got a very abbreviated
version of the conversation. A typical answer to “What's everyone talking/laughing about?” was as likely as not to be cryptic: “Oh, Henry's being silly” or “Mom's talking about her students.” If I was curious enough, and had the energy, I would ask for more details, but at other times I would give up and go back to eating.

Even television is an inaccessible cultural medium for deaf children until they learn to read well enough to follow captioning, an option not available until 1980 when the first television programs were captioned. Radio is, of course, never accessible. Although we think of television as a visual medium, it actually depends on sound to convey most of its messages; the video usually supports the sound rather than the other way around. Thus, unless and until a deaf child learns to read, mass media can not begin to make up for a deaf child's gaps in cultural knowledge.

Schooling should be able to expose the deaf child (and other minority-culture children) to the cultural knowledge central to the majority culture, but the poor track records of both deaf education programs and inner city schools tells us that this is not the case. Deaf children are likely to have had very little opportunity for meaningful interaction (communication) with hearing peers, either because they have been educated in an all-deaf program or because mainstreaming lacks sufficient support for non-class-related communication with hearing students. Actual class time occupies a relatively small portion of a deaf child's life, so no matter how much the deaf child learns about the majority (hearing) culture in class, she misses what other children learn about the (hearing) world outside of class.
The lack of cultural knowledge especially impacts the deaf student's literacy skills. E.D Hirsch, in his argument for teaching cultural literacy to every child, states that "fifth grade is almost too late" to establish the kind of background cultural knowledge necessary to read and write effectively (17). I do not believe it coincidental that the average deaf student's (as well as the typical inner-city student's) literacy skills peak at approximately the fourth grade level; both lack the background cultural knowledge for making sense of more advanced writing. Reading for content becomes much more important in later school years. As I will describe in chapters three and four on deaf education and linguistic problems, deaf people are often described as being unable to use anything but concrete language and as having an especially difficult time understanding figurative language. These difficulties are rooted not in linguistic ability but in cultural isolation. Deaf people who have been enculturated into Deaf culture, including the use of its language, American Sign Language, have no trouble with figurative or abstract language within the context of that culture.

What all this means to composition teachers is that although deaf students are likely to be underprepared for the demands of academic writing, an appropriate learning environment could help deaf students improve their academic literacy skills. In creating such an environment, Gallaudet University has developed its own admissions testing because standard testing does not accurately measure most deaf students' academic potential. In fact, potential Gallaudet students do so poorly on traditional standard tests "that their scores generally fall into the chance range in the College Board Scholastic Aptitude
Test" (Benderly 89). Yet given the opportunity, many of these same students successfully complete a college degree: many even go on to graduate school. Donald Moores, an expert on deaf education, writes that the success of Gallaudet graduates in graduate school, "where they compete on equal terms with hearing students, suggests that the deaf/hearing gap in achievement may be more apparent than real" (1-2). I would not go that far: an achievement gap exists between deaf and hearing students but only because deaf students have been failed by the educational establishment.

Passing writing courses required for a degree (and reading well enough to understand texts) is a major barrier to these deaf students' successful completion of a program of study. Since composition teachers do function as "gatekeepers," we should know that two-year (junior) colleges supporting programs for deaf students annually take in an average of about nine new students and graduate three. This difference results in an estimated withdrawal rate of about 66 per cent. Similarly, four-year colleges having support programs take in an average of seven new deaf students each year and graduate, on the average, only two, for a 72 per cent withdrawal rate. Withdrawal rates for hearing students average 58 per cent for two-year colleges and 30 per cent for four-year colleges. (Stinson and Walter 43)

Since these are statistics for deaf students in programs with organized support services, withdrawal rates for deaf students are likely even higher at institutions without these special programs. Also important is the fact that these same deaf students who struggle in postsecondary education are likely to be some of the best deaf students. If they went to a special deaf program for primary and secondary school, these students were probably among the best in their class. "Hearing-impaired students are at great risk: only 50-55 per
cent will earn high school diplomas, 10-20 per cent will receive certificates, and 25-30 per cent will drop out [of high school]" (Nash 8). In addition, academic achievement of deaf students who are also members of another minority group is at even greater risk: "Fifty per cent of deaf minority 17-year-olds read at or below the second-grade level" (Nash 16). The even lower achievement levels of minority deaf students are probably linked with the economic resources of their families. Middle class and upper class parents are more likely to have access to additional resources for their deaf children's education and are more likely to have the education and time necessary to provide extra learning opportunities for their deaf children.

Who are the deaf students who manage to stay in postsecondary programs? One study, whose results reflect those of other studies, "found that the students who persisted were generally those who: (a) had better oral communication; (b) attended high schools that offered minimal support; (c) evidenced some type of pre-college preparatory experience; and (d) made a decision about a major during the first year" (Stinson and Walter 51). In other words, deaf students who do persist in postsecondary education have preparation most similar to that of their hearing peers and have been enculturated (at least partially) into the hearing world. Not coincidentally, deaf students who do withdraw from postsecondary programs have a profile closely resembling that of disadvantaged hearing students who also drop out. These students "(a) tend to be poorly motivated; (b) are unrealistic about the time required to complete a degree; (c) have difficulties in developing a positive self image; (d) are poor readers; and (e) depend more on real-life experience than
on symbolic experience in the learning process” (Stinson and Walter 56). These problems cannot be solved simply by giving deaf students access to classroom communication—the traditional role of support services such as interpreters and notetakers, which are the only special support available at many schools.

Deaf students need to be enculturated into the academy, to learn not only the academic skills (particularly literacy skills) necessary to complete a postsecondary degree but also to learn what is expected of them. Composition courses can either present an insurmountable barrier to the deaf student’s progress towards a degree, or provide a true gate to the rest of the academy. “Writing instructors, untrained in the needs of deaf students, have generally not understood why deaf students have difficulty in their courses even—yes, even—with all these helpers [such as notetakers and interpreters]” (Brodesky, Cohen and Hayes 43). Yet even those instructors who have never before encountered a deaf student already have basic skills for teaching deaf students if they are prepared to teach other underprepared students. In addition, out-of-class resources already in place for all students, such as writing centers, can also serve deaf students. What instructors must do is understand their deaf students’ backgrounds and how deaf students are like and unlike their hearing peers. That is the purpose of this study.

NOTES

1 In 1864 Edward Miner Gallaudet convinced Congress to authorize the college division of the Colombia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind to begin granting degrees in the liberal arts and sciences as the National Deaf-Mute College. (At the same time, blind students were transferred to another school). Women were first admitted in 1887. In 1894 the name was changed to Gallaudet College in honor of Edward Gallaudet’s
father, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who founded the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States (now the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford, Conn.). In 1986, the name of the school was changed again to Gallaudet University to reflect that its mission had grown to include graduate programs.

2 Though it might seem peculiar to refer to the Deaf culture as "oral," American Sign Language (as well as other natural sign languages) is oral in the sense that it is not a written language. The Deaf culture also exhibits characteristics of an oral culture, such as its value placed on performance story-telling.

3 Even hearing parents of deaf children who think they are quite involved in their child's education by choosing an education method for the child, meeting with teachers, etc., may still be unable to communicate well enough with their deaf child to provide the essential education that takes place in the home.

4 Although the educational segregation of the deaf has resulted in denying the deaf the education needed to succeed in a predominantly hearing world, many deaf strongly support maintaining the system of residential schools for the deaf because mainstreaming can produce an even greater segregation—segregation from communication with peers. Instead, the deaf who support residential schools call for curricular reform and for putting more deaf people in administrative and teaching positions within the schools. The segregation of the past allowed educators to set different, lower standards for deaf students, but advocates of deaf schools argue that standards can be raised while maintaining the social benefits of an all-deaf school.

5 See chapter three on deaf education methods for further explanation of these different forms of communication used by the deaf.
Chapter 2

The Deaf Experience

The previous chapter discusses why those of us in composition need to be prepared to teach deaf students. Part of our learning to meet the needs of other groups of students ill served by traditional pedagogy and practices, such as women and African-Americans, involved becoming informed about the experiences of that group in order both to understand what they bring to the classroom experience and to discover ways to serve them better. For example (to oversimplify), African-American studies brought to composition studies a linguistic appreciation and understanding of Black English as a rule-bound dialect, just as Standard English is a rule-bound dialect, and taught us to broaden the scope of the writings we use in English to those from many cultures. Similarly, familiarity with what it means to be part of the deaf minority will help hearing teachers meet the needs of such students while providing an opportunity for hearing students to learn something about deafness.

Capitalization conventions make the word “deaf” in the above chapter title ambiguous. In the world of the deaf, “Deaf” with a capital “D” refers to the culturally deaf, while “deaf” refers to the physical condition—to anyone who has hearing loss great enough to make communication by aural means extremely difficult or impossible. In other words, the Deaf are part of the deaf, but the reverse is not always true. The equivalent distinction in ASL reserves DEAF (English glosses, approximate English translations of ASL signs are by convention written in capital letters to signify that they are glosses rather than translation) to refer to the culturally deaf (Padden and Humphries 39). Others
with hearing loss are referred to by such signs as ORAL or HARD-OF-
HEARING. The latter term, in ASL usage, can refer more to behavior than to
degree of hearing loss. Distinctions among the categories are not always
clear-cut, though. Deaf people actually are often somewhere on the
continuum between complete reliance on speech and speechreading for face-
to-face communication to complete reliance on ASL. Real animosity exists
between the two extremes; they use derogatory terms for each other, such as
"HEARING" (oralists) or "deafculter" (ASL-only user). Similar classifying can
be seen among racial minorities, such as when a black American who
ascribes to the value system of the majority white culture (by speaking
standard English, associating with white people, etc.) is called "white" by those
who identify with the African-American culture. I was deaf for over seven
years before I made my first contacts with Deaf culture and almost certainly
will never be a complete insider because of my strong ties to hearing culture,
of which I can also never be a complete insider.

When I first lost my hearing in 1979, when I was ten years old, I
thought that being deaf just meant that I could not hear any more. The
communication difficulties most hearing people immediately associate with
deafness were my initial experience of deafness; I suddenly could barely (or
not at all) understand my parents, siblings, doctors, and friends. Since I was
already literate, I "solved" the problem by always having writing materials with
me, but even so I missed a lot, including conversations of immense
importance to me, such as those between my doctors and my parents. I also
immediately experienced the prevailing (hearing) view of deafness as a
medical condition as I underwent test after test to diagnose the degree and type of my hearing loss, to find out if the medical establishment could treat my "condition." The public school system in New Orleans allowed me, at the insistence of my parents, to continue in "hearing" classes because by the time I lost my hearing I was too far ahead academically of the "deaf" classes in the system. I started sixth grade about a month and a half after losing my hearing; I simply continued in the gifted and talented program I had attended the year before. (I even continued playing my violin in the school orchestra, but quit the next year.)

I was required to take speech therapy, which I hated. In speech therapy I had to try to speechread differences between lists of look-alike words like "bat, pat, mat" and "be, pea, me," and practice vocalizing the differences between linguistically close sounds, such as s/z and v/f. Since through high school I was the only deaf student in my schools, having speech therapy during the school day meant that I had to miss class, which made it even more difficult for me to keep up with what was going on. The speech therapy was probably most valuable to me when I first lost my hearing because the therapist was able to teach me how to monitor my voice without being able to hear it. However, after learning the basics I found that the best speech therapy was less helpful than the practice real communication situations gave me. Therapy could not help with all of the variables present in real oral communication, such as the nervousness I felt giving oral presentations in class, which tended to make me speak too quickly and raise my pitch too high. Learning to speechread my therapist, who enunciated well,
did not help me understand people who did not speak just as she did. Therefore, even though all deaf students were required to take speech therapy, by the time I was in high school I managed to see my therapist very little.

My speech therapy experience—being required to have it regardless of need because of a conception educators have of the deaf—is emblematic of what it means to be deaf in America because hearing people decided I needed speech therapy based solely on their conception of deafness, not on my individual needs. Because the hearing world has created a social construction of deafness based on its own hearing-centered values, the attitudes of hearing people do play a large role in what it means to be deaf. In order to mainstream deaf students in their classes as successfully as possible, hearing teachers need to understand deafness as hearing loss, Deafness as a culture, and deafness as an “other” in hearing society.

DEAFNESS AS HEARING LOSS

How a deaf person experiences his or her deafness depends greatly on the degree of hearing loss, the type of hearing loss, and the age of onset. The degree of hearing loss, measured in decibels, indicates how much residual hearing a deaf person has; relatively few deaf people are completely deaf. Hearing aids take advantage of residual hearing. The degree of hearing loss may also vary across the range of frequencies. Two people with the same average degree of hearing loss may thus have a differing degree of speech comprehension if one has greater loss in the speech frequency
ranges than the other. This also means that not all deaf people who wear hearing aids can use the aids to understand speech.

The type of hearing loss—where the physical damage occurs—affects the usefulness of hearing aids or surgery to (at least partially) restore hearing. Hearing loss can be caused at any point from the ear into the area of the brain that processes sound. Generally, sensio-neural hearing loss, that which originates in the inner ear or along the auditory nerve to the brain processing centers, is most severe and most difficult to treat from a medical standpoint. My own hearing loss is sensio-neural. The Cochlear Implant, which seeks to “cure” hearing loss caused by damage to the tiny hairs in the cochlea that transmit signals to the auditory nerve, is currently being used for some such losses. The implant is not a hearing aid; hearing aids amplify sound to provide greater stimulation for the ear to work with, while the implant provides direct electrical stimulation of the auditory nerve to mimic what the ear does. The implant is surgically placed into the skull to receive the impulses from an externally worn processor. Currently the implant is not able to provide the equivalent of normal hearing. Some implantees find the device more helpful than others do. Also, implants have been improved in the fifteen or so years they have been in use. The implant is controversial among the deaf, not only because the Deaf do not see their hearing loss as needing correction, but also because of the possible dangers associated with surgery and with the unknown effect of long-term electrical stimulation so close to the brain. The implant itself and the medical care and follow-up therapy are also very expensive. In addition, the electronic components of the implant, like other
electronic devices, can break and quickly become outdated as newer models are phased into use.

Implantation in young children is especially controversial. Advocates argue that for the child to get full benefit of the implant for the development of spoken language, the implant must be done early, while opponents of the implant (or at least of the procedure on children) argue that the risks are too great and the possible benefits too unreliable to implant in those too young to give their informed consent. Cochlear implants are not used on anyone who has any significant residual hearing because inserting the implant destroys any residual hearing. My family investigated the cochlear implant not long after I lost my hearing, when implants were still experimental and not used on young children. We decided that the implant was not right for me.

Not everyone who could use a hearing aid wears one, either. Part of the reason is that hearing aids have not achieved the same acceptance in our society as eyeglasses have for correcting vision. Glasses can be fashion statements, not only as sun glasses or designer frames that are functional, but also as part of a “look.” I had a friend in college who wore non-prescription glasses just to look smarter, but I have never met anyone who wore a hearing aid for any other than purely functional purposes. Hearing aids carry much more of the stigma of deafness as a disability than glasses do for blindness, perhaps because glasses are so common and have been around longer, but also perhaps because the public has other assistive devices for the blind to carry the stigma, such as the cane or seeing eye dog. Benderly explains that at least 6 to 10 percent of the population has hearing bad enough to make the attempt [to wear a hearing aid] worthwhile, but only about 1
percent use them. Even the industry considers their potential market no larger than an additional 2 or 3 percent. The ethos of that business in part explains why, and explains a good deal else about the plight of many hearing-impaired. In the popular mind and in the industry’s promotions, the only good hearing aid is a small one, and the best hearing aid is nearly invisible. (10)

Hearing-aid earmolds are normally “flesh colored” to make them easier to hide. Refusal to acknowledge hearing loss, or to wear a visible indication of hearing loss, does not explain why Deaf people also sometimes refuse hearing aids when, according to their audiograms, they have enough residual hearing to benefit from the magnification hearing aids provide. After all, Deaf people show the world they are deaf in other ways, especially by conversing in sign. One explanation is that hearing aids are relatively high-maintenance electronic devices. They run on batteries, which of course must be regularly replaced; electronic components can, of course, break down. Hearing aids are expensive, and are often not covered by medical insurance. Physical discomfort is a further reason some people decline to wear hearing aids: ear molds are supposed to fit the individual, but that does not guarantee comfort. In addition, and many hearing people do not realize this, hearing aids cannot correct hearing as well as eyeglasses correct vision, and thus may deliver more background-sounds or “noise” than useable speech.

Children often do not have a choice about wearing hearing aids. Parents usually want their deaf child to wear a hearing aid even if the aid only provides access to some background noise for safety reasons, so that the child can hear sirens, alarms, oncoming traffic, and so on. Many schools and programs for deaf children require all students to wear aids. Some also
provide special hearing aids for use in school. For example, there are hearing aid systems that allow all students in a class to have their hearing aids connected directly to the teacher’s microphone; such a system helps eliminate environmental noise, but also means deaf students can hear only the teacher. Some programs have students wear large “body” hearing aids which are designed to allow deaf child to feel the vibrations of sound with the goal of teaching them to distinguish between different sounds. However, none of these special hearing aid systems are practical for everyday use.

The age of onset, the age at which an individual becomes deaf, greatly affects language and speech acquisition. The earlier the loss of hearing, the more severe the consequences for the acquisition of spoken language. Hearing loss is commonly described as prelingual or postlingual: the postlingually (after age 3 or 4) deaf normally have an easier time with spoken language and are able to transfer this to written language. Disagreement exists over how late hearing loss can occur and still be considered prelingual loss. The adventitiously deaf are those who became deaf sometime after birth and thus had at least some exposure to spoken language. Helen Keller, who lost her hearing at 18 months was prelingually but adventitiously deaf. The term “prevocationally deaf” is used as another way of grouping deaf people based on age of onset; the prevocationally deaf are those who have had to get at least part of their education while deaf. The term emphasizes the difficulty of acquiring education as a deaf person in a hearing world. In addition, hearing loss can occur either gradually (especially in the case of certain genetically determined deafness) or all at once.
The physical aspects of deafness—degree, type, and age of onset—obviously exist in many different combinations. Thus, the loss itself accounts for variety in the experiences of the deaf population, but educational and social experiences also help create the differences that contribute to where a deaf person is on the communication continuum from oral to Deaf.

DEAFNESS AS A COMMUNICATION BARRIER

At many colleges and universities studies related to deafness, such as courses in sign language or deaf culture, are offered through the communication disorders department. Deafness as a communication disorder has received more treatment by professionals and scholars—mostly hearing professionals and scholars—than any other aspect of deafness. To call deafness a communication disorder is very much a hearing point of view, expressing the fact that deaf people do not communicate in exactly the same way as hearing people. For certainly deaf people, like everyone else, can communicate. In fact, the deaf population provides one of the greatest testimonies to humans' inborn language potential. Young deaf children from hearing families who are unable to make meaning from any spoken language (either from residual hearing, speechreading, or the written word) regularly invent their own rudimentary languages of "home sign." Deaf culture in North America has its own language, American Sign Language, a visio-spatial language few hearing people fully master. In fact, the deaf population as a whole probably communicates better with hearing people in their auditory-based language than hearing people ever do communicating with the deaf in their visual language. If everyone (or most people) were deaf, hearing loss as
a communication barrier would be a non-issue. (There are historically
documented cases of isolated populations with much higher than normal
instances of deafness, such as on Martha’s Vinyard in the 19th century, where
so many people—deaf and hearing—could communicate in sign that deafness
was not a barrier to everyday communication. Such isolated populations with
high rates of intermarriage perpetuate genetic deafness.)

Nevertheless, all deaf people, even the most skilled in speech and
speechreading, experience deafness as a communication barrier in a world
geared to aural communication. For instance, skilled speechreaders get lost
in group discussions, such as a graduate seminar or a business meeting,
because by the time the deaf person is able to focus attention on each new
speaker, that speaker may be well into his or her remarks. And this is
assuming that only one person speaks at a time. Civic and cultural events
conducted via speech, such as political debates, public lectures, and theater,
are not fully accessible to the deaf without the provision of special
accommodations. Deaf people thus miss acquiring information hearing
people take for granted. Carol Erting explains:

Because a deaf person requires as much information as a hearing
person, a basic goal for deaf people is to acquire information and to
communicate with others in the most efficient way possible, both to
avoid visual fatigue and to free their visual attention for the next activity
or demand. This goal is not peripheral, rather it is a central organizing
principle for their lives. Success in achieving it is necessary in a world
in which effective information processing and management are keys to
survival. (131)
The need for access to information, for communication, serves to unite all deaf people along the spectrum from purely oral to the Deaf person who cannot speak.

The invisibility of deafness creates its own problems. Since a deaf person does not "look" deaf unless a hearing aid is visible or he is signing, hearing people assume the deaf person is hearing, also, thus creating ample opportunity for missed communications. At best, the hearing person will think the deaf person rude for not appropriately responding (as Jerry Seinfeld did in an episode of Seinfeld where a deaf tennis ball girl, played by Marlee Matlin, seems to ignore him, when she does not even know he is there) and at worse the deaf person can be in danger. Deaf people have been shot and killed by police and others for not heeding spoken warnings.

Until the institution of relay systems throughout the United States as part of the ADA, the telephone provided another communication barrier for deaf people. Without a relay system, deaf people could call only the few others who had a Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDDs, also known as a Teletype or TTY and as a Text Telephone or TT). Some communities did have relay systems prior to being legally required to do so, often sponsored by local deaf organizations; even these were often not twenty-four-hour services. The current law provides for relay systems to provide operators at all times to relay a call between a deaf and hearing person by reading out what the deaf person types through a TDD to the hearing person, and then typing back the hearing person's response. A relatively new feature to relay systems, voice carry over (VCO), allows deaf people with good speech skills to speak for
themselves over the phone while the operator still types the hearing person's response. Relay operators are required to keep all calls confidential.

Unfortunately, the relay is only as good as the operator, and although most operators are competent and handle calls professionally (and, in my experience, are getting somewhat better now that relay services have been mandated nationwide for several years), some are better than others. As the party on the TDD end of relay conversations, I continue to be frustrated with operators' poor typing skills; some operators make a lot of typing errors.

Most hearing people are unaware of the existence of the relay system (although everyone pays for it through surcharges on telephone bills) or even of the existence of TDDs; some refuse to take relay calls, perhaps suspecting the call is from a telemarketer. Others talk to the operator instead of the deaf person, even though operators explain the system to each person called unless asked not to. But perhaps more isolating is that either few businesses or organizations know how to initiate contact with a deaf person over the phone or they do not care to make the extra effort required. Many modern TDDs have a recorded voice to announce to those calling with a regular phone that they have reached a TDD. All TDDs also make a distinctive beeping noise when the deaf person answers the phone and starts typing (the beeps are the electronic signals encoding the typed message from the TDD). I have yet to answer such a call on my TDD and have a business call back through the relay. My hearing husband is able to take such calls when he is home, but not all deaf people have a resident hearing person. Perhaps the growing presence of TDD-equipped pay phones in some public areas, such
as airports, convention centers, shopping centers, and college campuses, in addition to providing access to the deaf, will make the hearing population more aware of the ability of the deaf to communicate by phone. However, just through talking to friends and acquaintances I know that most do not notice the existence of pay TDDs, not even when they have used a phone so equipped.

Another form of electronically transmitted type—closed captioning—has made it possible for deaf people to benefit from the mass communication of television and the movies. The first television shows were captioned in 1980. (The FCC set aside part of the transmission band for captioning, and the government provided some funding.) Captioned news allows deaf people, for the first time, to access news without waiting for the daily newspaper.¹ Network newscasts are captioned, as is much of CNN. Some local newscasts are captioned, at least in part. (Some local stations use the text of the TelePrompTer for their captions—and thus the deaf viewer misses live segments and any ad-lib sections.) Virtually all national network broadcasts, including sports, are now captioned, as are most syndicated shows. Late-night talk shows were one of the last areas of network television to be captioned. They made the switch to captioning with the changes following the retirement of Johnny Carson. Captioned movies, both on television (including cable) and on videos further expand access to popular culture. Most current release films are inaccessible because open captioned showings are rare. This expanded access is important because popular culture is an essential component of American society.
Significantly, one cable network that does not regularly caption is MTV. During the summer of 1995, an internet newsgroup, Deaf-I, had a thread going on how to convince MTV to caption both music videos and its non-music fare, such as the cartoon “Beavis and Butthead” and the show “The Real World.” Most hearing people do not realize that deaf people often are interested in (or at least curious about) music. Those with residual hearing can even hear some music, and even those of us who are stone-deaf can feel the rhythm and beat. Heather Whitestone, Miss America 1995, the first deaf person to win that competition, performed ballet in the talent competition using her residual hearing and ability to feel the music to dance to it. Lack of knowledge about popular music is a communication barrier for a deaf person in the hearing world, especially for a deaf student among hearing classmates in a culture where popular music is especially important to teenagers and young adults. Operators of MTV and other music-video channels might not realize deaf and hearing-impaired people might want to watch their channels. They also might be reluctant to print the lyrics to much of today’s popular music. When I have seen captioned popular music (such as by music guests on late-night talk shows or on Saturday Night Live) with hearing friends, they usually make comments like, “Oh, so that’s what the words are.” As a deaf person I find it very difficult to understand the point of lyrics no one can understand, but if unintelligibility is an important aspect of the music, that could explain why videotaped music is so rarely captioned.

Another form of electronics—computers and the internet—makes communication between the deaf and hearing possible in cyberspace. Online,
deaf people are able to lurk in on conversations (and pick up incidental information) as they cannot in real space. For once, the size of a group does not matter, and deafness-related discussion groups or bulletin boards allow deaf people who use different communication methods for face-to-face conversations a place to "get together" to discuss common concerns. However, the deaf community as a whole is still not able to benefit fully from the possibilities inherent in computer technology both because of the cost and because of low literacy levels in the deaf community. Low literacy levels are a significant barrier in internet communications since many users criticize others whose English usage is not perfect.

Deaf Americans are also able more and more often to share in cultural and civic events such as the theater, poetry or fiction readings, public lectures, and political speeches as more such events are regularly interpreted for the deaf. Legislating expanded communication opportunities for the deaf--from use of the telephone to access to popular culture and mass media to local civic events--is in every sense of the word civil rights law, allowing the deaf to participate in American civilization. Being able to choose to watch and understand Oprah or Murphy Brown might not seem an essential civil right, but icons of popular culture play central roles in public debate, both as a type of forum themselves and as topics of debate. Removing the barriers to communication between the deaf and hearing involves not only making the form of communication accessible, but also the content.

Most of these expanded communication options are highly print dependent. Deaf usage of TDDs, the internet, and closed captioning is
evidence of the special importance of literacy in the lives of the deaf.

Teachers can build on these real-life literacy events. For suggestions on how to do so, see chapter six on composition course content.

**DEAF CULTURE AND THE NON-DEAF DEAF**

At least partly because of their (forced) isolation from the mainstream of American society, groups of deaf people have created their own culture, their own community, a community created not by geography but by language. Deaf culture is not easy to define, nor the Deaf community to identify. Not only is there a continuum of degrees of participation as in all other cultures and communities, but also the Deaf culture itself is changing. The one crucial aspect of Deaf culture that those who write about it agree on is its members' use of ASL. The language is much more important than degree of hearing loss, which is why it is possible to be deaf but not Deaf, and hard-of-hearing but Deaf.

The crucial role ASL plays as indicator of Deaf culture shows in the ambiguous role hearing people fluent in ASL play in Deaf culture. Paul C. Higgens (a hearing child of deaf parents), who did a sociological investigation of the Chicago area Deaf community, writes

> If observers of deaf communities differ in their assessment as to whether or not hearing people are or are not members of deaf communities, perhaps members do themselves. Hearing-impaired or hearing people may be accepted by some members of deaf communities but not by others. Perhaps it may be more useful to view people as more or less members of deaf communities depending on their own actions and attitudes and the activities and attitudes of others in the deaf communities. . . . Due to personal experiences and orientations, activities, and other existing ties, individuals would be tied more or less directly and more or less closely to one another. Wherever the boundaries would be drawn would be somewhat arbitrary. However, the above suggests that in whatever ways deaf
communities are conceptualized and their boundaries drawn, many of their members are likely to share a culture which separates them from the larger society. ("Deaf Community" 159)

Hearing people who know ASL are almost always either close family members of a Deaf person and/or employed in a profession serving the deaf. Hearing children of Deaf parents (known in the Deaf world as CODAs—children of deaf adults) are likely to learn ASL as their first language, their mother tongue (mother hand?), and thus be more fluent in ASL than an adult who grew up deaf in a hearing family and did not begin to learn signs until, as an adult, he sought out the Deaf community. In addition, a sizable percentage of interpreters and other hearing people working in professions serving the deaf are CODAs, and thus continue to interact with the Deaf community outside of the family.

The Deaf community/culture is so difficult to define, as well as unusual, because it is normally not transmitted from generation to generation within families as most cultural identities are; only about ten percent of deaf children have deaf parents and about ninety percent of the children of deaf parents are hearing. Hearing parents, like many hearing people (as I will discuss later in the chapter), rarely know very much about deafness, much less about Deaf culture; they may have a (quite understandable) desire for their child to communicate in the language of their own culture—English—rather than in ASL, a “foreign” language. These parents would probably be quite pleased for their child to grow up to be labeled as HEARING by the deaf community, because that means their child is an oral success, a part of the hearing parents’ culture.
Complex Attitudes Toward ASL

ASL is actually a "native" American language, much more so than English which, of course, came with colonists from England. ASL is a descendant of French Sign Language (LSF), brought over to the United States by Laurent Clerc, the deaf teacher Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet recruited from France in 1816 to be a teacher at the first school for the deaf in the United States, and of the sign already in use by the deaf in Connecticut, with some loan words from English (via fingerspelling).²

The education establishment (primarily hearing people) has failed to supplant ASL with a signed English not only because the Deaf are proud of their language, but also because ASL grammar is suited to its visual-spatial modality, while English, developed in an aural-oral modality, is not. For instance, English speakers perceive ASL as lacking pronouns, and so signed English systems invent signs for pronouns. Yet ASL does have a way of indicating information that English relates through pronouns, through use of space (which, of course, is unavailable in non-spatial English). The ASL signer designates a certain spot to "hold" each referent, and then when she needs to refer to the referent, simply designates that spot; there is no possibility for ambiguity. (Composition teachers might wish English permitted such a device.) For a signer, adding signs for such elements present in English but not in ASL slows communication. Since languages (including signed languages) tend to modify towards ease of production, trying to make a signed language "fit" a spoken one is a linguistic step backwards. The Deaf community has instinctively fought such attempts to modify their language,
even while recognizing the desirability of using all aids possible to learn the language of the hearing community. I will go into more detail on differences between ASL and English in the chapters on deaf education and on linguistic difficulties associated with the deaf.

The Deaf community does, and long has, used English-like signing, primarily because so few hearing people manage to learn "real" ASL. English-like signing even carries a cachet of prestige because it is the language of formal education, including that used at college level. English-like signing, known as Pidgin Signed English (PSE) consists primarily of ASL signs in English word order. The Deaf who are able to sign approximations of English are more likely to have good jobs and communicate more easily with hearing people. Markowicz and Woodward explain this situation in the linguistic terms of diglossia, common where one linguistic group has more power than, or actively suppresses, another.

Signing that approaches English along the continuum serves as the "H" [high] variety and tends to be used in formal interaction, such as in church, the classroom, lectures, and in conversation with outsiders. Signing that approaches ASL is more like the "L" [low] variety in that it is used in less formal situations, such as intimate conversations. English is usually considered superior to ASL, while ASL is often regarded as ungrammatical or nonexistent. (5)

However, at the same time ASL has long contained a sign executed by performing the sign COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY upside down, to refer to the educated English-like signers. In ASL, reversal of a sign carries negative connotations; this sign, which means that the person so referred to is an intellectual snob who thinks she is better than the more uneducated deaf who do not know English well enough to use English-like signing, is no exception.
Until recently, ASL was considered mere gesture, or at best "broken English" or "baby English" without regular grammar. Spoken and written English were thought superior to it in every way. English glosses of ASL do look like bad English, but English glosses of any other language would look like bad English, too, since glosses simply substitute an English word approximately translating each sign. The French "Je t'aime" would be glossed I YOU LOVE. Not good English, but the original is good French. Thus, the language situation of the Deaf in America closely resembled that of natives in colonized countries where native languages were considered inferior to that of the imperialists, and where those natives who mastered the language of the imperialist (or who were at least skilled users of pidgin understandable to the colonists) were at once respected (for economic power, intelligence) by and seen as betraying their own people to serve those in power.

Today ASL is more accepted by the Deaf for use in formal situations, such as for presenting papers at conferences, thanks to several developments that have contributed to Deaf pride in ASL. In the sixties, William Stokoe, a professor at Gallaudet (then in the English department) undertook a study of sign language (against the advice of his colleagues). His description of ASL in linguistic terms proved that ASL is a language, and he developed a notation system to record these linguistic features of ASL (as a linguist might use the linguistic alphabet to represent on paper a spoken language). Other researchers, notably Ursula Bellugi at the Salk Institute, have done further analysis of ASL. The recognition of the complexity of ASL has helped make ASL not only essential to Deaf culture but also to Deaf pride. Benderly
describes how signing style (dialect) serves to announce social sympathy in a comparison with how dialect usage functions in the African-American culture:

Native signing close to ASL is, paradoxically, both a high- and a low-prestige form, depending on context, and the same is true of forms close to pidgin English. The latter imply a certain aura of sophistication and worldly success, such as a middle-aged black person with graduate degrees might cultivate [in using standard English]. The former, however, implies a genuineness, a claimed cultural purity and integrity, a closeness to the "people" such as a young black nationalist [speaking an inner-city dialect] might espouse. (224)

Signers skilled at both ends of the spectrum from ASL to English can, of course, change their dialect based on the situation. There have also been attempts to develop an acceptable, easy to use written form of ASL, but none has been established yet. Developing a written form would allow the Deaf culture to answer the critics who continue to insist, in spite of all the linguistic research on ASL in the past decades, that because ASL has no written form it is inferior to English.

Deaf Pride vs. Hearing Identification

The civil rights movement within the Deaf community has also inspired pride in ASL and in Deaf culture as a whole. The whole country (and world) followed the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest at Gallaudet in 1988, the most visible event in the fight for the rights of the deaf. DPN occurred when the governing board of Gallaudet (with a hearing chair and majority) chose Dr. Elizabeth Zinser, a hearing non-signer, to be the next president of Gallaudet, over two qualified deaf candidates. The successful student-led protest, which is documented in Jack Gannon's The Week the World Heard Gallaudet, led to the selection of Dr. I. King Jordan as Gallaudet's first Deaf president, the
establishment of a deaf majority on the Gallaudet governing board (with a deaf chairperson for the first time), and, perhaps most importantly, to a greater pride in Deaf culture throughout Deaf communities both in the United States and abroad. Awareness and acceptance of Deaf culture are allowing some deaf children, for the first time, to study ASL as a language in the newest trend in deaf education, known popularly as Bi/Bi (Bilingual/Bicultural—see chapter three).

However, since the 1970s, the more established forms of deaf education allowing sign have been something of a threat to ASL by teaching children to speak and sign (English) at the same time. "Today, an increasing number of deaf persons sign, fingerspell, and speak or mouth words simultaneously when talking in mixed crowds. Maintaining tightly closed lips is no longer in vogue. The old sign language masters would have winced at such a sight" (Gannon 376). Speaking English while signing pure ASL is as difficult as speaking English while simultaneously writing a translation in Chinese. Thus, the signer either uses a form of signed English or a pidgin while speaking or speaks nonstandard English while signing ASL. The Deaf pride movement has raised more interest in maintaining "pure" ASL, but ASL will probably continue becoming more and more influenced by English.

Unfortunately, for those of us who work to teach fluency in written English, the pride in ASL has translated among some Deaf students into seeing any English fluency as a betrayal of their culture. Although, as I will discuss in chapter three, the educational system has failed deaf students, "differences in patterns of literacy can be understood in terms of culturally
determined attitudes about the appropriateness of a given communication mode for a given social activity" (Maxwell 206). and attitudes both within and without the Deaf community make English literacy more difficult for a Deaf child or adult to attain.

[The Deaf community's] level of literacy, as measured by reading tests, is quite low. Does this low level of educational literacy signify little use of literacy? What value is placed on literacy and different uses of literacy? Sign and speech are highly weighted culturally and emotionally in the deaf community. Is writing? (Maxwell 207)

Deaf students in our classrooms may very well appreciate the necessity for fluency in written English in our information-oriented society while on another level resist mastering the written form of a language long associated with the oppression of their culture. At the same time, English cannot but seem to be a "dead" language to students who use it only for writing and associate the language mostly with school. There is also the question, which I raised in chapter one and will discuss further later, as to whether or not the reading tests yielding such poor results are culturally weighted against the Deaf. If Deaf people have such difficulty reading and writing, how do they manage to understand captioned films and television, and to use the TDD?

There is no question, however, that speech—or rather, not speech itself but the valuing of speech over a natural sign language—is rejected by the Deaf culture. Deaf people readily acknowledge that possessing understandable speech, along with an ability to speechread, makes life easier in a world where most people are hearing. Thus, a Deaf person may very well possess excellent speech skills. What "members of the deaf community commonly condemn [is] a deaf acquaintance who is ORAL [signed with an O-shaped
hand moving with a circular motion at the mouth]—that is, who does not fully
acknowledge that he is deaf" (Lane 6). ASL provides a rich vocabulary for
describing these deaf individuals who in English are simply "oral." Reliance on
speech most likely means the deaf person is THINK-HEARING, literally a deaf
person who subscribes to the hearing world's values. It is signed by forming
the sign HEARING—index finger extended from hand, parallel to floor with
palm facing the signer moving in a forward circular motion—at the forehead
rather than in its usual position at the mouth; that HEARING is signed at the
mouth is further evidence that speech ability, not hearing, is the important
characteristic. Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, two Deaf authors, describe
two more ASL synonyms for ORAL given to them by friends:

MIND RICH and ALWAYS PLAN. ORAL individuals are stereotypically
represented as members of the establishment, as coming from hearing
families that are inflexible about their children's behavior. As the belief
goes, the richer the family, the more likely the family will embrace
oralism (MIND RICH). The second stereotype portrays a typical ORAL
person as one who actively tries to pass as hearing, and must be alert
to every possible situation in order to pass successfully (ALWAYS
PLAN). In its strongest connotations, ORAL means one who "cozies
up to the oppression and uncritically embraces the world of others." (51-52)

The goal of oral deaf education is to allow deaf children to join hearing
society; for orally oriented deaf, the ability to "pass," to be able to function
comfortably in public places such as a restaurant or grocery store without
anyone else noticing one's deafness, is desirable. For the Deaf reliance on
speech is an indication that the oral deaf accept that deaf people, as a
minority, should assimilate as much as possible with the hearing; that is, that
they should deny, as far as possible, that they are deaf.
A deaf person need not even be strictly oral to incur such criticism from portions of the Deaf community. Marlee Matlin, the actress, and Heather Whitestone, Miss America 1994, have both been criticized by some members of the Deaf culture because, although both deaf women sign, they also speak. Both women have chosen (at least part of the time) to speak (and thus to appeal) to hearing audiences rather than to use their visibility to affirm Deaf culture by signing. Harlan Lane explains that

Marlee Matlin won the admiration of many hearing people when she chose to speak aloud on national television, rather than through an interpreter, on receiving the Oscar for her role as a culturally deaf person in the film *Children of a Lesser God*. By the same act she incurred criticism from some members of the American deaf community. For them, in those few halting words she negated the principles of the story she had so brilliantly enacted; she chose symbolically not to accept the award as a member of the deaf community; and she seemed to endorse the view that any amount of English is better for deaf people than the most eloquent American Sign Language. (8-9)

Each woman made a rhetorical choice to appeal to the hearing majority rather than to her fellow Deaf rooted in the ethical need to establish credibility to participate in, and be paid attention to by, the culture that awards success—the hearing culture, not the Deaf one. Members of other oppressed-language minorities have made the opposite ethical choice to renounce the language of the oppressor to show solidarity with their native culture. One example is the writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o who decided to cease writing in English, the language once forced on his native Kenya, even though doing so means less economic success. Perhaps in the near future a prominent Deaf person will make a similar choice.
Deaf culture itself, like any living culture, is changing. Shifting trends in the way deaf children are educated (see chapter three on deaf education) are responsible for many of these changes. For instance, the trend away from residential schools towards some form of mainstreaming means that the residential school, or even the deaf-only day school of some larger cities, can no longer serve as the introduction to Deaf culture that it had for most Deaf people for over a century. Other changes result, paradoxically, from the very civil rights the Deaf worked so hard to achieve. Closed captioning, for instance, means that the deaf clubs (where the earliest captioned films were shown) are less important as centers of entertainment because the deaf can watch a full range of television and movies at home. The relay system means they can call anyone, not just other people with TDDs.

The idea of the need for civil rights and equal access for the deaf is itself a relatively recent addition to Deaf culture. Deaf culture’s more traditional stance was to avoid any special accommodation (other than schools for the deaf) because of the community’s view that deafness is not a disability. For instance, Deaf people resisted the attempts of well-meaning legislators to institute a special income tax deduction for the deaf like that already provided for the blind. Deaf peddlers, deaf people who use their hearing loss as a sympathy ploy to sell cheap goods to hearing people at inflated prices, were actively condemned by the Deaf community for creating the impression among the hearing that Deaf people can not make an honest living (Gannon 255-259). However, “the modern language of ‘access’ and ‘civil rights,’ as unfamiliar as it is to Deaf people, has been used by Deaf
leaders because the public understands these concerns more readily than ones specific to the Deaf community" (Padden and Humphries 44). In other words, the previous contentment of Deaf culture to exist on the fringes of American society is being replaced by an insistence that the Deaf be recognized as part of the multicultural heritage of this country.

HEARING ATTITUDES

The relatively small size of the deaf population, coupled with the tendency, intentional or not, to segregate the deaf, first in special schools and then in a narrow range of trades, means that most hearing people have little or no personal experience with deafness. That fact alone would probably be enough to explain the negative attitudes that hearing people as a whole hold about deaf people, but even hearing professionals who work with the deaf express many of the same attitudes. Harlan Lane, a hearing man who has done extensive research on the history of the deaf and Deaf culture, collected the following descriptions of deaf people from his readings in 350 books and articles published during the 1970's and 1980's. It is worth quoting in full to show just how little acquaintance with the deaf modified the writers' hearing-based attitudes towards the deaf.

Some Traits Attributed to Deaf People in the Professional Literature

Social: depends on admiration; asocial; childlike; clannish; competitive; conscience weak; credulous; dependent; disobedient; irresponsible; isolated; morally undeveloped; role-rigid; shy; submissive; suggestive; unsocialized.

Cognitive: conceptual thinking poor; concrete; doubting; egocentric; failure externalized; failure internalized; insight poor; introspection: none; language: none; language poor; mechanically inept; naïve; reasoning restricted; self-awareness poor; shrewd; thinking unclear; unaware; unintelligent.

Behavioral: aggressive; androgynous; conscientious; hedonistic; immature; impulsive; initiative lacking; interests few; motor
development slow; personality undeveloped; possessive; rigid; shuffling gait; stubborn; suspicious; unconfident. Emotional: anxiety, lack of; depressive; emotionally disturbed; emotionally immature; lack of empathy; explosive; frustrated easily; irritable; moody; neurotic; paranoid; passionate; psychotic reactions; serious; temperamental; unfeeling. (36)

As Lane observes, "this is a disturbing list—all the more so as these descriptions come from studies published in professional journals, studies that say they used impartial scientific testing" (35). Lane does not present a balanced case—there were articles within the time frame he cites with more positive descriptions of the deaf—but the existence of such negative articles at all is cause for concern, especially since professionals-in-training read these articles and books. Padden and Humphries explain that the hearing viewpoint that deafness is a deficiency explains why professionals such as those quoted by Lane, "describe in detail the facts of hearing impairment, and ... classify Deaf people in terms of the degree of impairment. Other facts about them, notably those about their social and cultural lives, are then interpreted as consequences of these classifications" (10). Lane lists "lack of empathy" as one characteristic hearing people have ascribed to the deaf; perhaps it should be the other way around.

The lack of empathy of professionals serving the deaf for what it is really like to be deaf shows most visibly in through reluctance not only to give deaf people more control, but even to listen to their concerns. For instance, hearing administrators who valued speech and sound kept teaching positions in most schools for the deaf through most of this century closed to their own graduates. After all, "if educators, employers and significant others such as
parents—in general hearing people—typically believed that deaf people were
defective, then it made sense that they did not provide similar educational,
occupational, and other opportunities and challenges to deaf people as were
provided to those believed not to be defective (Higgens, Introduction x).
Donald F. Moores describes how the process worked in the world of deaf
education (where deaf teachers, much less Deaf teachers, are still only a
small percentage):

A number of forces may be operating to keep the impact of deaf
teachers at a minimum. Although overt discrimination is not common
at present, it is still manifested occasionally in subtle ways. Of perhaps
greater importance is the effect of prior systematic discrimination
against the deaf by virtually all teacher training programs. Before 1970
the majority of teacher training programs had never accepted deaf
students . . . . Those teacher training programs accepting deaf
students tended to 'track' them toward teaching at junior and senior
high school levels on the grounds that educational programs for the
deaf placed an almost exclusive emphasis on speech in preschool and
elementary grades and would not hire deaf teachers to work with
young children. (26-27)

As shown in the previous chapter, by the time most deaf children get to junior
and senior high school they are already far behind their hearing peers in
academic achievement, thus limiting the impact of a deaf teacher, at best, to
repairing the damage done by previous teachers. Deaf teachers have also
been encouraged to teach in the vocational rather than the academic track.
One effect of the lack of deaf role models for young children observed by
many researchers is a tendency for young deaf children to think that either
they will not live to grow up, or that they will somehow become hearing,
because they have never seen a deaf adult. The situation is not quite so
extreme now in most schools for the deaf with the exception of strict oral
programs, but a continuing lack of strong role models for deaf children cannot but impact negatively on their developing self-conception. Mainstreamed deaf children are even less likely to have Deaf (or deaf) role models. One of the arguments against mainstreaming is that hearing schools are unlikely to hire deaf teachers for classes including hearing children, and thus deprive deaf children in those programs of an important source of positive deaf adult role models. I know that I had a very difficult time imagining myself in the teaching career I always wanted because all of my teachers were hearing.

Hearing professionals with careers focused on the deaf are, of course, only a small minority of hearing society, but they do reflect general perceptions about, and reactions to, deafness and deaf people. Paul Higgens defines “deafism” as “the set of assumptions and practices which promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of their deafness...Typically unnoticed assumptions of the larger hearing world have a profound impact on deaf people” (Introduction ix). Almost invariably these assumptions are rooted in the inability of most hearing people to imagine functioning without auditory input. Deaf people have learned that “the realm of sound very often involves issues of control. It is not surprising that what others use as a central definition of their own lives, sound, should become a powerful tool of control” (Padden and Humphries 100). Hearing people are attuned to sound; after all, hearing cannot be “turned off” by closing the ears the way sight can be suspended by closing the eyes. Sound is a constant presence.

Thus, activities not really dependent on sound appear to be so to hearing people. A common example is the ability to safely drive a car. One
question that has come up every time I have spoken to college-level communication or communication disorders classes, by students who have supposedly received some instruction about deafness, is “Can you drive?” or, if the asker is already aware that deaf people are allowed to drive, “How can you drive?” Deaf people still encounter difficulty obtaining automobile insurance, even though such discrimination is technically illegal. In 1990, my car insurance company, when they found out I was deaf, wanted me to provide medical documentation. When my husband and I asked that the company put their request in writing they never mentioned it again. In the past there were periodic attempts to outlaw deaf drivers. Even hearing people, such as those in the insurance industry, who are aware of studies showing that deaf drivers are actually among the safest drivers seem unable to believe the statistics. In actuality, the constant practice deaf people have in taking in information visually is applied to driving. Deaf drivers can also use visual cues to receive information most drivers hear. Strobe lights (and the behavior of other drivers) warn of the approach of an emergency vehicle; today there are also special dashboard-mounted devices that warn deaf drivers of traffic noises such as horns and sirens. In any case, hearing drivers are often so bombarded by sound unrelated to driving—such as a blaring radio—that traffic sounds do not get through.

Attitudes about deaf drivers might not seem to have much to do with college composition, but the same inability of many hearing people to see from a deaf viewpoint does affect what happens to a deaf student on a predominantly hearing college campus. When hearing students are reluctant
to initiate (or even participate in) conversations with deaf classmates because of ignorance about communication abilities of deaf people. deaf students miss the social interaction that contributes to the value of college life. When teachers do not understand that deaf students cannot look at the overhead and "listen" to the instructor's explanation at the same time, deaf students miss crucial information. If neither teachers nor hearing students understand that many deaf students receive very poor education in elementary and secondary school, they will not understand that the low achievement levels of those deaf students are not caused by their deafness. And so on.

NOTES

1 Access to current news is one reason why printing was traditionally a prestige job in the Deaf community.

2 LSF is the language developed by the deaf in France: Abbe L'Eppe, a hearing priest who started the first school for the deaf in France, tried to change the signing used by his deaf pupils to make it more like French, but he eventually gave up and permitted the use of the language as developed by the deaf themselves. Similar attempts have been made to modify ASL into a signed form of English, as I will further discuss in chapter three, but ASL continues to have a grammar and vocabulary distinct from English.

3 Until fairly recently, Gallaudet was the only college where the deaf could have picked up the "educated" English-like signing, so such signing indicated the additional cachet of attendance at Gallaudet.
Chapter 3
Deaf Education

Of all the aspects of society that contribute to the poor English skills of the deaf, education is probably the most important. Therefore, background knowledge about the systems of deaf education currently used in the United States is essential to understanding the poor academic performance of so many deaf students. Deaf education is the focus of services provided to the deaf since most deaf adults can function well independently and pride themselves in doing so. Deaf children, however, are a captive crowd for whatever theory of deafness is in vogue with those entrusted with their educations.

Why do deaf students' educations so often fail them? Fail them in spite of the enormous resources, both public and private, in money, time, and effort, that have been spent (mostly by the hearing) to educate deaf children? Every educational method used in deaf education today has been used, in some form or another, in the past, if not in the United States, then abroad. In deaf education, "method" normally refers to the primary communication method employed, rather than to pedagogical approaches. Benderly explains that "every method hailed as revolutionary in our own time, be it auditory training, the simultaneous method, mainstreaming, even cued speech, has been tried at least once, and in some cases repeatedly, in the past. But as the argument is at bottom philosophical--almost religious--rather than technical, it shows no sign of abating" (115). Trends in deaf education follow a pattern similar to those in other forms of education: when frustration with
the method used reaches a high enough level, and when change occurs in how the goals or purpose of deaf education are viewed, a new method is likely to be introduced. For example, in the 1970's, the "total communication" method (TC) replaced "oral" (pure or hybrid) methods at schools all over the country because oralism was an obvious failure and because the schools were beginning to recognize the value of signing. Now there is enough dissatisfaction with the total communication method coupled with recognition that deaf people have a unique culture that the bilingual/bicultural method (popularly known as BiBi) is quickly gaining popularity, although there are still more TC programs than BiBi programs, along with a considerable number of oral and cued speech programs. ¹

Historically, the deaf education debate has been divided into two camps, oral vs. manual. In the United States, as in the rest of the western world, the split became very public in the last quarter of the 19th century. Internationally, the oralists won ascendancy at the 1880 conference of educators of the deaf in Milan, where the delegates passed a resolution in favor of using only the pure oral method with all deaf children. There were no deaf delegates to the conference, and the few delegates in favor of using sign language (including Edward M. Gallaudet, founder of Gallaudet University) were suppressed. In the United States, Gallaudet was opposed by Alexander Graham Bell. The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf (founded with Bell's Volta Award from France for inventing the telephone) continues to be a strong proponent of the oral method and maintains a medical view of deafness. Most members of the Bell Association are hearing people--
professionals serving the deaf, parents or other family members of the deaf: a small number of deaf adults belong to the oral deaf adults section, formed to serve as a proof that the oral method works. The Bell Association supports mainstreaming as an ultimate goal in education as a step towards full integration of the deaf person into hearing society. The current mission statement of the association, adopted on April 4, 1992, is printed in every issue of their bimonthly magazine, Volta Voices:

[Our goal] is to empower persons who are hearing impaired to function independently by promoting universal rights and optimal opportunities for such persons, from infancy through adulthood, to learn to use, maintain, and improve all aspects of their verbal communications, including their abilities to speak, speechread, use residual hearing, and process both spoken and written language. (1)

The competing organization, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), to which tens of thousands of deaf adults now belong, was formed, not coincidentally, in 1880 by the deaf community. The NAD promotes the use of American Sign Language and the maintenance of Deaf culture, including the continuing existence of residential schools. The Deaf community prides itself in contrasting the names of the two organizations: NAD is "of the Deaf" but the Bell Association is paternalistically "for the deaf."

Unfortunately, both sides have tended to go to extremes, unable to acknowledge any good in the other side's position. For instance, in 1967 when NBC made plans to show "Experiment in Television," a production of the National Theater of the Deaf, "the first major production using sign language on national television, the network received a telegram from the Alexander Graham Bell Association objecting to such plans and arguing that the
exposure of sign language on television would undermine the efforts of
'thousands of parents of deaf children and teachers of the deaf who are trying
to teach deaf children to speak’” (Gannon 346). NBC aired the show. The
NAD, on the other hand, has a reputation for not accepting choices for deaf
people that are contrary to Deaf culture. For instance, the NAD has actively
opposed cochlear implants, especially for children, because the NAD does not
believe that deafness needs to be cured.

The manual-oral debate continues to be played out in the schools
today, but in a somewhat fragmented manner. Pure oralists consider any
hand signals at all as inappropriate. Proponents of cued speech, who are just
as insistent on the primary importance of the deaf child’s learning speech,
acknowledge the fact that certain sounds look alike on the lips and use
specific hand shapes, in conjunction with lip movements (normal speech), to
convey speech sound information visually. The necessity to provide an exact
representation of English for deaf children also motivates those who advocate
fingerspelling, also known as the Rochester Method. This method of spelling
out every word is now mostly out of favor in the United States, although the
method is used elsewhere, such as in Russia, where the method is known as
neororalism. Total Communication poses as a compromise between the
oralists and the manualists by using speech, sign, and fingerspelling in various
combinations; in most classrooms this works out to using Simultaneous
Communication (SimCom), using one of the various English word order sign
systems while also speaking, with fingerspelling used for English words
without sign equivalent (or without one the teacher or interpreter knows).
Finally there are the advocates of using ASL as an instructional language in the classroom, and using ASL to teach English so that the deaf children will be bilingual—the method known as BiBi.

Though on the surface the broad oralist-manualist debate is not about the content of deaf education, communication method emphasis is closely related to content goals. For example, one of the arguments for bilingual/bicultural education for deaf children is that using ASL as an instructional language allows deaf children to maintain grade-appropriate content-learning by presenting content knowledge in the language easiest for the children to master. Oralists advocate focusing on speech learning early because mastery of English, including spoken English, will give the child the most direct access to information in the larger world.

COMMUNICATION METHODS IN THE SCHOOLS

Because of the oralism/manualist debate, I have divided my description of recent and current methods of deaf education into those two categories. Distinctions are not always easy to draw: I have grouped the methods based on whether the theoretical basis of the method supports the integrationist philosophy of oralism or the ease-of-communication philosophy of the manualists.

Oralism

I will discuss oralism first both because it has dominated deaf education in one form or another for much of its history and because its methods aim to integrate the deaf into hearing society. Pure oralism is based on the assumption that deaf children will not make the required effort to learn
speech and speechreading if they are allowed to use any form of manual communication simply because speech and speechreading are so much more difficult to master. Proponents of oral education traditionally forbid any manual communication not only in the classroom but also elsewhere in the school. They also advocate that parents discourage any manual communication at home. Strict oralists even discourage normal gestures that hearing people regularly use, such as pointing, to force deaf children to use speech. Oral schools focus on training children to use any residual hearing, and thus place emphasis on the use of hearing aids, and, more recently, cochlear implants for children who are candidates for them. Oralists argue that their method of deaf education is best because, when it succeeds, the deaf child can communicate with anyone in the larger English-speaking society. In addition, oralists also argue that the foundation of knowledge about spoken English that deaf children acquire through oral instruction is the best preparation for fluency in written English. Not surprisingly, oral methods seem to work best either with children who have significant residual hearing or who are postlingually deaf, and thus have an understanding of speech and sound. 

Most oral programs today are either in private schools for the deaf or in local school systems. One of the oldest and best known oral schools, Clarke School, in Massachusetts, is a private school. Arden Neisser describes the program:

Students remain at Clarke School for about twelve years. Average age at entrance is four, and most leave at sixteen, having had more than three thousand hours of speech training. The objective of the Clarke School is to mainstream all their students. Upon graduation they are encouraged to go on to a hearing high school. (126-427)
Most of these sixteen-year-olds enter hearing high schools not on the level of their age-mates, which would be approximately eleventh grade, but rather in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. Furthermore, a report "on the educational achievement of 310 graduates over a fourteen-year period shows the median reading level at 5.7—fifth grade plus seven months. Only 4 of the 310 were reading near grade level; those four ranged from 11.0 to 11.9" (Neisser 127). These statistics are better than the fourth-grade average reading level cited for deaf high school graduates around the nation, but not much better.

Apparently there is little connection between speech skills (or time spent in speech instruction) and literacy skills. However, proponents of the oral method place their highest priority on achievement of speech skills in order to allow the deaf child to interact "normally" with hearing people in day-to-day life; if deaf people lack oral communication ability, even excellent literacy skills will not allow them to assimilate into hearing society.

The oral method carries highly negative connotations in the Deaf world, even though all deaf people, especially those with poor speech skills, are aware of how important speech is in the hearing world. Deaf parents of deaf children usually want their children to have an opportunity to develop speech skills at school. What deaf people do object to are the negative attitudes towards deafness long held (and often still held) by proponents of the oral method. Lou Ann Walker, a hearing child of deaf parents, initially agreed with her oralist professors of deaf education—until she saw how they treated a deaf student in the same graduate program. She writes that the professors "treated that one deaf adult, a fellow professional."
condescendingly—almost inhumanely. The professors rarely talked to [the deaf student], even though she had had years of experience teaching the deaf—and being deaf" (138). As Neisser observes, “the oral schools may not have produced a large number of conversationalists, but they did produce several generations of deaf children who were quiet, stationary, inconspicuous, and quite acceptable to the hearing” (30). Oralism, if it succeeds on its own terms, makes the deaf person enough like a hearing one not to jar hearing society when she comes in contact with it. A true “oral success” can “pass” as hearing. In fact, it is my experience, and the experience of other deaf people with “passing” speech skills, that many hearing people simply refuse to believe that we are deaf. If we fit in too well, we too easily become invisible. For “oral failures,” the deficit in education from years of not being able to understand the teacher virtually guarantees a powerless (voiceless) position at the bottom of the economic ladder.

The following examples of “oral successes” are all typical of the pattern of possessing some residual hearing and/or a period of normal hearing prior to onset of deafness. One of the most famous deaf Americans, 1995 Miss America Heather Whitestone, has enough residual hearing to be able to use a hearing aid: she used her hearing aid to help her stay in time with the music when she danced in the talent portion of the pageant. Nevertheless, even after years of intense speech therapy, Whitestone still does not possess “normal” speech, although her speech is among the best for a person deaf from early in life, and hearing people are easily able to understand her. Whitestone was mainstreamed in public schools and also attended the oralist
Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis for two years. Unlike many, perhaps most, oral successes, Whitestone chose to learn sign language, and now uses sign language interpreters where she finds them necessary, such as in the classroom. To the extent that Whitestone does use sign language interpreters, she demonstrates vividly that the oralist proponents' claims that oral skills allow for complete integration into hearing society can never be entirely true because speechreading is impossible in many situations.

David Wright, a British writer, is another deaf oralist who found sign invading his oral education. Wright lost his hearing to scarlet fever when he was seven. His parents first hired a private tutor in London, where his mother had taken him from their home in South Africa to see if doctors could do anything for him. He then had a governess in South Africa who had been trained by his first teacher. Both emphasized speech training. He subsequently went to a school with hearing boys for a few years before being sent back to England at fourteen to attend a private school for the deaf in Northampton. Wright describes the policy of the school, also common to public and private schools for the deaf in America for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century:

The deaf-and-dumb alphabet we never used; it was strictly against the rules of the school. Most of the pupils, like myself, had never even learnt it. All communications were supposed to be oral. Our own sign-argot was of course strictly prohibited, like another habit we had of not using the voice when forming words (it makes for easier lipreading apart from the obvious advantage of cutting the risk of being overheard). But these rules could not be enforced without the presence of the staff. (60)
Wright goes on to describe how, since the sign system students used at the school was created at the school itself, it was useless for communicating with deaf people who had not gone to the school. In addition, among the least successful of the students, even among the older boys, oral vocabulary consisted of “no more than a couple of dozen words, mostly nouns” (61), although other students, like himself, had mastered English at least on average age level. Wright says that “our peculiar argot of signs and gestures in fact derived from those of us whose verbal equipment was smallest” (61), not surprising when one considers that with an English vocabulary of only a few dozen words such boys were unable to communicate meaningfully orally.

Wright later explains the oral methods used by teachers in class:

All teaching was done by the spoken word: we were expected to lipread (and did) every syllable uttered in class. The method of instruction cannot have differed much from that practised in hearing schools, apart from the immense pains taken to elucidate each subject. The substance of every sentence might be repeated over and over again, each time in a slightly different way, until the dullest had grasped the point. It would then be written down on the blackboard . . . By the end of the lesson a brief essay would have been chalked up, which we were then required to copy into our exercise books—ready-made notes of the lecture, as it were. (66-67)

Wright himself may have been able to gather each lesson through speechreading alone, especially since he had such good English skills. However, the boys Wright described earlier as having an English vocabulary that could be measured in dozens of words almost certainly could not follow the lecture, even if they could understand more words than they could speak. The written notes would have helped the boys who could not speechread well, but only if they could understand written English better than its spoken
equivalent. And this too seems highly doubtful. Wright later writes that "it is almost impossible to exaggerate the narrow scope of the general information of a deaf-born boy whose vocabulary may sometimes be too scanty to allow him to browse over a popular newspaper" (68-69) as was the case with many of his schoolmates. Thus, while the oral method worked well for Wright, it failed many of his peers, especially those who lost their hearing earlier in life or who were not as gifted with talent for speech and speechreading.

Wright could probably have succeeded in the ultimate oral education situation, true mainstreaming without special support services. Another deaf writer, the journalist Henry Kisor, a critic and editor at the Chicago Sun-Times, never went to a special school for the deaf or had any special help provided by his schools. Kisor, who was deafened at three by meningitis, has always been completely oral. He writes, "Though I have been totally deaf for forty-six of my forty-nine years...I am what is called an 'oralist.' That is, I depend wholly on spoken language and lipreading, however imperfect they might be, to help me live and work in a hearing world. I do not know sign language at all" (7). Soon after Kisor lost his hearing, his parents, especially his mother, began working with him using a method learned from Doris Irene Mirrielees, a private tutor for deaf children. Mirrielees was an oralist but not a conventional one. She firmly believed that all deaf children, given the appropriate means, could catch up to and keep up with hearing peers in language development, and part of her methodology called for parents to speak in the child's line of vision so that she would begin associating lip movement with meaning. However, in a major departure from the oralist tradition.
Miss Mirrielees knew that lipreading was too exhausting a method of taking in large amounts of information over long periods of time. The answer [to providing language input], instead, lay in the printed symbol of the spoken word.

In short, she believed in teaching deaf children to read almost as soon as they could focus their eyes. And not just in single words but in entire phrases and sentences with the full rhythm and content of spoken English, in the same way hearing children learn language. The difference was that deaf children would "hear" with their eyes, not their ears—and would do so before they learned to speak. (27)

Mirrielees extended her belief in the importance of learning language in context to learning language in the context of real-life events. Thus, to teach a child "chicken" and "egg" she would have had the child visit an egg farm to see the chickens laying the eggs, and would then act out the relationship between the two again back at home while at the same time expressing the appropriate spoken and written words in full sentences, such as "Eggs come from chickens," or "Chickens lay eggs." My example is oversimplified; Mirrielees would have also taught the child other associated information, such as what the chicken eats, since she believed in exploiting every opportunity to teach language.

What also separated Mirrielees from traditional oralist (and from other educators of the deaf) was her belief that parents should do most of this language teaching. After all, hearing children get their initial language learning at home. The method required an enormous investment of time by the parents: Kisor's mother spent two or more hours daily working with him, in addition to providing constant language exposure by being sure to speak in Kisor's line of vision.
The method seems to have worked for Kisor, as it did for Ann, the daughter of the writer Walker Percy. Ann’s deafness was discovered by the time she was three months old, so she can easily be classified as prelingually deaf. Jay Tolson, Percy’s biographer, describes how, for Percy, Mirrielees’s approach seemed both pragmatically and philosophically sound. Miss Mirrielees’s method was, in fact, an almost perfect pedagogical analogue to his theories about the differences between the signaling and symbolizing functions of language. While the traditional method reduced the deaf child to rudimentary signaling, using words as signals to satisfy needs, the Mirrielees method brought the full symbolic power of language to deaf children. It taught them to use words as a means of knowing the world and themselves. (249)

Percy’s wife, Bunt, did most of the work with Ann, but the whole family helped out. Tolson later describes how Percy (in the days before closed captioning) sat next to the television to provide Ann an oral translation of newscasts. Time consuming, yes, but doable. Today Ann owns and runs a bookstore in her home town and, like Kisor, depends completely on her oral skills to communicate.

Mirrielees’s method of using written English to teach language is actually theoretically close to the fingerspelling method used by Ann Sullivan to teach Helen Keller. In the United States, using the manual alphabet as the primary means of conveying information to deaf students is known as the Rochester Method because it was first used and advocated in this country at a school in Rochester, New York. Since fingerspelling is simply words spelled out on the hands instead of in print, the Rochester Method, like Mirrielees’s approach, provides deaf children with English-language input in a visual form.
Although out of favor in the United States, fingerspelling as an instructional method for deaf children is used in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, with a theoretical basis in the insights of Lev Vygotsky.

Donald Moores, a deaf education expert, explains:

According to [Russian] educators, the Russian language can be expressed in three separate modes: oral speech, written speech, and dactyl speech (fingerspelling). Each of these is considered a separate form of the Russian language, and each is used with the child as soon as possible. Because oral and written speech are difficult for very young children, fingerspelling is introduced and used from the beginning; even children who cannot speak or write can fingerspell. Both parents and teachers are expected to spell complete sentences at all times. (233)

The Russian method as a whole is known as neo-oralism, and educators have found that deaf children thus educated acquire superior oral skill compared to those educated by pure oral methodology, most certainly because of the additional and more complete language input.

So why is fingerspelling out of favor in the United States today, used mostly to supplement sign language rather than as a method in itself? There is no one good answer. Part of the reason is probably because spelling out every word takes a long time. Parents (or teachers) who are poor spellers would end up providing garbled input. Since fingerspelling does take longer than speech, parents and others probably, very humanly, simplified what they had to say to deaf children. Also, some studies have shown that visual input is held in short-term memory for less time than auditory input, and that therefore many children (and adults) have difficulty retaining enough of a meaningful unit (at least clause length) to process for meaning since fingerspelling input of necessity comes one letter at a time. A further reason
for the decline of the Rochester method in the United States is the rising acceptance and promotion of ASL: ASL is gaining new signs for words that once had to be borrowed from English via fingerspelling. Fingerspelled words are to sign language what loan words are to spoken languages, and the deaf pride movement has included an effort to keep loan words in ASL to a minimum, much as the French try to keep English words out of their vocabulary as part of their preservation of French culture.

The final variant of oralism in use today is cued speech, which was developed (in its American form) in 1966 by Dr. R. Orin Cornett, then vice president for long range planning at Gallaudet. “Cues in which eight different handshapes are placed in four different locations around the lips on the face and throat” supplement the speech message (Gannon 334). The hand shapes alone are not enough to convey the message. There is a different cue for each of a family of linguistically related sounds, such as voiced/unvoiced pairs like /s/ and/z/, and /t/ and /d/, where the difference between the sounds is not visible on the lips. Initially oralists rejected cued speech because of the handshape element, but today oral programs, especially within local school systems, are the primary users of cued speech as a classroom communication method.

Cued speech is supposed to be easy for parents (and teachers) to learn, but to do it well requires the cuer to analyze the phoneme content of speech while talking, and to pair the cue with exactly the right sound. My family tried cueing not long after I lost my hearing; my mother even came to school regularly to try to teach it to my classmates. However, I found cueing
mostly confusing and distracting, and I now suspect that was because the sounds were not always paired exactly with the appropriate cue. I know I started ignoring the cues and convinced my mother to stop. Perhaps cues are more helpful for prelingually deaf children, although for the cues to make sense it surely helps to have some idea of the sound they represent. I wonder if cues work (and they do seem to work for many) in a large part because they force the speaker to pay close attention to what he is saying. Cued speech, done appropriately, has the advantage of more clearly conveying speech sound information than any other oral method.

Manual Methods

Although most deaf children get some sort of speech training, various sign systems have overtaken oralist methods of instruction in the United States. The same dissatisfaction with traditional oral methods that led to the development of cued speech in the late 1960s also led to the shift to accepting manual communication. (Previously, many schools for the deaf did allow some signing for classroom communication, but only for older students who had failed to progress with the preferred method—usually oralism.) However, instead of switching to using ASL, schools instead adopted one of the varieties of English-based sign systems, all of which adapt and modify ASL signs into English word order. When schools switched from oralism to manualism, teachers who had previously been forbidden to use any signing in their classrooms suddenly had to learn to teach in a completely different mode. 4 English-like signing is much easier for someone who already speaks
English to learn than ASL, since English-like signing follows English word order, while ASL has its own syntax.

Simultaneous Communication (SimCom) and Total Communication (TC) are related concepts, but are not exactly the same. SimCom, as its name implies, refers specifically to the practice of signing and speaking at the same time. SimCom has long been the official classroom communication method at Gallaudet where, “theoretically, it gave deaf undergraduates an extra channel of English. They could read the lips of the instructor if they chose (the few who could choose), while reading the signs” (Neisser 40). TC, on the other hand, is more of a philosophy than a method and refers to the idea that every possible method of communication should be used to help the deaf understand. Most of its proponents “argue for total communication over oralism on the grounds that it does less harm” (Benderly 151). However, there seem to be almost as many versions of what TC should be as there are advocates of TC, in part because no one agrees on which sign system should be included as part of TC or even if or how students should be taught the sign system.

Unless a school ascribing to the TC philosophy uses only ASL signs (and fingerspelling) in English word order, which is a pidgin and a natural result of the encounter between the minority deaf language ASL and the majority (power) language English, the school would be using an invented system. As with any other invented (as opposed to naturally developing) language, invented sign systems tend to be awkward and even confusing. Donald Moores explains that
the invented systems have a number of characteristics in common. They have been developed for use by hearing parents of deaf children as well as by teachers. Conscious attempts have been made to generate new signs for elements that in the past would have been fingerspelled or omitted, such as pronouns (he, she, it), affixes (-ly, -ness, -ment), verb tenses, and articles (an, the). (208)

ASL itself conveys the information these invented signs attempt to convey, but ASL, like any language, can only convey its meanings when produced in its appropriate context, which for ASL includes its visio-spatial grammar. For many years the deaf were taught that their signing was an inferior language (or not a language at all) because it lacks certain English grammatical markers. but ASL is no more inferior to English for that reason than English is to French because English does not use gender markers on nouns.

Creators of the invented sign systems do not necessarily believe ASL inferior to English, but all did hope their systems would provide a more satisfactory method for conveying English to deaf students. The signing does not require the eye-strain producing extremely close attention necessary for speechreading or even cued speech; it is also much faster (and easier to read) than fingerspelling, although still slower than ASL. Invented systems are slower than ASL precisely because they use additional markers to English-ize signs, markers absent (because unnecessary) in ASL. The better known invented sign systems are known as Seeing Essential English (SEE 1),Signing Exact English (SEE 2) and Signed English; all are known generically as manual English. Individual schools have then modified these systems when they adopted them beginning in the 1970s.
Developers of the invented sign systems have had to make choices about which ASL signs to adapt for which words. For instance, should the ASL sign PLANT, referring to flora, be used for all meanings of the English word “plant,” including not only flora but also industrial production facilities as well as the verb “to plant?” Each invented sign system has, for the most part, answered the question the same way as the SEE 2 developers, who emphasized that signing should be by relationship to an English ‘word’ rather than by concept . . . [and follow] a two-out-of-three rule involving sounds, spelling, and meaning. The outcome of this procedure is to give sound and spelling some precedence over meaning. There are many words that sound the same and are spelled the same but have different meanings, particularly one-syllable words with three or four letters . . . . On the other hand, it is difficult to generate a list of words that mean the same and sound the same but have different spelling, or that mean the same and are spelled the same but sound different. (Moores 208-209)

Imagine the confusion for the child who sees a teacher signing that the class will get BACK TO BASICS (with BACK signed by placing a hand on the back), or a parent signing that a man will come install the CAR PET (as if carpet was made of cars and pets). Strict adherence to the principles of manual English obviously has enormous potential for disrupting communication.

The following quotation from a humor column in The Nebraska Journal, published by the Nebraska School for the Deaf and cited in Jack Gannon’s Deaf Heritage, illustrates one such situation of crossed classroom communication that can be attributed to using manual English: “Do you like liver?” asked the teacher. ‘Yes,’ responded the student, ‘I would like best to liver in California” (208). I imagine the teacher used as signs the ASL words YOU LIKE LIVE and then tacked a fingerspelled R on at the end. The
student, who thought the teacher was asking him where he wanted to live, then signed back I LIKE BEST LIVE CA, which is a completely appropriate ASL answer to the question he thought he saw. Hearing people also tend not to sign every word when they are speaking and signing at the same time simply because it takes longer to express every word in manual English systems than it does to speak the same words, and not signing some words is one way to keep the messages simultaneous. Ironically, the “missing” manual English signs are often, I have noticed, words manual English systems were created to convey in the first place, such as articles and pronouns.

The student’s misreading of the teacher is even easier to understand when we realize that students at residential schools learn ASL from each other outside of class (in the halls, dorms, dining areas, etc.) but are never taught the manual English communication system. Donald Moores explains that

Reviews of the literature have not turned up any real curricula for teaching manual communication to deaf children. Many schools have a manual communication system that they endorse and use. At the state level, Texas has developed the comprehensive Texas Preferred Signs Dictionary (1980). However, the schools do not have a curriculum for teaching the individual signs or the communication system. It apparently is assumed that the children will learn to understand and use the system essentially through exposure. Although the majority of deaf children are taught by means of sign and speech, direct instruction in the use of a sign system is not normally part of the school curriculum. (242)

Without formal instruction in either ASL or in the manual English system in use there should be no surprise that children confuse the two, or that they favor the conceptually coherent ASL over the manual English system for conversation among themselves.
There have even been occasions where deaf students carried their resistance to manual English from the dorms to the classroom. As recently as 1987, "eighty-five students of the Tennessee School for the Deaf were suspended for resisting" a command to sign in English word order (Lane 40). The students' message that signing in English word order inhibits classroom communication is beginning to be heeded as some deaf education programs begin implementing bilingual/bicultural programs where ASL and English are used as instructional languages. English is taught with the help of ASL, with the goal that students will be bilingual in ASL and English (written English for all and speech for those with the ability and inclination) and functional in both the Deaf and hearing worlds.

One reason why bilingual education for the deaf has been slow to catch on is because "neither the laws that provide funding for bilingual education programs, nor the laws that require those programs in schools with large numbers of children who use a minority language, have been applied to ASL-using children" (Lane 120). Some states now legally recognize ASL as a foreign language, and some high schools and colleges accept ASL courses for foreign language credit; however, bilingual education, as opposed to foreign language education, is geared to serve children whose families speak a language other than English, and the majority of deaf children come from hearing families whose language is not ASL. Also, bilingual programs are designed to be a bridge for the child into an English-speaking classroom, but a deaf child will always be deaf no matter how well she learns spoken and written English, and will thus always at a disadvantage (unless provided with
sufficient support services) in an otherwise hearing classroom. In other words, bilingual education for deaf children cannot accept the same mandates and goals as bilingual programs for hearing children.

Bilingual/bicultural curricula for deaf children are also still relatively rare because there is a shortage of qualified teachers truly fluent in ASL. Colleges and universities with deaf education majors offer widely varying quality and quantity of ASL classes for their students, although it is as difficult to learn ASL as any other second language. Most teachers are still trained to teach in TC programs and so need to be able to combine speech and English-order signing, and thus have little use for ASL. Hiring more deaf teachers would also increase the availability of ASL-fluent teachers, even considering that some deaf teachers are not native ASL signers. In any event, it is too early to tell if bilingual education for deaf children will be more successful than the other methods have been.

Since deaf children have managed to learn under each communication method, there probably is no one best method, certainly no one best method for all deaf children. Numerous factors, including degree and type of hearing loss, age of onset, family commitment, and the inclinations of the child, affect whether a method is appropriate. In addition, as I will discuss later in this chapter, inadequate academic curricula are likely contributors to the poor achievement records of deaf children taught under every communication mode.
SCHOOL SETTING

Besides the continuing oral-manual debate, much controversy exists about which type of school setting—residential, deaf-only day school, self-contained classes, or true mainstreaming—best serves deaf children. As I mentioned earlier, the Deaf community opposes educating deaf children at predominantly hearing schools (even in self-contained classrooms) because of communication and social barriers. Deaf children who lack sufficient opportunity to communicate with peers both in and out of class miss essential social-skill development. In fact, the Deaf community advocates maintaining the residential schools precisely because residential programs allow deaf children to be around people they can communicate with all day, not just in the classroom with the aid of an interpreter. Deaf children whose families cannot or will not learn and use visually accessible communication methods are especially well served by residential schools.

Most deaf children now attend public schools, either in self-contained classrooms (especially in the early grades), fully or partially mainstreamed in a school with several deaf students, or “onestreamed” as the only deaf student in a school. School systems vary widely in the degree and quality of support services they are able to provide; program quality is affected by the overall resources and quality of the school system. A poor interpreter, for instance, would greatly affect a deaf student in a mainstreamed class, but there are shortages of qualified educational interpreters in many parts of the country. However, even a good interpreter cannot make up for a bad teacher. Support services can be expensive, but so can residential education. In fact, one of
the initial problems with mainstreaming when it became more common after
the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 was
an expectation that mainstreaming would save money, but this has not proved
ture. Parents have taken their school systems to court for failure to provide
appropriate services. Under the current education and disability laws, parents
have successfully sued local school systems for interpreter or transliterator
support so that their deaf children can attend private and parochial schools. If
higher courts uphold these rulings, deaf children's educational options will
finally equal those of their hearing peers.

THE CONTENT OF DEAF EDUCATION

Deaf children attending mainstreamed school programs are expected
to perform academically at the same level as hearing peers. This
development should increase the overall standards in programs for the deaf.5
Mainstreamed (or "onestreamed") deaf students have the same teachers,
texts, tests, and assignments as their hearing classmates, but many programs
exclusively for deaf students do not hold their students to the achievement
standards expected of hearing students. As African-Americans argued during
their fight for desegregation, separate is often unequal. In schools for the
deaf, the inequality of expectations can be seen throughout the curriculum,
especially in reading and writing.

As part of my research for this chapter, I observed classes at two high-
school level TC programs for the deaf. one a state residential school, the other
a local mainstreaming program. At the residential school, all classes are very
small because state law prohibits the teachers from having more than thirty-
three students per day (over five class periods). The teachers I observed (in English classes) were highly skilled signers and used ASL signs in English word order rather than manual English. Classes were very slow-paced, in part so that students did not have to take notes while watching the teacher. However, students often came to class unprepared, which meant some class time was taken up with what should have been homework. For instance, at the time of one of my visits, the senior English classes were discussing The Odyssey (which they read in simplified translation). The class had extreme difficulty answering basic content questions such as, “What did Cyclops look like?” However, once they were given the chance to read over the assigned pages, the students were able to answer the questions. Possibly the students did not have enough time to complete their homework; faculty members regularly complain that the residential supervisors do not give students enough time for schoolwork. The teacher said that most students usually had only about an hour for studying each evening. There is an apparent conflict of interest between the academic part of the residential institution to educate the students and the residential part to keep the students entertained after school hours—and out of trouble.

The high school English classes at the residential school consist mostly of grammar work, spelling and vocabulary, and reading comprehension activities, with some (mostly short) writing assignments. The head English teacher told me that in recent years they had modified the content of their program to help prepare the students to pass the state high school exit exam, which they must do to get a diploma. All English classes use grammar books
written for ESL or learning disabled students as well as simplified reading material. Some of the reading material is commercially produced. The senior classes reading The Odyssey were reading versions written for children: the best seniors were reading one written on about the sixth grade level, the poorer students one on the fourth grade level. The teachers also simplify some material themselves. The head English teacher said that they want their students to get the same content knowledge other high school students get in their English classes.

The mainstreaming program in the local school system provides a very different education. Classes are larger, but the deaf students have interpreters, although some of the primarily oral students refuse the interpreters. All of the deaf students spend one period each day in the resource room (with one or two other deaf students) where one of two teachers serves as an all-purpose tutor. Beyond that, the students are expected to meet the same requirements as their hearing classmates. (There is a separate program on the same campus for deaf students who are not working for an academic diploma. These students are not mainstreamed and have their own resource room.) Like all other seniors, deaf students have the option to take Business English rather than English IV, and some do so. The difficulty of all of their material far exceeds what the students at the residential school are assigned. Deaf students are given some special accommodations if needed, such as extra time for tests. I could see obvious gaps in the deaf students' knowledge. For instance, I watched one student preparing for a science test by studying a diagram of the food chain. The teacher/tutor
quizzed her to check her understanding and discovered that she did not grasp the difference between a producer and consumer. The other teacher/tutor used my presence to discuss college with two seniors who are hoping to continue their educations, and we discovered that they did not really understand about choosing a major or that college class schedules are not like high school class schedules. These gaps in knowledge are not indicative of lack of intelligence, but rather that the students simply had not yet been exposed to the information.

No doubt the academics are more challenging in the mainstreamed program, and that the deaf students I observed in the mainstreamed program had (over all) superior English skills to those in the residential program. However, I had no access to information about the students' hearing losses or their families. It is therefore possible that differences other than the schools contribute to the success or failure of the deaf students.

I have heard that some residential schools are actively phasing in expectations that their students will perform on grade level, but the school I observed is not one of them. I am convinced that low expectations are at the root of the failure of deaf education in both oral and manual programs. Neisser writes how, at one residential school, "very openly [the teachers] gave me their opinions about deaf education. All seemed convinced that teaching deaf children was a difficult, maybe an impossible task: that a fifth-grade reading level was an acceptable goal. One teacher asserted that his deaf students could not grasp abstract ideas" (118). A significant body of research shows that teacher expectations do affect student performances; these self
fulfilling prophecies then provide the teachers with evidence that they are right.

Language, or to be more specific, English (in English-speaking countries), has always been the focus of those who doubt the ability of deaf students. Researchers concerned with the writing ability of deaf children found that

in examining and observing the approaches to writing that have been used over the years with hearing-impaired students, it becomes apparent that too often the students' abilities and talents have not been nurtured appropriately. It has been easy to excuse the lack of writing in classrooms for the hearing-impaired and deaf students by referring to the assumed lack of control these students have over the language systems. During visits to several schools for the deaf in New England, teachers of the deaf frequently mentioned the copying of sight word vocabulary and extensive spelling lists as prerequisites to early writing, adding that their children could not really write because they did not know how to spell. (Ciocci and Morrell-Schumann 125-26)

If my early grade school teachers had not tolerated my early misspellings, maybe I would never have developed very good writing skills either. Certainly not being able to hear or speak English decreases deaf children's quantity of English language experience to use in internalizing its grammar. But delaying writing and using simplified reading matter hardly seems the best way to make up for this experiential deficit.

Two teacher-researchers who questioned the traditional approach to teaching deaf children literacy write that in the schools for the deaf where they taught

generally, . . . we saw reading taught using "high interest-low reading" level texts usually through a structured syntactical approach. At my school we called it a specific skills approach. But we found through our own experience that reading authentic texts and commenting on them in a holistic way could work well with [deaf students]. (Cuneo and Shannon 275)
Even if the deaf students given the "real" texts acquire literacy more slowly than hearing peers, they are at least given a chance to study texts not carefully modified to a certain readability level. As I will further discuss in the next chapter, this textual deprivation is certainly at least part of the reason why deaf students are described as unable to process abstract thought, understand metaphor or other figurative language, and so on. Of course they cannot, if the texts they have read have all been edited to eliminate these elements in the interest of "readability."

CONCLUSION

Deaf students will always be somewhat disadvantaged because they must use their eyes to listen as well as to receive normal visual information. However, most current education programs have made the situation worse. Rather than providing rich accessible-language environments, they limit the deaf students' exposure to language. Deaf schools do so by limiting written English learning, and mainstreamed programs do so by limiting the student's opportunity to communicate with hearing teachers and students. Oral programs limit communication by making it difficult if not impossible, manual English programs by providing poor models of English through an unnatural sign system, and ASL programs by focusing on ASL and de-emphasizing English.

However, deaf education does not have to produce students with poor English literacy skills. As I will argue in the next chapter, there is no linguistically necessary reason for the deaf to have generally poor reading and writing skills. Any education system that recognizes that as a language.
written English can be acquired much the same way as spoken language—through massive, meaningful exposure and use—can succeed in helping deaf children become fully literate. Since languages are most easily acquired in early childhood, early emphasis on written English is extremely important for deaf children. Deaf children need even more opportunity to use written English than hearing children do since deaf children can not extrapolate from oral English knowledge. Unfortunately, most deaf children never get this early, intense exposure; the result is that most deaf postsecondary students' written English exhibits ESL-like problems.

NOTES

1 Every year the journal American Annals of the Deaf publishes a survey of every deaf education program in the United States (Canada is included in a separate listing). The survey uses “oral,” “cued speech,” “manual English,” and “ASL” to identify which communication philosophy (or philosophies) each program claims.

2 Alexander Graham Bell is infamous in the Deaf community for having advocated laws to prevent the deaf from marrying each other because he feared their offspring would create a “deaf variety”—a new race, even though it was already known that most deafness is not genetic. Bell’s fear of a “deaf race” was also behind his opposition to special schools for the deaf, because of the opportunity such schooling (and alumni events) gave for the deaf to meet and marry. Bell’s wife was deaf—and oral.

3 Fingerspelling is used more frequently in teaching the deaf-blind, much as it was when Anne Sullivan used it to teach Helen Keller.

4 In Louisiana, where I did my research, the state school for the deaf used fingerspelling for classroom communication prior to switching to a Total Communication philosophy. I talked to several teachers who taught prior to and after the switch, and all had learned at least some signing from their students. In deaf education classrooms, just as in hearing classrooms, teachers do not necessarily tow the administrative line.

5 After I lost my hearing, I was “onestreamed” at my parents’ insistence, and because the school system acknowledged that I was too far ahead of the students in their program for deaf students. I am very grateful that my parents insisted that I continue having access to the best academics the system had to
offer. The school system provided speech therapy, a social worker (for a short time), and offered an interpreter, which I refused because I did not know any sign language.
Chapter 4

Language Difficulties and Deafness

I will open this chapter with two jokes. One is an oft-repeated element of Deaf culture, the other a personal anecdote; both illustrate how difficult it is for hearing people to comprehend the possibility of a deaf person’s being literate. The Deaf culture joke goes something like this:

A hearing man and a deaf man are waiting at a bus stop. The hearing man says something the deaf man cannot understand, so he hands the hearing man a pad of paper and a pen while gesturing that he cannot hear. The deaf man waits until the hearing man hands him the message. It reads: “Can you read?” The deaf man then writes in reply, “No. can you write?”

During the first few years after I lost my hearing I never considered the possibility that anyone would automatically assume that literate behavior was beyond me simply because I could not hear. After all, if anything I had increased my dependence on the written word for communication, learning, and entertainment. I certainly would have thought the joke above was far-fetched—until a stranger assumed that I could not be deaf because I was highly literate. This story remains one of my favorite “dumb hearing person” anecdotes:

I went to Ben Franklin, an academically selective public high school in New Orleans that is well-known for piling on the homework. Most days I’d lug a large stack of books home over my route of a streetcar and two city busses. One day when the bus was crowded my best friend, Kathy, was sitting next to me in the seat by the window. A boy from an area Catholic high school was standing in the aisle next to me, but since I was looking at Kathy I was not aware that he was speaking to me. Kathy told the guy that I was deaf and then told me that he was telling me that I “must be real smart to read all those books!” (Perhaps he was impressed by my English book, which that junior year, was the Norton Anthology of English Literature, major authors edition which I always carried on the top of my book pile.) At least that’s not a typical pick-up line. I looked at the guy and muttered something like “not
really" and then turned back to Kathy. The guy was still talking to me (well, to the back of my head), so Kathy told him again that I was deaf. He wouldn't believe it, and insisted that I couldn't be deaf since I was a Franklin student. We kept insisting (after all, I am deaf), and he finally gave up, saying, "Well, if she's deaf, I'm blind." I studiously ignored him by looking at Kathy, so when she told me he said this I turned to him and said, "Oh, really?"

At the time I was mostly annoyed that the guy could not figure out that I was not interested in having a conversation with him, and I filed the story away in my memory under "annoying males." I was annoyed—and puzzled—that he found it so impossible to believe that I was deaf; I figured that he was simply a jerk. I also thought he might have been confused because I could speak, but my voice (although very good compared to most deaf people) is definitely not "normal." I realized later that the guy was only expressing to an extreme degree what many other people believed about deafness. For instance, when I got to college I was surprised that other people were amazed that I was deaf and majoring in English.

Even then I did not understand why people thought that deafness precluded being literate. I would tell people who expressed surprise at my literacy that deafness had nothing to do with my ability since I could read and write before I lost my hearing. My explanation would satisfy people, and I was for a while bothered mostly by the fact that people assumed that since I was deaf I must have been born that way. However, I was never really satisfied with my own explanation. I knew that prelingually deaf people could become highly literate even when my only example was Helen Keller. I began to wonder why more people did not realize that if the blind and deaf Keller could learn to read and write several languages, the merely deaf certainly can learn
written English even if not as brilliantly as Keller. My curiosity led me to the line of inquiry that helped spawn my current research.

Does deafness prohibit, or at least seriously impair, the ability to acquire a written language? To answer this question, I considered the assumptions hearing culture makes about the connections between spoken and written language. These assumptions have long informed deaf education curricula, and are based on the idea that written language is secondary to spoken (or signed) language. Common sense seems to dictate that the written form of English is based directly on the spoken form (through transcription with the alphabet). After all, the spoken form did come first.

Belief in a high degree of interconnectivity between the spoken and written forms of English is behind phonics approaches to teaching reading. Most people mentally “hear” words as they silently read them. Do deaf people?

Certainly spoken and written English in all of the various dialects are still the same language; that is to say, they conform to patterns that make them recognizably the same language. Both consist of symbols grouped together in ways meaningful to English speakers or writers. As Shirley Brice Heath observes, “learning written language is fundamentally very similar to learning oral language. What is needed to learn written language are models who communicate with us through writing and who expect us to transmit our knowledge, needs, and plans for the future through the written channel” (92). While it is true that most children do not learn to read and write until they receive direct instruction in school, we have all heard anecdotal evidence of children learning to read from being read to, and copying letters on their own
to learn to write. For that matter, most children do not learn to listen and speak without direct instruction; parents and other caregivers talk to babies and young children specifically to teach them oral language. Babies raised in signing homes pick up fingerspelling—alphabetic representation of English—before learning their ABCs because many words in ASL and the various manual English systems are simply fingerspelled English words or signs with initialization. ("Initialization" simply means using the first letter from the English translation in the hand shape for the sign. For instance, FAMILY is signed with both hands in the F position forming the GROUP shape, a circle in the air.) That should not be surprising since hearing children learn to say words before they understand that the sounds that compose the words have names and can be represented with written letters.

The belief that written language competence is strongly dependent on through-the-air language competence is the principal reason behind the creation of manual English systems. In an article on "Deaf Culture and Literacy" Carol Padden and Claire Ramsey write that

adults often have the illusion that the relationship between print and their spoken face-to-face language is a direct one, that the input of an English word or sign can be analyzed by a signer or speaker and then directly mapped onto the equivalent print form . . . . In fact, this relationship is not apparent to children—either deaf or hearing. If the relationship was as intuitive and direct to children as it is to adults, far fewer hearing children would have problems learning to read, and the precise nature of the problems would be much easier to diagnose. (98)

Even so, written English and spoken English correspond much more closely to each other than either do to manual English systems. The phonemes of spoken English have at least some recognizable relationship to the alphabet.
Manual English (except for its fingerspelling component), on the other hand, can provide no more than an understanding of appropriate word order and placement of inflections, suffixes and affixes. Manual English systems have their uses but should never substitute for exposure to print.

The major difference between acquiring written language and learning spoken language is that reading and writing require tools, whereas oral language normally does not. Also, for most people oral language does not require the same degree of attention as learning written language. For deaf children, neither of the norms apply. For them, learning oral language often requires very complex tools (such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, diagrams and models demonstrating proper position of tongue, teeth, lips for a sound, etc.) and exclusive attention. Just as literacy “learners with access to only a few primers and charcoal and parchment cannot match in achievement those who have a variety of printed materials,” neither can deaf children who have little access to spoken or signed language acquire much skill in using through-the-air language (Heath 92). For prelingually deaf children, written language could be the most natural, easiest-to-learn form of English. Print is unambiguous compared to the way speech looks on the lips. In addition, there are only twenty-six letters in English but thirty-five separate phonemes. Print is preferable to fingerspelling because the eyes can access entire words or phrases of print at a time, while fingerspelling constrains the user to one letter at a time; short-term memory limits make processing fingerspelled sentences difficult.
Indeed, the belief that print is the most accessible form of English for deaf children underlies the unorthodox deaf education method promoted by Doris Mireelees in the mid-twentieth century (described in chapter two). Other anecdotal evidence exists suggesting that it is possible for deaf children to learn print as a first language. The published proceedings of a conference, *Removing the Writing Barrier: A Dream?*, include a first person account by Michael Chorost, who was born with hearing loss. His story is worth recounting in detail both because his late start in acquiring language is unfortunately not atypical for deaf children and because the skill he did acquire in written English allowed him to graduate as an English major from Brown University.

Chorost establishes at the beginning of his story that “without hearing aids my loss is total, the silence all but complete,” although he was able to benefit from hearing aids once his hearing loss was diagnosed (192). However, his hearing loss was not diagnosed until he was about 40 months old or at nearly three-and-a-half years. Chorost did somehow manage to acquire “a bare twenty or thirty” words by the time his hearing loss was diagnosed (193). By any measure he was language delayed, and Chorost recounts that he exhibited the hyperactive always-getting-into-trouble behavior typical of children who cannot understand or be understood because they lack the language capabilities to do so.

However, Chorost was lucky that his parents understood that his problem was a “meaning-crisis when the diagnosis [of deafness] was made” (195). His father, a psychologist, understood that language development
happens most naturally in the first few years of life, and "reasoned, if not language through the ears, why not the eyes?" (195). Chorost's father immediately began teaching his son to read even before he was fitted with hearing aids. Chorost's account of the process is intriguing enough to quote in full:

[my father] started me on the Dolch word-picture cards, i.e., "hat" on one side, a picture of a hat on the other. He didn't waste time on the alphabet. He chose instead to teach me to recognize words by their total shape, as if English were Chinese, instead of painfully working them out by their meaningless letters. I think this was a brilliant move, because it exposed me to meaningful language instantly. Starved as I was, meaning was the greatest motivator of all. Thus print, rather than speech, was my first true language. He tells me that I brought the cards to him wanting to start each day's session . . . .

Shortly after Dolch cards began, he started me on books. Words which formed meaningful ideas were even more interesting than words on cards, and through context my vocabulary snowballed. A few months later I got hearing aids and could start learning to hear and pronounce words, many of which I already knew from print. (195)

Chorost continued through his education to rely heavily on print, both reading and writing, for meaning-making even though he acquired oral language.

Chorost goes on to argue that if teachers (or those in the role of teachers) make the use of reading and writing necessary, then "children will catch on to the meanings of ink as readily as they do to the meanings of sound waves, in the right circumstances" (196). The "right circumstance" is communication in a meaningful context. Writing teachers at all levels can take a lesson from the boy who found learning to read and write natural language acquisition because he needed it to communicate.

Chorost's story is important because one explanation for the average deaf person's poor English language skills is that the lack of oral input means
that the deaf child (and adult) never develops an internal (intuitive) grammar for English because she is not repeatedly exposed to the patterns of English present in everyday conversation. The literature seems to use the terms "speech" and "language" interchangeably, as though speech were the only way to develop language. Because this position makes speech acquisition essential for education, it is an oralist position. However, the connection is mostly an unspoken assumption in oralist educational literature. The assumption is prevalent, but I have found research data supporting this position. The closest, and most recent, is an article by Ann Geers and Jean Moog, who both work at the Central Institute for the Deaf, a well-known private oral school in St. Louis, Missouri. They gathered data on one hundred oral deaf students to look for patterns that correlated with successful literacy acquisition. Their sample included a few who could sign, but all relied primarily on oral means for face-to-face communication, and the majority knew no signs. They found that children with profound hearing impairment who have a combination of favorable factors—including at least average nonverbal intellectual ability, early oral education management and auditory stimulation, and middle-class family environment with strong family support—have potential for developing much higher reading, writing, and spoken language skills than is reported for hearing-impaired people in general.

However, Geers and Moog offer no proof that oralist education itself causes positive results. The early intervention—not the oralist intervention per se—could account for the success by giving the child early language exposure, and the other variables the authors cite could in themselves account for the deaf students' success in acquiring literacy. This assumption about the
importance of early speech training resulted in "educational programs for the
deaf that placed an almost exclusive emphasis on speech in preschool and
elementary grades" (Moores 26-27) and not just at oral schools. Teacher
training programs to prepare teachers to teach in Total Communication
schools continue to emphasize speech development in their curricula.

Deaf students might even have a slight advantage in that by
internalizing rules of English directly from print their progress in learning
written English will not be disturbed, as hearing children's progress frequently
is, by "conventions [of written English] that are counterintuitive and in contrast
to the rules of use of oral language" (Heath 92). Young deaf children make
spelling errors—but mostly errors based on visual similarities between letters or
in placement of letters in the word. Deaf students have been observed
fingerspelling to themselves—their way of "sounding out" a word when reading
(Padden and Ramsey 98). Deaf students are also more likely to confuse
words that look alike than words that sound alike. The deaf students can
simply encode English in strings of visual symbols instead of auditory
symbols.

That deaf students do have some way of mentally representing English
is supported by research into deaf students' concept of "voice" in writing. In
research based on deaf students' responses to a writing prompt about voice in
writing, it was found that

some students referred to an inner voice or to inner speech, and we
interpreted these as being similar to the voice Welty "hears" when she
reads or writes—similar in function, at least, since we cannot know the
internal voices of others. The common feature of these descriptions
seems to be that the internal voice is regarded as a guide. (Albertini,
Meath-Lang, and Harris 234)
My own experience tells me that deaf users of written English can decode it in more than one way. My strong oral skills are related to the mental voice that sometimes accompanies my reading and writing. However, there are many words in my vocabulary that are more a part of my print vocabulary than my spoken one. I misspell such words based on visual confusion. In an early draft of this chapter, I misspelled the word "aisle" as "asile": if you had asked me how to pronounce the word I would have read it as I wrote it, even though back in my memory somewhere is the right pronunciation. When I am reading an unfamiliar word, I experience voice not as mental sound but as the physical movements that I would have to use to produce the sound. Sometimes when I am reading, especially when I am reading quickly, I am not conscious of any representation of the words in my mind other that the print itself and its meaning. There are more options to encoding and decoding written language than just reference to speech.

In other words, my argument is this: there is no inherent reason why hearing ability should be linked to ability to excel in written English. Rather, success hinges on the fact that oral and written language are both symbol systems. Language learners learn that the symbols, grouped in certain ways, mean something to the community that uses the language. Writing more clearly separates the symbols into meaning units since word barriers (and punctuation) are visible in written, but not in spoken, English. I am not arguing that print or spoken English is easier to learn—only that they are both languages and are both acquirable as part of the human biological disposition.
for language. I am also arguing that even though English is an alphabetic language, it is still possible to encode the language mentally in a non-auditory way.

If we do not accept that written English can exist without reference to the oral code, then we must accept that deaf people, especially prelingually profound-to-severe deaf people, have no real chance to learn English in any form. The "Deaf English" problems in writing that I will discuss in the rest of the chapter would be unremarkable. Indeed, it would be a miracle that the deaf could write at all. But it is not a miracle that prelingually deaf people manage to learn to read and write, at least no more of a miracle than it is that humans are language-users and language-creators.

Nevertheless, deaf users of written English show persistent problems in learning standard grammar and other conventions of literate language. These problems resemble those that ESL and (to a lesser degree) basic writers have when writing college-level academic prose. Sentence- and word-level problems—limited vocabulary, limited understanding of English idiom, nonstandard phrasing or word order, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and so on—are the most obvious, but "typical" deaf students also have problems with global issues such as awareness of audience and coherent organization. There are no miracle cures for deaf students any more than there are for other students who have these same difficulties with academic writing.

But since deaf students have these problems for the same reason other students do—insufficient practice with and exposure to standard written English—many approaches used for other students can also be used for deaf
Jacqueline Anderson's dissertation, published as *Deaf Students Mis-Writing, Teacher Mis-Reading: English Education and the Deaf College Student*, focuses on the weaknesses deaf students typically have with written English, especially what she calls "discourse errors." She acknowledges the effect of culture on deaf writers, but Anderson's focus is on linguistic analysis of deaf college students' writing to show where the problems are and to suggest approaches instructors can use to help students overcome them.

Even so, she writes that "the methods suggested [in her book] are equally applicable to hearing students, and can be utilized in any mainstream, ESL, or English for Special Purposes classroom" (18). Her linguistic approaches are workable, but they do not sufficiently take into account non-linguistic factors interfering in deaf students' ability to profit from classroom instruction, such as poor interpreting or a student's self-defeating belief that deaf people can not be expected to write as well as hearing people. Anderson's real contribution is her demonstration that deaf students' writing problems are linguistically comparable to those of hearing ESL and basic writers. Because Anderson shows that deaf students' difficulties with writing are not qualitatively different from those of hearing students, her suggestions for teaching deaf students resemble those methods teachers already use with hearing students. For instance, Anderson suggests that "from the outset, all activities in the writing class need to focus on academic meaning and how that meaning gets represented in written English genres" (224), advice that should sound familiar to writing instructors. She suggests activities for helping deaf students learn about text shapes by bracketing and underlining salient features, by creating
charts and diagrams of texts, and other means to help deaf students experience text shape visually, all activities to some degree already used in writing classrooms.

This chapter could end here. I have made my case that the "language problems" deaf students have do not deserve to be placed in a special category but rather should be considered as part of the larger problem: schools and our culture at large have failed to provide deaf students with appropriate opportunities to achieve academic literacy. However, I will provide a general overview of the problems with written English typical of deaf students as a point of reference and will discuss why in the past deafness itself or sign language has been considered a direct cause of the difficulty. At all times please remember that "typical" weaknesses in the writing of deaf students are not all exhibited by all deaf students. Even deaf students with similar backgrounds will not necessarily share strengths and weaknesses in using written English. As for any student, "it must be through your own knowledge of language development and of the underpinnings of English language per se that you diagnose the problems of your individual students and target proper remediation"—just as we do for hearing students (Gregory 34).

DEAF TEXTS

The following short texts can exemplify what "deaf writing" might look like, but I cannot provide enough examples to cover all possible problems. I have also deliberately chosen texts an English teacher would find problematic;
that deaf writers can write standard academic English is exemplified by my own text.

The first example is from “ASL Write Right Rite Wright,” an article by Deaf English teacher David A. Anthony deliberately written in ASL word order. I am including this quotation to give readers a sense of ASL rhythm so that they do not mistakenly think all deaf writers’ errors are due to ASL interference, and because Anthony describes some Deaf fears about writing.

One way, Oracy, that all. Sad sorry; happen fact. ASL have no other way, Now, point important think about. ASL (and other some language many) have Literacy. Have no write of the print to the paper book any for the read. . . .

Now think about two:
One: School teacher always me English wrong wrong wrong; correct correct correct pencil red, my white paper same blood mess. [Who perfect? Matter, matter]. But I right write (wright write, not wrong write, follow ASL rite same you sign) . . .
Two: People you all read my ASL write, laugh laugh laugh HA HA HA. Right me talk? Think funny? Polite not. Hearing people (and, worse happen, many some think-hearing Deaf people, know-all, do-act-think-smart, head-big) laugh laugh laugh HA HA HA and sometimes mock mock mock fun of us born Deaf funny write. (3)

Instructors can expect deaf students’ writing to be much closer to standard English even if there is ASL interference in their writing.

The second example comes from a short piece titled “Mermaids” printed in “The Reader’s Page” of The Buff and Blue, the Gallaudet student newspaper.

In fact, many people never thought that a mermaid is just like the physically challenged because she can’t walk. Although, it does sound interesting. I was watching the movie ‘Splash’. It was about a young lady with fish legs who fell in love with a normal guy. . . .

Mermaids and the physically challenged have said a million of times that the human society still doesn’t understand how mermaid or the physically challenged women feel.

I always felt that way. It must be frustrating. I don’t let anyone step on me. (Mulligan 7)
In this text, the surface features are problematic, but the author develops a sophisticated metaphor comparing a mermaid's experience to that of a physically challenged woman. The writer succeeds in communicating her idea even if the English is not perfect.

The final example I will provide comes from Anderson's book. It is a short written response to in-class questions on George Will's essay, "On Her Own in the City": "Why do you think George Will wrote this essay? For whom was he writing it?"

George Will's purpose was in writing "On Her Own in the City" was talking about an essay. He thought it might be interesting. George can help you learn that same title so you can write about title on the essay. It gives you an ideas on how to skill in right language. (236)

This text is not easy to understand in spite of being closer to standard English than Anthony's deliberate ASL writing. The writing context could account for at least some of the problems in this text. The deaf student writer was composing at the beginning of a class about a homework reading assignment before any class discussion of Will's text. We cannot dismiss the possibility that the student had not read the homework assignment and so was trying to bluff his (Anderson identifies the student as a "he") way through the writing assignment. Anderson does not raise this possibility, but if the student is bluffing, he shows that he is skilled in the language of bluff: "He thought it might be interesting."

What do these texts tell us about deaf writers? All show the ability to manipulate language. The two student writers might not have Anthony's freedom to choose not to write in standard English, but their texts are closer to
standard English than to Anthony's ASL text. Nevertheless, the students' texts do exhibit common weaknesses of deaf writers.

WORD AND SENTENCE LEVEL WEAKNESSES

Errors by deaf students on these levels have been much investigated by researchers because they are easy to describe and to count. I describe first word-level and then sentence-level difficulties with written English common among deaf students.

English Vocabulary, Idioms, and Figurative Language

Deaf students' difficulties with using and comprehending written English on the level of word meanings is usually blamed on the usage of sign systems or on cognitive deficiencies. Sign systems are blamed because their vocabularies are much smaller than that of English. Until William Stokoe and others established in the 1960s that ASL is a real, linguistically complete language, most educators did not even consider ASL a unique language. ASL was considered to be at best a simplistic signed version of English (like baby talk) and at worst a gesture system too primitive to be considered a language at all. Since no language invents words it does not need, and since ASL was not allowed to be an academic language, it should not be surprising that its vocabulary did not meet academic needs. This situation is slowly changing as ASL users who need academic vocabulary invent needed signs, but it takes time for new signs to be widely known and accepted as part of the language. My interpreters and I have had to agree on many different signs for them to use in my graduate classes. Since simplicity is an important consideration for interpreters trying to keep up with fast-paced discussion and
lecture, most of our sign inventions were English initializations, such as S-C for "social constructionism." Sometimes we had to agree on which already-existing signs most closely fit an English term. We decided to sign "literacy" with the LANGUAGE sign although it could be signed by WRITING READING SKILL.

In addition, the gestural nature of ASL (and any other sign system) resulted in the misconception that signing is capable only of iconographic representation and is therefore unable to represent abstraction successfully. Because signs were thought to have a necessary one-to-one concrete correspondence to something in the real world, educators thought that explained why deaf children had difficulty understanding English idioms and figurative language, both of which require taking words at other than face value. However, linguists now know that ASL has its own figurative language and idioms: perhaps the best known outside of Deaf culture is TRAIN GO SORRY, the title of Leah Hager Cohen's 1994 book about New York's Lexington School for the Deaf. The idiom translates approximately into the English "you missed the boat." ASL is also able to convey abstract terms that can not simply be acted out or drawn into the air, such as GOVERNMENT or SCIENCE. ASL researchers have also documented that signs that began as semi-iconographic can become less so over time as cultural foundations for words change. For example, maleness is indicated in certain signs by placement at the forehead--signs such as GRANDFATHER, BOY, and UNCLE. These signs are located there because the sign for MAN is a gesture at the forehead resembling tipping a hat; hat tipping was, of course, once a
male-related part of American culture. Although the custom has changed, the male-indicator in ASL remains at the forehead.

Thus, if deaf students have difficulty with English words and idioms there has to be another explanation other than that deaf people are limited to thinking in concrete terms or in pictures. There needs be no explanation other than that most deaf students have not had sufficient exposure to English. As I outlined in chapter three, deaf students are often given simplified reading materials by well-meaning educators concerned that the students will not be able to understand difficult vocabulary or English idioms. Although the practice does not happen in every deaf education program, my observations at one school for the deaf indicate the practice is alive and well. The English teachers at the school chose simple texts or rewrote texts themselves both to ensure uncomplicated syntax and to control the introduction of new vocabulary, including English idioms. Below is a section of the Beowulf the seniors read, a version written by the English teachers at the school:

Grendel heard the laughing and singing in Heorot. He was filled with hatred. He hid in the dark behind the trees and watched and waited. When the feast ended, Beowulf and his men went to their beds. The soldiers slept, but Beowulf watched and listened in the dark.

The students may be getting the story, but they are missing the vivid poetic metaphors so central to the beauty of Beowulf. The vocabulary the students learn during the Beowulf unit are determined, sturdy, hatred, satisfied, fatal, injure, saddle, bridle, furious, struck, spear, grateful, revenge, and epic hero.

It is impossible to know how much more vocabulary these students might have if they had been given more challenging reading material throughout their
schooling, but the students I observed in the local mainstreaming program were able, with the help of their resource teachers, to understand the texts their hearing classmates used, including such literary works as Romeo and Juliet and To Kill a Mockingbird.

Writing instructors should therefore be aware that deaf students might have difficulty understanding textbooks or written assignment instructions. Instructors should watch for confusion and offer additional explanations where necessary. Deaf students with limited vocabulary should also profit during the drafting stage of papers from suggestions from peers or the instructor on alternate or more appropriate words to use in the specific contexts of the students' own writing.

Grammar and Syntax

Even extremely language-deficient deaf students who have made it to college should have a working English vocabulary, although it may be insufficient for the needs of academic reading and writing. Knowing words, however, is not sufficient for putting them together into standard English sentences, especially the complex sentences needed to write in academic genres.

Many deaf students get little exposure to complex syntactical forms in their primary and secondary education. The same simplification of texts that deletes complex vocabulary and figurative language also limits syntax complexity. At the state school for the deaf I visited, seniors use Basic Skills in English, Purple Level, published by McDougal, Littell, for their grammar text. The book is meant for twelfth graders, albeit twelfth graders with poor reading
skills; the content is supposed to be grade-appropriate, but the readability level is simplified. The publishing company also produces a series for "regular" students, Building English Skills. The examples below, from each book's sections on sentence combining, show the difference between the two texts. The Basic Skills text uses simple sentence structure: "Two sentences may state similar ideas of equal importance. Such sentences can usually be joined with a comma and the word and" (66). The Building text is more complex: "Similar ideas of equal importance can usually be joined by using the word and. When such ideas are paired, repeated ideas . . . can be deleted" (19). The deaf students have no chance to develop familiarity with complex sentence structures because such structures are not part of their education. Thus, the same texts that attempt to teach deaf students grammar shield them from the more complex syntax used in academic writing.

Numerous studies describe grammar weaknesses in the writing of elementary and secondary students; the few dealing with postsecondary academic writing describe the same ESL-like errors. Studies of older deaf students show the same problems that younger ones have. The persistence of the same errors in spite of years of English instruction in school has convinced many educators that they cannot expect deaf students to do any better. However, the very similarity of "deaf writing" errors and those typical of ESL writing is evidence that these deaf writers have not been provided the opportunity to create an internal monitor or grammar for written English. Will more workbook exercises help? Probably not.
The evidence presented in Leonard P. Kelly's article "Relative Automaticity without Mastery: The Grammatical Decision Making of Deaf Students" can be interpreted as confirmation that deaf writers with ESL-like problems lack an internal monitor for written English. Kelly, a researcher at Gallaudet University, compared ten prelingually deaf college students with five hearing college students identified as basic writers. Kelley gave each student three separate tasks. The first was a writing assignment, the second an assignment for each writer to identify and correct any errors in the previous assignment, and the third an assignment to correct errors in a composition written by Kelley on the same topic he originally assigned to the students. The subjects did not know at each stage what they would be asked to do at the next stage. Throughout each assignment Kelley used special equipment to observe when, where, how often, and how long the subjects paused while doing the assignment. He assumed that during pauses the subjects were considering the appropriate English usage for what they were then writing or correcting (rather than, say, thinking about what to have for lunch or wishing they were somewhere else). Kelley combined this data along with data about the final products the subjects produced to reach his conclusion that deaf basic writers write with more "automaticity" (with fewer pauses) than hearing basic writers. Kelley hypothesizes that deaf writers do not practice "the same hyperconcern for correctness that seems to affect basic writers who have normal hearing. [And that] it follows that the minds of deaf writers are relatively free, if sometimes not adequately skilled, to address constraints of writing other than language" (327). Kelley's conclusion is problematic not only
because of the small size of his sample but also because he does not account for variables that might account for these results. For instance, it is possible that the deaf students were writing fluently because they often write to communicate (via TDD and even face-to-face) and are thus used to writing as quickly as possible, while the hearing basic writers may have very little experience writing for purposes other than school.

Kelley's results show that the deaf writers made proportionally more errors in their own writing than the hearing writers and corrected fewer of their own errors, but they corrected Kelley's writing about as well as the hearing writers. Kelley theorizes that this result means that deaf students do have an internal monitor for grammar but do not consult it while writing. I would suggest, however, that his results actually show that the deaf students have not internalized the rules of standard written English; they were able to correct the researcher's text better than they could their own because the task more closely resembled grammar exercises than did the other two tasks. In other words, the deaf students have memorized grammar rules but have not internalized them. Kelley's results would also suggest that deaf students most need practice working on their own writing so that they can learn to apply more naturally the grammar rules they have already memorized.

An incompletely internalized English grammar is sufficient reason for typical grammar and syntactic weaknesses of deaf writers since these problems have persisted through generations of deaf students educated with different deaf education systems. ASL interference is often presented as a possible contributor to the usage errors in deaf writing. However, since the
same sort of errors are present in deaf students with oral-only education. ASL interference can be, at best, a partial explanation.

What error patterns are common among deaf writers? The following list of "grammatical and syntactical concerns" in deaf writing, part of an article on "Language and Computer Assisted Writing Program at Clarke School for the Deaf," could as easily describe ESL concerns. The list is of special interest because Clarke School for the Deaf is a respected oral school.

1. Verbs—The variety of verbs was limited and the use of appropriate tenses was inconsistent and poor.
2. Pronouns—While students appeared to understand the simple subjective and objective pronouns they often wrote the noun in place of a pronoun anyway. Use of the possessive case and of more complex forms were frequently omitted or incorrectly used.
3. Articles—Most children utilized simple articles before nouns but erred in the use of a and an, some and any, a and the, this and that, etc. Indefinite and indefinite [sic] articles presented constant problems.
4. Prepositions—Use of in, on, under was relatively accurate but at, to, by and other more subtle propositions were frequently misused.
5. Syntax—Sentences were frequently short, overly simplified and/or patterned. Complex sentences . . . were extremely rare. Direct quotations were utilized in the place of more sophisticated verbs or complex language . . .
6. Questions—Formation of questions was poor. (Magner 99)

At Clarke School these error patterns could not possibly result from ASL interference because all signing (even outside of the classroom) is forbidden— not out of fear that the students would confuse ASL and English but that the students would lose incentive to develop oral language skills.

Probably the only way a teacher could know whether or not internalized ASL grammar structure is affecting a student's written English is to ask the student. For instance, if question formation is poor, it is possible that the student is forming questions in ASL order rather than English. For
example, if a student wrote “Your house where?” to mean “Where is your house?” the student would be using the words in acceptable ASL order. Although ASL would also accept “WHERE YOUR HOUSE?” Word order is usually not as important in ASL as in English because it is the spatial nature of ASL that makes the relationship between the words clear; rather, in ASL signers usually “front” the elements of the sentence they wish to emphasize. However, the student might also have simply never had enough exposure to English to internalize transformational-generative grammar rules. ASL might also interfere with English verb usage because ASL indicates tense through space and context and does not require a verb to agree with its subject. ASL could be seen as interfering with English usage almost everywhere because the two languages are so different. It is easy to understand why a direct cause and effect relationship is often attributed to poor English usage by ASL speakers. However, since even oral deaf students exhibit the same sort of difficulties it is more likely that ASL interferes indirectly to the extent that communication in ASL supplants communication in English.

GLOBAL WEAKNESSES

Global weaknesses are the problems most fully addressed by Anderson. She writes that the deaf students whose texts she uses as examples

have a predisposition for multiple topics or focal points rather than one; they exhibit a high incidence of digression; they show a great deal of backtracking; they tend to front their topics early and then fail to return to the fronted topics; they make global judgments drawn from personal claims or single incidents; they become affectively involved with the topics of the texts; insert English idiomatic expressions to signal the end of a thought or a change of topic; they appeal directly to the reader to understand why they may not have adequately met
assignment constraints: and they demonstrate a reluctance to take a
strong stand while acknowledging that others may have different
views. (19-20)

Some of these weaknesses can be seen in the “Mermaid” text above.
Experienced teachers know that all of these problems are common in hearing
writers who have not yet mastered the conventions of academic discourse. It
is not at all surprising that deaf students who have had limited access to
complex academic discourse exhibit these weaknesses in their writing.

Organization and Coherence

Communication needs of deaf people can help account for poor
organization in the writing of deaf students. Quite simply, the need to process
communication visually favors particular organization strategies, such as
fronting the topic. Knowing the topic up front makes processing the rest of the
message easier. In ASL story-telling, it is common to tell the point of the story
first, and then the story. Deaf students might not know that academic writing
requires different organizational strategies or might know but not have enough
exposure to appropriate patterns to use them themselves.

Inappropriate strategies for signaling transitions, for trying to make text
cohere, could similarly be attributed to the constraints deafness places on
communication. Oral communication, for deaf people, requires concentrating
on picking out key words to get the gist of the message; transition words are
easily lost in the process. ASL users, on the other hand, see transitions—but
transitions in non-English ways, such as through body movements.

Again, deaf students need plenty of opportunities to see how other
writers organize their writing and lead their readers from point to point. Since
deaf education programs rarely provide for extended writing opportunities.

deaf students may have had little occasion to develop organizational skills beyond paragraph-level writing. Deaf students need what hearing students need: examples and plenty of practice making their own writing well-organized and coherent.

Audience Awareness

An additional problem is that many deaf students also have difficulty writing reader-based prose—prose that considers the needs of the reader. This is not a well-explored area, since most researchers have concentrated on less global aspects of the writing of deaf students. Educational researchers like to quantify results, and audience awareness is difficult to quantify. Harlan Lane suggests that deaf students have difficulty with "essay-text literacy" because

essay texts are explicit, complete, clear, closed, self-sufficient. But face-to-face communication, which the student knows well in his primary, manual language, is frequently not explicit but suggestive, not complete but fragmented, unclear in itself but made clear by its connections with context, hence neither closed nor self-sufficient. (183)

Here we hear echoes of the old orality-literacy controversy, of Walter Ong's argument that "technologizing the word," privileging print communication over oral communication, results in a different way of thinking by being able to remove language from an immediate context. Lane is an apologist for deaf culture although he is himself hearing, so he is most certainly not suggesting that deaf students are incapable of academic literacy. His point is rather that
the language of deaf culture. ASL, is very much "oral" in nature. These "oral" language patterns often carry over into the writing deaf students do at school.

"Oral" or through-the-air language takes place in the presence of the intended audience, so the speaker or signer can gauge audience reaction and make appropriate adjustments or clarifications. Since the communication occurs in a specific context, the speaker or signer can rely on the context to convey parts of the message. This context-dependent reliance on the audience's presence might account for Anderson's observation that deaf writers appeal directly to their audience to forgive errors. In other words, they are all too painfully aware that the removed audience of academic writing cannot stop them in the middle to request clarification. Deaf students do want their audience to understand them even if they are not sure how to get their ideas across.

Awareness of audience might also account for deaf students' reluctance to state their own opinion. All deaf people have experience being denigrated by hearing people. To write out an opinion that will be judged (graded) by a hearing person opens the deaf student up for further (perceived) rejection. Deaf students know that hearing people often (perhaps even usually) see them primarily in the context of their deafness. Members of minority cultures are often reluctant to display their opinions to majority culture members because of power issues. Thus, when hearing teachers expect deaf students to write opinion papers, they are unintentionally requiring deaf students to trust an audience that has often proved untrustworthy. Teachers can work to build that trust, but only if they understand that trust is an issue.
One way to build trust is by structuring the course to take into account the deaf students' needs and culture: suggestions on how to do so are included in chapters five and six.

CONCLUSION

Gallaudet University operates its English composition program on the assumption that deaf students are members of a culturally disadvantaged group whose educational and family experiences contribute to preventing the student from developing strong academic literacy. By creating a cultural environment where academic excellence is expected of deaf students, the university produces graduates who are literate in academic language. Mainstream classrooms can provide similar opportunity for deaf students by recognizing that their language difficulties are culturally constructed and can be remedied by providing the same sort of instruction provided to hearing students with insufficient preparation in written English. This does not mean that deaf students have no special needs. They do. However, currently existing English courses designed for poorly prepared hearing students can serve deaf students as well if the instructor recognizes that some strategies used with hearing students, such as using oral English knowledge to improve written English, will not work with deaf students. Strategies that can help are explained in the next two chapters.

NOTES

1 Reduced English exposure further reduces deaf students' knowledge of English-speaking American culture, so much so that certain aspects of hearing culture, such as humor, will be difficult for deaf students to understand.
Kelley did not indicate how he defined prelingual deafness. As I indicated elsewhere, onset of deafness as late as age three is often considered “prelingual.”
Chapter 5

Making the Classroom Accessible

The world does not look the same to deaf people as it does to hearing people. A hearing instructor, Ms. Hayden, looks forward to her 4:30 composition class. In this late-afternoon time slot she has several non-traditional students who are always willing to share their lived experiences with the rest of the class; even the traditional freshmen are much more alert than the ones in the 8:30 a.m. time slot she taught in last semester. The students include members of several races, a young woman in a wheelchair, and a deaf man. Most of the time when she walks into class the students are already talking about their papers or readings for the day. The classroom itself catches the afternoon sun, and although rush-hour traffic passes nearby it is not too loud to talk over comfortably. Today she is expecting an especially lively class because she is going to use lyrics from popular music to illustrate a lesson on metaphor.

The same class that looks so good to Ms. Hayden presents several potential problems for deaf students, both in course content and in the classroom environment. This chapter will show instructors ways to make the classroom environment accessible; the next chapter will address issues of course content. After all, modifying course content without making the class physically accessible would not be of much help. This chapter draws heavily on my experience as a deaf student in mainstreamed educational settings from sixth grade on. I also evaluate the suggestions of others (primarily hearing professionals working with the deaf in many different areas) from the
point of view of a deaf student. The purpose of this chapter is to help a
hearing teacher see the classroom and other educational settings, such as the
library or a professor's office, from the point of view of a deaf student.

I begin by re-emphasizing that deaf and hearing-impaired students are
not all alike, and that a solution that works for one may not work for others.
The possible differences in deaf students' backgrounds—educational and
otherwise—discussed in previous chapters make deaf students themselves the
only ones who can, ultimately, let a teacher know what is and is not helpful.
However, I know that I needed many years to figure out exactly what worked
for me and why and was sometimes too intimidated by teachers to ask for
changes even when I did know what would help. Also, the teacher is the one
who knows ahead of time what she plans for the class and is thus ultimately
the only one who can assure that the deaf student has appropriate
accommodation for any given class activity.

I also want to emphasize that just because a deaf student is doing well
in a class does not mean that the class is as fully accessible as it could be.
After all, some deaf students have managed to get through their educations
with very little special accommodation. I got all the way through high school
by copying lecture notes from classmates and by replacing dictation exercises
with translation in foreign language courses, but I know that I missed a lot. On
the other hand, some deaf students (like some hearing students) will do poorly
even if a class is fully accessible. Accessibility simply assures an equal
chance to excel, get by, or fail.
Equality is the key. No student needing accommodation is served well when well-meaning teachers exempt students from crucial learning experiences. The goal should always be to find a way for the disabled student to participate fully in the educational opportunities provided to non-disabled students. Accommodations remove unnecessary barriers so that the disabled student can concentrate on the academic challenge rather than on barriers created by the disability.

ACCOMMODATING ACCOMMODATIONS

Making a classroom accessible for deaf students begins with helping them get the greatest benefit out of any forms of help they bring to a class. Probably the first accommodation hearing people think of for the deaf is sign language interpreters. and interpreters of some sort certainly are the most visible form of accommodation the deaf receive in the classroom. However, not all deaf people sign. and there are alternatives for them. as well as for situations for which no interpreter is available. Many deaf students also use note takers (known sometimes as communication assistants, especially if they are specially trained). Deaf students also may have hearing aids or cochlear implants. They will also have ideas about where to place themselves within the classroom to get the most out of their communication options. Although the instructor does not have to actively implement these means of access, he can help make them more effective by cooperating and to do so must understand what that means.
Interpreters (and Variations)

Since access to aural information is the main obstacle that deaf students face, the interpreter (or the equivalent) is an important resource. Although the instructor is not responsible for the performance of the interpreter, using this resource well requires understanding its limitations and awareness that just because such a person is present does not necessarily mean that the deaf student is receiving the same information as hearing classmates. For example, interpreters regularly summarize the oral content in class because doing so is the only way to keep up with fast-paced lecture or discussion; a summary might inadvertently miss key information. Although the interpreter’s code of ethics requires interpreters to request clarification if they do not understand what they are to sign, I know from experience that not all interpreters do so. Many interpreters will also need to serve as the voice for their clients, since even those deaf who can speak may not be understandable to those not familiar to deaf speech. Since adequate or better speech skills in the deaf usually correlate to postlingual onset of deafness, most deaf students who need reverse interpreting will be prelingually deaf and more likely to use sign language interpreters. The need for reverse interpreting creates a real problem for deaf students because “few interpreters have advanced reverse interpreting skills due to the difficulty in mastering this skill” (Hurwitz and Witter 137). Instructors should thus be aware that the interpreter might not be voicing the message intended by the deaf student and should request any clarification necessary, especially since the deaf student quite likely would not be able to catch the interpreter’s error.
Although the guidelines I quote from others refer to sign language interpreters, they can apply equally well to the other means of providing deaf students access to the oral content of a class. Alternatives to sign language interpreters for deaf people who do not know sign language are cued speech transliterators and oral interpreters. Cued speech transliterators repeat what is said while cueing it. (See chapter three for a description of cued speech.) Oral interpreters mouth the oral content; however, they do not simply repeat word-for-word what is said, but rather often condense it to be able to mouth the words at a speed the deaf person can read. Deaf students using any of the above methods to access oral content of class depend on the skill of the interpreter—and that one will be available. This is not always a safe assumption to make, especially outside of large urban centers.

A relatively new alternative to interpreters uses the technology developed for providing captioning on live television. This system, known as CART (computer-aided real-time transcription), requires a court reporter and the computer software to transcribe the stenography shorthand into English, which is displayed on a computer screen for the student to read. CART has the benefit of not only being accessible to deaf students no matter whether they sign or speak (as long as they can read English), but also of providing an instant transcript of the class for future reference. Skilled court reporters are also in greater supply than interpreters or cued speech transliterators. However, CART has no way of conveying the part of spoken language that is not in the words themselves, no way of showing that the instructor is speaking with emphasis or sarcastically, and so on: an interpreter can convey that
information. In addition, as anyone who has watched real-time captioned newscasts knows, the technology does not always work perfectly. The software that translates the shorthand messes up when a word is unfamiliar or is similar to another word—and that is assuming no errors in input. For example, I have seen captioned newscasts confuse “Oklahoma” and “Okinawa.” When I used CART briefly for writing center staff meetings as a teaching assistant, I found the system “choked” on unfamiliar names and academic language. The system can learn new vocabulary, but only once there is a chance to program in the new words it processed incorrectly.

Another problem with the CART system stems from the likelihood that the CART transcriptor probably will not be familiar with deafness and may not be able to understand the student very well, especially if she has poor speech skills. The student would therefore have a more difficult time participating in class; the student could still type or write comments or questions, but deaf students with poor English skills might be too embarrassed to do so.

Deaf students themselves might not be quite sure of the role of the interpreter (or equivalent) in the college classroom. Students from schools for the deaf whose teachers have always signed will have limited (at best) experience using an interpreter in an educational setting. Those who used interpreters in mainstreamed classes might also be unfamiliar with the appropriate role of an interpreter in a college classroom because educational interpreters (those who work in K-12) follow a different set of rules from other interpreters. Educational interpreters are supposed to intervene in the education of the students they work for, such as by talking to the teacher if the
student does not seem to understand something. Other interpreters are not supposed to go beyond being the ears (and voice, if necessary) of the deaf person. Ideally, the interpreter would be professional enough to ensure that both the student and the instructor use the interpreter's services appropriately. Unfortunately it has been my experience that all interpreters are not that professional, especially at schools that do not require their interpreters to be certified. At least if instructors are aware of what an interpreter should be doing, they can be aware when a student is not being served well and can take steps to correct problems.

What should instructors expect from interpreters? As I have said previously, it is the role of the interpreter to ensure that the deaf student has access to the aural content of a class. As a deaf student, I found the following behaviors most desirable in interpreters. An interpreter should

1. Render the message faithfully. If the interpreter misses any information (either because of a break in concentration or because the speaker is talking too fast, too softly, or too incoherently, or because more than one person is speaking at a time), she should interrupt to get the full message. This also applies to reverse interpreting, to translating anything the deaf student says, either signed, voiced (but not understandable to the average hearing person), or written/typed. The interpreter is also bound to maintain the intent of the message whether the interpreter thinks the message ill-advised or not.¹
2. Prepare as much as possible before the class, especially learning any specialized vocabulary ahead of time. The interpreter and client can then agree on how to handle difficult vocabulary (long words). Likewise, the interpreter should not take any assignment for which she knows she can not be reasonably prepared.
3. Not participate in class (unless the deaf student gives permission). The interpreter is being paid only to interpret and should stick to his job.
4. Be on time. Ideally, the interpreter should arrive slightly early to do any last-minute preparation and to give the student access to conversations before class. Tardiness, however, is inexcusable.
5. Inform the client as far as possible in advance if she must be absent and arrange for a substitute. Absences (even those covered

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¹ This rule is especially important for reverse interpreting, where the interpreter must be able to understand the message before translating it. It also applies to interpreting anything the deaf student says, whether signed, voiced, or written/typed. The interpreter is also bound to maintain the intent of the message whether the interpreter thinks the message ill-advised or not.
by a substitute) should be kept to a minimum because the substitute will not be as well prepared.

6. Keep all information confidential. The interpreter's code of ethics forbids him from discussing any aspect of his interpreting assignments except in the most general of terms. The Deaf community is very small, and sharing any identifying information at all (such as that the client is a college student) would mean invading the client's privacy.

7. Refer any requests for information about the deaf client to the deaf person. If anyone in the class (teacher or students) asks the interpreter for information about the deaf student, the interpreter should convey that question to the client instead of responding to the hearing questioner.

Instructors can help the interpreter by allowing her to perform her job, and by informing the class of the role of the interpreter so that all hearing persons in the class understand why the interpreter is there. Some hearing students resent the "helpers" provided for deaf students and the interpreter (or equivalent) is the most visible of these. Other students will thus be more likely not only to cooperate with the interpreter but also to accept the deaf student as a peer if they understand that special services provided to deaf students are intended only to give deaf students equal access, not do their work for them. When the hearing people in the class understand the interpreter's role, she can do her job more easily.

Interpreters do need the cooperation of the instructor and students to do the best job possible. The hearing persons in the class should

1. Speak to the deaf person as though the interpreter were not there. In other words, the deaf student should be addressed directly and should be included in discussions. Speaking to the deaf student in class is one way to help ensure that the deaf student participates.

2. Articulate as clearly as possible. Interpreters are skilled listeners but can not interpret what they can not hear. Likewise, speakers should try not to speak too rapidly because the interpreter will have difficulty keeping up. Only one person should speak at a time.

3. Be aware that the interpreter is bound by her code of ethics to keep what happens in class confidential. Hearing people are often intimidated by the presence of an interpreter but should not be; the
interpreter is only providing the deaf client with the same information that would be available if she was not deaf. ³

4. Avoid interrupting the communication line between the interpreter and the deaf client by not distracting the interpreter from her job (by, for example, asking her to pass on a handout) or by physically coming between the interpreter and his client.

5. If at all possible, inform the interpreter ahead of time if there will be an audio-visual presentation, such as a slide show or film, requiring the lights to be dimmed. The interpreter will then be able to bring a small light so the deaf student can still see the interpreter’s hands and/or mouth.

6. Be aware that the interpreter will always be at least a few seconds behind the speaker. After all, the interpreter has to hear what is said before interpreting it. ⁴ Occasional short pauses will give the interpreter a chance to catch up and the deaf person a chance to ask questions or make comments.

These “rules” are not difficult to follow and, from my point of view as a deaf person using an interpreter, seem to be only common sense. However, my experience in mainstreamed classrooms showed me repeatedly that hearing people often just do not realize that their actions make an interpreter’s job more difficult. I have seen each of my above rules violated many times by both teachers and my fellow students.

Communication Assistants

Many deaf (and hard of hearing) students, including many who do not use an interpreter (or equivalent), use communication assistants (CAs), also known as notetakers. Deaf and hard of hearing students who depend heavily on visual input (from speechreading or from an interpreter) simply can not maintain the intense visual concentration necessary and take notes at the same time. ⁵ Some schools use volunteer notetakers drawn from other members of the class: a typical procedure would be to request the instructor to ask the class for volunteers and choose at least two who can be trusted to
take good notes (to provide a back up notetaker in case the primary one is absent, or to provide the deaf student with two sets of notes to create his or her own notes). Schools should then provide the paper and cover the copying costs as part of the school’s legal requirements to provide equal access to the disabled.

Some schools pay communication assistants; this alternative is preferable because the CA has an added incentive to do a good job. In addition, paid CAs are less likely to be students in the class and can thus focus completely on taking notes. The following is a description of the requirements for and duties of a CA at one university that pays CAs $5.00/hour. The CA’s duties are to

provide support services to deaf, hard-of-hearing or mobility impaired students by going to their classes and taking comprehensive notes. These notes need to be more complete and thorough than regular class notes. Information such as special announcements, homework assignments, test dates, and questions from students are to be included in the notes.

[The requirements for the position are:] 1. CAs should have college course background and the ability to take high quality, comprehensive notes. 2. CAs cannot be on academic probation. 3. If a CA is also a Work Study student, he cannot work over the allotted number of hours per week. 4. CAs may not currently be enrolled in the same course section for which they are working. (Louisiana State University 1-2)

Potential CAs are evaluated for hiring based on the notes they take while viewing a sample videotape of a class lecture. Schools using such a screening system are able to provide students needing CAs with a more reliable source of potential note takers than whoever happens to be enrolled in the class for which the student needs a CA. Of course, a deaf student
could still choose to borrow the notes of classmates instead of using a paid CA if such an arrangement suits his or her needs better.

**Tutoring**

Many institutions offer special tutoring for disabled students both to make up for the barriers present in even the most accessible classrooms and because other tutoring services might not be prepared to deal with special needs students. However, the presence of such services should not prevent an instructor from suggesting other tutoring options (such as a writing center for composition students) if they would do so for other students. Deaf students especially need to be told about the availability of such options since they miss so much incidental information other students hear about. Instructors should not, however, expect tutoring to relieve them of the obligation to make their classroom as accessible as possible.

**Mechanical Aids**

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who have some residual hearing might bring with them a mechanical aid of some sort to increase their access to the oral portion of class. Regular hearing aids (and cochlear implants) may or may not help the student very much in a classroom situation simply because the devices pick up non-speech sounds as well as speech sounds. Hearing aids and implants work best in much the same situations ideal for speechreading—one-on-one conversations without a lot of additional distractions (visual noise for speechreading, aural noise for aid use). In addition, for many aid or implant users, the information thus derived is most helpful in conjunction with the visual input of speechreading. Hearing people
often do not seem to understand that hearing aids do not correct hearing the way eyeglasses correct vision because hearing loss is usually much more complex. Hearing aid and cochlear implant users will probably have very specific ideas about where they need to sit in a classroom to derive the greatest benefit from their mechanical aids. Even deaf people who wear aids on both ears (cochlear implants are always only on one ear) may have one ear that hears more in the speech range, and thus need to sit so that that ear has the best reception. The instructor can also help the deaf student receive the greatest benefit from his or her aid by requesting that the whole class abide by a one-speaker-at-a-time rule.

Some deaf students may also use specialized aids that pick up sound specifically directed into a microphone. Such a device serves to filter out the background noises that can render normal hearing aid input useless (and annoying) by focusing on a sound source—such as a lecturer. The instructor would need to wear the microphone, and since the device would not pick up the speech of other students, would also need to repeat any questions or comments from the class, especially if the student does not also use an interpreter.

IMPLEMENTING ACCOMMODATIONS—INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE

Instructors may very well wonder what is left for them to do to make their classroom accessible other than cooperating with resources the student chooses to use. Support services do go a long way towards making a classroom accessible for deaf students, but, even with support services, the classroom—and most of the mainstreamed institution—is very much a
hearing-oriented environment. Racial desegregation taught us that simply adding a new population of students to a campus is not enough to achieve true integration. The administration (or the law) can provide for an open door (or for translation of sound), but only teachers can restructure their classes to serve the new populations along with the old ones.

Perhaps the most important action for teachers to take to make deaf students feel welcomed in their classrooms is to believe that (and act as if) deaf students have the same ability to complete the course work as all other students. Alan Hurwitz, a deaf man who went to college before laws required special accommodation, writes that "oftentimes, a teacher would be shocked to learn that a deaf student was in his class and would say that I couldn’t make it in his class" (51-52). Unfortunately, his experience sounds all too familiar to me, although not all educators were quite so blunt in letting me know. I was, for example, strongly discouraged from attending the selective college preparatory high school that I had long planned to attend because the administration did not think a deaf student had a chance. I was then practically forced to transfer from German to Latin, which I did not want to take, because the administration (again!) thought Latin’s emphasis on written language would be easier for me. I hated it and switched to French the next year; I ended up taking three years of French in high school and more in college. I happen to take “you can’t” as a challenge to prove otherwise. However, not all students have this attitude.

Evidence exists that teacher expectations can create self-fulfilling prophecies for student achievement, and that students pick up on these
expectations whether they are explicitly stated or not. Susan McLeod
discusses expectancy research in her article “Pygmalion or Golem? Teacher
Affect and Efficacy” to urge teachers to learn to be empathetic towards
students (and for administrators to foster empathy) in order to foster the
Pygmalion Effect (positive expectations resulting in positive outcome) rather
than the Golem Effect (negative expectations producing negative outcome).
Empathy is the key because it allows teachers to see how the class appears
to the students. McLeod writes that “cultivating empathy does mean that
teachers actively engage themselves in the thinking and learning processes of
their students” (375). For the hearing teacher of deaf students, this empathy
would have to include considering how the classroom structure (as well as
course content) appears to a hearing impaired student depending on his or
her eyes.

Ideally, schools would provide training to prepare instructors for special
needs students. However, based on the results of a small survey I conducted
of teachers who have had deaf students in mainstreamed composition
courses, postsecondary institutions provide no preparation whatsoever for
teachers. Some universities will inform instructors to expect a deaf student
but because of privacy issues should not do so unless the student gives
permission. I prefer to tell my instructors myself on the first day of class; that
way an instructor cannot begin forming an opinion about me before we meet.
Writing program administrators could begin to educate their faculty members,
including teaching assistants, about the needs of deaf and other disabled
students as part of the process of training in empathy for which McLeod calls.
To promote this empathy I will provide practical suggestions, both my own and those of mainstreaming experts, along with the reasons for implementing these suggestions. After all, carrying through the suggestions without explaining why they are important would not promote empathy, which is based on understanding. Most literature on mainstreaming deaf students concentrates on the needs of elementary through high school students since the public schools have much more experience dealing with mainstreaming than do most postsecondary schools. One of the most inclusive articles I have found, "Suggestions for the Regular Classroom Teacher" by Barry R. Culhane and Lawrence L. Mothersell, is directed towards K-12 teachers but is also helpful to postsecondary instructors. These experts on mainstreaming deaf students provide lists of their suggestions for communicating with deaf students in both groups and one-on-one: I will cite these lists when their suggestions correspond to mine. Most of the suggestions are already common teaching practices with benefits for hearing students as well (after all, hearing students—unless they are blind—also benefit from visual information), but they are even more important to hearing-impaired students.

Speaking and Lecturing

If a deaf student uses an interpreter/transliterater, an instructor could easily see no reason to pay particular attention to his or her speech, on the assumption that the interpreter does all that is necessary for the deaf student to understand what is said. However, this is only partially true. A deaf student normally sits where she can see both the interpreter and the teacher because the interpreter can not substitute for the teacher as a source of information.
and because shifting visual focus between the two (while being able to see
both) helps prevent eye fatigue. An instructor should therefore try as much as
possible to provide visual access to his or her mouth, and to speak clearly at
all times. This means not only keeping objects away from one’s face, but also
avoiding “standing in front of a window or other light source” (Culhane and
Mothersell 109) because then shadowing obscures the face. Supplementing
speech with what Culhane and Mothersell call “paralanguage,” the non-verbal
elements of face-to-face communication gesture, pantomime, and facial
expression, will help give deaf students greater access to the instructor’s
message such as being able to tell which points the instructor is emphasizing.
Paralanguage also makes speechreading easier by providing additional clues
and so is even more crucial for hearing impaired students who choose not to
use an interpreter or transliterator. During any discussion, deaf students will
also benefit if the instructor writes key words or points on the blackboard or
overhead projector; using an overhead projector has the added benefit of not
requiring the instructor to turn his or her back on the class and face away from
the speechreader.

If the oral content of a class is planned, such as a lecture or a reading,
extra visual cues should be provided. An extra copy of any material to be
read aloud should always be provided to deaf students. Most people naturally
read aloud at a much faster pace than they normally speak, thus making
interpreting more difficult and increasing the chances that the deaf student will
get a corrupted message. An additional reason to provide a copy of the
reading material is to give the deaf student access to the exact English
message, and thus a chance to increase familiarity with English. Since, as I argue in previous chapters, deaf students have poor English skills because they are not given enough exposure to a full range of English, instructors should use any opportunity to give deaf students direct access to the English of the classroom. Any interpreted, transliterated, or transcribed version will almost certainly not be the exact same version the other students hear.

An outline of a planned lecture including key concepts, terms, and names will make it easier for a deaf student to understand the lecture itself whether through sign cues, speechreading, or even a CART system. New terms and names are especially problematic for all of these methods deaf students use to access the oral content of class. As Culhane and Mothersell suggest, providing a “written outline and written assignments” (110) helps prevent confusion. Ensuring that the deaf student gets the appropriate information on which to act is the primary reason for providing written copies of key information, including (and perhaps especially) assignments and tests or quizzes. As a student I always had an especially difficult time with orally administered quizzes, especially those given by teachers who did not seem to understand that I could not watch my interpreter and write the answers at the same time. The standard practice of reading a question twice allows hearing students to write their answers during the second reading while at the same time listening to make sure they heard the question right the first time. Eventually I learned to let my instructors know that I needed them to slow down a bit if they did not have the questions written, but at one time I was much too concerned with not asking instructors to change their methods.
because I felt the need to prove any instructor wrong who felt like I could not handle his or her class. I could not let myself seem "slow."

Deaf students are more likely to miss parts of any lecture or discussion due to the simple fact that eyes, unlike ears, get tired and need short breaks. Even a blink is enough to miss a word, especially for a speechreader, and occasional slightly longer breaks are a physical necessity. Deaf students looking down at the floor or up at the ceiling are not necessarily refusing to pay attention (unless they do so for extended periods of time) but rather may be giving their eyes a break. Until I learned how to take strategic short breaks my eyes would get so tired by the end of a 50 minute class, especially at the end of a day, that my vision would blur. Instructors who use "repetition and rephrasing techniques" (Culhane and Mothersell 110) increase the likelihood that a deaf student will receive the complete message by providing the same information more than once, both the instructor's own comments and any contributions from other students.

Group discussions are an especially trying communication situation for deaf students. When there is one primary speaker, the deaf student can place him- or herself in the most optimal position for understanding that person. Heated group discussions are also a likely time for students to forget classroom etiquette allowing only one person to speak at a time. Group discussions are especially difficult for hearing impaired students who do not use an interpreter/transliterator. Skilled speechreaders, especially those with significant useful hearing, might be able to follow a single speaker. However, in a group discussion, by the time the hearing impaired person locates the
new speaker part of the message is already lost. Since speechreading is
highly dependent on context, missing the beginning of a sentence or word
makes it that much more difficult to piece together what is being said. Even
with an interpreter, group discussions, especially heated ones, are a challenge
for a deaf student to participate in. Because of lag time in interpreting, by the
time a deaf student finishes “hearing” one speaker, the next might already
have started: when the deaf student finally gets a chance to speak (or sign),
the topic might have already changed from what he wanted to say. Thus,
instructors who choose discussion over lecture in order to make their courses
more student-centered may actually create a more difficult classroom
environment for deaf students.

Deaf students do have a more equal chance when instructors “control
discussion pace” (Culhane and Mothersell 110). One way to do this (and to
help ensure that students respect each other’s right to be heard one at a time)
is to require students to be recognized before speaking. Seating
arrangements (horseshoe, circle) that allow students to see each other also
provide deaf students an environment more conductive to participation in
discussions. That way the deaf students can see who is speaking and be
more aware of opportunities to jump into the conversation themselves (to see
when to raise a hand for recognition). Such a seating arrangement is the only
chance that a speechreader will have to follow the conversation at all.

Using Visual Aids

Since deaf students are skilled at receiving information visually, visual
aids would seem to be a no-fail way to increase access in the classroom.
However, this holds true only if the visual aids are used appropriately. Most importantly, deaf students need sufficient time to look at any source of visual information provided to the class—time when there is no competing source of auditory information since the deaf student would then need to choose between the two sources of information. I had to make such choices all of the time. Did I want to find the passage in my own text that the professor was reading and discussing to mark it for future reference and to see if I had made any notes there myself (as my classmates were doing), or did I want to make sure I did not miss any potentially enlightening remarks? When there is a deaf student in the class, any time the teacher uses any source of visual information—text in a book or handout, information on a computer screen or overhead projector—the instructor should provide enough time for the deaf student to focus attention on the visual aid without having to try to simultaneously receive aural information visually. The student should also be alerted when it is time to move on; otherwise she might be unaware of the need to shift her attention.

Handouts of any sort are ideal visual sources of information because the student can go back to them later. However, if the instructor plans to use them in class, deaf students need enough time to read through them. If the plan is to discuss a handout part by part and read the handout as a class, a copy placed on an overhead projector in print large enough to be legible to the students can provide a solution. Deaf students can read the copy on the screen while the teacher indicates what part he is reading simply by pointing at the words as he (or a student) reads them aloud. Removing the pointing
device (finger, pencil, etc.) could then indicate for deaf students that they need to shift the focus of their attention to their source of aural information. If an overhead projector is not an option, the instructor should at least indicate how much of the text will be read aloud before any discussion occurs, and then make sure that the deaf student is looking at her source of aural information before proceeding with the discussion.

An overhead projector or blackboard is essential for providing impromptu visual aids. Writing down key elements of the oral component of class is simple and serves the needs of hearing students as well. As always, the instructor should pause in speaking long enough to give the deaf students a chance to read over what has been written; hearing students can use the time to write the information in their own notes.

Overhead projectors are less ideal when their usage requires the lights to be dimmed unless there is to be no oral commentary. The same goes for slide or (uncaptioned) video presentations. As I mentioned above in the section on cooperating with interpreters, a small light source that allows the deaf person to see the source of oral information makes such situations easier for deaf students. However, visibility is still more difficult than in a well-lit classroom, especially since the light will cast shadows that bright overhead lights do not. In addition, oral commentary should not be provided while the deaf student is expected to watch the visual aid. For an information source that combines audio and video, such as a film, instructors should make try to use a captioned copy. If none is available, an interpreter standing right next to the screen is a second best solution for deaf students who use interpreters.
Computers have potential to greatly increase deaf students’ access to academic conversation. Especially promising is the use of networks, either in an actual classroom or in a virtual classroom where students meet over computers networked directly or through telephone lines. When all students and the instructor type their contributions to the classroom discussion, deaf students have a completely equal chance to participate (as long as they have sufficient command of written English). For a deaf student, “being able to write interactively as a group in class can open up new levels of communication, creating an opportunity for expression during class that normally doesn’t exist” (Batson and Peyton 255). Conducting class via a computer network would seem especially appropriate for writing classes, since it allows the entire class to be conducted in writing.

Classroom Setting

Certain classrooms may be highly unsuitable for a class with deaf students. Schools regularly move classes held in rooms inaccessible to mobility impaired students: the same principle should apply to classrooms for deaf students. The room must, of course, be well lighted; bright lighting helps reduce eye fatigue. The room should also be as silent as possible since environmental noise reduces the effectiveness of hearing aids and cochlear implants as well as making it more difficult for an interpreter to function effectively. Also, environmental noise makes it even more difficult than normal for deaf students who speak to make themselves understood, since they have no way of gauging how loudly they need to talk. The vibrations produced by certain noises (heavy traffic rumbling by, for example) are distracting. Deaf
people use vibrations as an alternate source of environmental information that can not be provided visually. For instance, it is perfectly appropriate in Deaf culture to stomp one's feet to get another's attention. For a similar reason classrooms subject to reflecting light from passing traffic should be avoided since deaf people train themselves to use flashing lights to alert them to phones, alarms, doorbells, and even crying babies. I know my own response is so automatic that I jump whenever a light flashes no matter where I am. Direct sunlight flooding into a classroom can be a problem because it creates shadows.

**Small Groups**

Providing opportunities for deaf students to work closely with hearing classmates in small groups gives deaf students the opportunity to interact with hearing peers. especially important since deaf students with poor oral communication skills rarely interact significantly with hearing students outside of the classroom. If the extent of integration in a mainstreamed classroom is simply the physical presence of deaf students in predominantly hearing classes, neither group will benefit from the opportunity to learn from the other. Group work provides an opportunity to break the ice; I found that hearing students who worked with me in small groups were then more likely to try to talk to me at other times.

If a class has only one deaf student, the logistics are relatively easy since the interpreter/transliterater can be present during the group work. However, if more than one deaf student is sharing the same interpreter the instructor needs to decide ahead of time if the deaf students will always be
permitted to work together in the same group. The instructor should not feel bound to do so. Dr. Jean Rohloff, an instructor at Louisiana State University had four deaf students in a composition course. The students used two interpreters. Dr. Rohloff found group work problematic. She says that “peer group evaluation moves slowly and I end up with only one hearing student to two hearing impaired. I’m not sure that’s the best situation.” When I observed a peer evaluation session in her course, groups with only hearing students did finish before those with deaf students, even though each group with deaf students had an interpreter. However, deaf people do need to find ways to communicate with hearing people; on the job, in the world, interpreters are not always present. Hearing students could then learn that there are ways to communicate even with non-oral deaf when no interpreter is present.

Alternatives depend both on the deaf student and on the other group members. For instance, most deaf people can speechread at least somewhat. Even if the deaf student can understand only one of the other group members, that member could “interpret” for everyone else. The group could decide to communicate via writing or could designate one member to write everything down for the deaf student. If small group membership is established for an entire semester or for one long project (rather than for just one class meeting), the deaf student could perhaps teach the other students the manual alphabet. Any deaf student attending a mainstreamed postsecondary school is an expert on finding ways to communicate with hearing people when the need arises: the interaction might be awkward and
slow, but it will happen. Instructors who use small groups to develop
collaborative skills might find them an especially useful challenge for their
students since the essence of collaboration is communication.

Office Hours

Although deaf students can schedule interpreters for meetings with
instructors, an interpreter might not always be available, especially if the
meeting is not planned well in advance. Dr. Rohloff found that “one-on-one
conferencing works well” with her deaf students. Meeting with deaf students
without their interpreters present is not a bad idea anyway; if the student is
having problems in class caused partly by an inadequate interpreter or
transliterator, the student might not want to say so in front of that person!
Although students should be able to fire any service providers who do a poor
job, a replacement might not be readily available. In any case, there is no
reason why instructors should not be able to communicate with deaf students.
If all else fails, writing works. Deaf students are especially likely to need out-
of-class clarification of assignments and information resulting from the
inevitable communication breakdowns; they need to know specifically that
they are welcome to drop by during office hours or to schedule an
appointment, with or without an interpreter. All deaf people have experience
trying to communicate with hearing people who do not want to bother with
making the extra effort; deaf students need to know that their instructors are
not part of that breed!
SUMMARY

College campuses and classrooms are not physically inaccessible to the hearing impaired. Nevertheless, campuses and courses are structured on the assumption that students are hearing. Classrooms with built-in desks assume that it is not important for students to see each other. Fire alarms that signal only with sound assume that there are no deaf people to be warned—not much of a problem in well-populated classrooms, but a significant worry in deserted corners of a library. And so on. Teachers do not have much power to change the physical plant, but they can make some changes in classroom management that allow a deaf student to be more fully integrated into a class. They can also request room changes if it is evident that a classroom is not suited to students’ needs. Appropriate classroom management will in turn support an instructor’s efforts to make course content appropriate. Suggestions for how a composition instructor might do so follow.

NOTES

1 Misinterpreting—intentional or otherwise—is a continual source of jokes related to deafness. One example occurs in the movie Four Weddings and a Funeral. The deaf brother of the character played by Hugh Grant signs very physically descriptive comments about his brother’s lover in front of her. When she asks what was signed, Grant’s character deliberately misinterprets.

2 When I have used an interpreter in a class with an instructor who frequently mumbled or who had a strong accent, I found other students watching my interpreter for clues as to what the instructor was talking about.

3 Several of my teachers have told me that having an interpreter in their class made them nervous, especially at first, because someone was repeating all of their words. Perhaps teachers are not quite used to having anyone pay that much attention! Other instructors, on the other hand, were immediately fascinated by the interpreter.

4 One way to get a sense for lag time is to watch a captioned breaking-news broadcast (and thus no script or even notes for the transcriber to use).
Captioning is often far enough behind that the last sentence or so is "lost" for the deaf person when the station breaks for commercials. Lag time also means that the captioning often does not fit with the visuals on screen. This can be especially disorienting during an interview, when the person speaking on camera is not the same one whose words are scrolling on screen.

I eventually learned to take my own notes (supplemented with classmates notes in lecture-intensive courses) by writing without looking at my paper except for short glances. The result was always incredibly messy. (If I were an undergraduate today a laptop computer would solve that problem.) However, I learned early on in college that the notes other students took were rarely what I would have taken myself, and that I would remember the important information more easily if I took the notes myself.
Chapter 6
Suggestions for Writing and Reading

"Transitions are words and phrases that connect sentences, paragraphs, and whole passages of writing. When transitions are faulty, a paper will seem choppy and disconnected. To decide whether that's the case, read your draft aloud. If you pause, stumble, and detect gaps, you should improve the connections between ideas." Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruskiewicz, The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers 3rd edition, p.92.

To diagnose sentence sprawl, "pick out those sentences that run for more than three typed lines. Read them aloud, slowly, pausing where it feels natural to do so. If you feel you are about to run out of breath before you come to a pause, you have identified sentences that you may want to revise." Joseph M. Williams, Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace, p. 165.

"In the process of helping both nonstandard and ESL speakers acquire Standard Written English, the intensive conversational opportunities provided by tutorial conferences do provide incentives and rewards for their speaking as well as writing standard English. The more frequently they converse in standard English, the more closely they approximate Standard Written English." Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith, The Practical Tutor, p. 207.

The authors of the above advice to writers or writing teachers assume that speech comes more easily and naturally than writing for the students their advice is intended to help. Finding instances where the primacy of speech is held out as a (at least partial) solution to a certain writing problem is not difficult. These are very obvious instances where current composition curriculum fails to consider the possibility of students for whom speech is not natural, for whom speech may be more difficult than writing. Even primarily oral and postlingually deaf students might have difficulty applying such advice. I, for instance, find the Style advice useless because when speaking aloud I have to consciously control my breathing and pauses; instead, I diagnose sprawl in my own writing

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from how a sentence looks. I have learned, over time, that my longer sentences often sprawl, so for sentences of more than three typed lines I consider dividing the sentence into two shorter ones. Of course, most texts and teachers present more than one possible solution to writing problems, but the assumption does exist that students can use their speech to improve their writing.

The most blatant expressions of the assumption that writers can hear and speak tend to occur, as in the examples above, in discussions of editing and learning to use Standard Written English. Other areas of composition theory and practice, though, also show that when the authors imagine the student population they write for (in textbooks and lesson plans) and about (in books and articles for other compositionists), their conceptions of diversity do not extend to include the deaf and hard of hearing. Even books intending to promote understanding of diversity make this error. For example, Ann Raimes’s *Identity: Readings from Contemporary Culture* is a collection of readings on diversity issues for use in writing classes and includes writing prompts after each essay. It includes an essay by a deaf writer, Nicolette Toussaint’s “Hearing the Sweetest Song,” in the section on appearance, age, and abilities. One of the writing prompts after Toussaint’s essay reads:

Toussaint gives a lot of examples of the sounds she began to hear when she first wore a hearing aid, such as the sound of “paper crackling.” Block your ears for a few minutes and then list which sounds you notice that you usually take for granted. (114)

How could a deaf student respond to the question? Even if a teacher does not use the suggested questions in the text, deaf students who see such a question will notice that the author did not envision them as readers of the text. I cannot
even imagine a textbook writer today including Zora Neal Hurston's "How It Feels to be Colored Me" and asking at the end "close your eyes and imagine how it would feel to be black, then list any differences from now you usually feel."

In previous chapters I have already argued that language learning is qualitatively similar for deaf and hearing people, but that does not mean that we should not question whether our approaches to teaching composition suit the needs of deaf students. In chapter five I discussed classroom management techniques that would make a classroom more accessible to deaf and hearing impaired students; in this chapter I will focus specifically on composition-related issues. Not all sections of this chapter will apply to all composition teachers or writing courses, and I do not pretend to cover all possible situations that composition teachers might encounter, but I hope that the concerns and suggestions raised here about assignments, English usage, and readings will help teachers see composition from the view point of a deaf student. Instructors should use this chapter to think about how the writing and reading content of their courses affects deaf students.

As always, please keep in mind that different deaf students have different needs. As a result, it may seem that I contradict myself in my suggestions sometimes. My intention is not to make instructors feel as though they are in a no-win situation, but since there is no one right way to accommodate deaf students, instructors' fears about making the wrong choices are valid. In a response to an early draft of this chapter, Dr. Sarah Liggett, the
Director of Freshman English at Louisiana State University, wrote that she
would
like some advice about how to work with a deaf student from the
beginning. Should I invite her to my office on the first day and have a
corneration at the computer asking about past language experiences,
for example? Should I discuss the degree of accommodation she'd like
for me to make? I'm never even sure how to handle students who come
to me, usually head bowed, and hand me a slip of "official paper" that
says they have a learning disorder and will need extra time on
assignments. I usually just say "Oh, ok." I feel like I'm prying if I ask
more: "What are your limitations? What is it like for you to write under
pressure? How will you feel if your very best in this class still earns you
a 'D'?" There's so much left unsaid. Should more be said? Does a
teacher risk seeming as if she doesn't care if she doesn't try harder to
communicate and learn about the deaf student or does she seem
overbearing if she asks too much about the deaf person's past?

Another reader, Dr. Carol Mattingly, raised similar concerns:

Some of your suggestions, it seems to me, might also serve to focus
attention on deaf students. Can you address such tension? If students
are trying to fit in, and if teachers draw attention to them by including
readings and making adjustments for them, how are such students going
to feel?

I wish there were an easy solution. I do think, however, that if instructors are
prepared for the possibility of having a deaf student ahead of time that they will
be able to address that student's needs more easily. Instructors should try to
make any changes fit in with the rest of the course so that the deaf student feels
a part of the class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Creating assignments appropriate for all students in a composition
course is a challenge with diverse populations, especially when an assignment
is very specific, such as to use a certain technique or to write about a particular
topic. Assignments that seem suitable for the "typical" student might not be
appropriate for individual ones. Ironically, sometimes the assignments designed specifically to be interesting for today's typical student are barrier-filled for a deaf student. Just as an assigned topic created with eighteen-year-olds in mind might not be well-suited for an older student, so might a topic designed for hearing students be inappropriate for a deaf student. Consider the following assignment scenarios:

1. One stated goal of the freshman composition sequence at your school is to teach students to write research papers and use the library. You are dissatisfied with the dry papers that come from library-only research and decide to require your students to gather information for their paper from people as well as from books by conducting (and appropriately documenting) interviews and/or surveys. You require that students audiotape any interviews they conduct both to satisfy your requirement for documentation (you suspect students in the past have invented such data) and for students to have to refer to while writing the paper. You assume that college students have tape players or at least have access to one.

2. You are teaching students to write evaluative papers. In order to demonstrate to your students that different people will establish different evaluative criteria and will reach different conclusions even with similar evaluative criteria, you assign the entire class to view a film playing at a theater just off campus and then write a review that could be published in the school newspaper.

3. You are teaching argumentative writing. Your state is currently holding an election for governor. For homework you assign students to watch a televised debate between the candidates and record the types of argument they use and any errors in logic.

4. You assign students to groups to write a paper collaboratively. Most of the work is to be done outside of class. You encourage each to meet regularly to discuss and work on their paper together. You decide to require each student to keep notes about these meetings and to evaluate each of the other group members' contributions.

None of these assignments is out of the ordinary, but all present potential barriers for deaf students. All could also be revised to make the assignment more appropriate for deaf students. These are also situations similar to ones I...
encountered as a student. I have faith that no teacher with deaf students in a class would give an assignment obviously dependent on hearing (such as evaluating a musical performance), yet in all of these scenarios, the teacher requires work that would be very difficult if not impossible for a deaf student.

In the first scenario, needing to document an interview on audiotape means that deaf students would have to find someone to lend them the necessary equipment as well as someone to transcribe the result—and this if the student can conduct an oral interview. A signed interview could be videotaped—again assuming students can borrow appropriate equipment. However, the school might not be willing or able to provide an interpreter outside of regularly scheduled classes. Interpreters are expensive; pay scales vary based on the part of the country and on the certification and/or experience level of the interpreter. Also, even if a school is willing to provide an interpreter for out-of-class assignments, it might be difficult to find one available. Instructors should check with the office at their institution in charge of providing interpreters before making an assignment for out-of-class work for which the deaf student would require an interpreter.

A possible solution would be to discuss with the whole class reasons why audiotaping an interview is helpful, such as that it frees the interviewer to concentrate on the interview itself and that (if the interview is for print publication) such a tape would provide documentation to protect the interviewer from a libel lawsuit. However, since technologic failure is always possible (the tape jams or breaks, the recorder batteries quit, etc.) discussing alternatives will benefit everyone learning to conduct interviews. Such an approach would not
single out deaf students for special treatment since hearing students would be able to use the other methods, also.

Teachers at one school for the deaf taught their students interviewing techniques as part of a student project to write the histories of older deaf adults. The students learned key word notetaking and to fill in the notes more completely immediately after the interview ended. (Fraenkel and Hadfield 215). The notes themselves could serve as documentation; further “proof” in the validity of the interview could be achieved by asking the interviewee to review and sign the interviewer’s notes (and the paper) as proof of their validity. A deaf student interviewing a hearing person could conduct the entire interview in writing. Both hearing and deaf students could use typed interviews over the internet. In other words, encourage all students in the class to be creative in finding ways to get information from people.

The second assignment would only work if the movie was subtitled or open captioned: the success of the third scenario would depend on the debate being captioned (or interpreted if appropriate). Neither current movies nor theaters are usually accessible to deaf students, and although many political events are captioned or interpreted, many still are not, especially on the local and state level. I once had to evaluate a (non-interpreted) campus production of Measure for Measure. I read the play beforehand, but all I could write about was the visual presentation, such as that one character’s wig fell off mid-scene. Another time my homework was to see Mississippi Burning when it was first released; I managed to follow the basic story but I missed the nuances. I’m sure my reviews were not what the teachers were looking for when they made the
assignments. My classmates were probably well entertained and enjoyed the outings, but all I remember is the frustration. Heather Whitestone, Miss America 1995, had a similar experience of having to critique a play for an English class: Heather’s mother went along to take notes for her, but she would have been out of luck without her mother’s willingness to help out as necessary (Grey and Lewis 231).

A political debate would be even more impossible to follow without appropriate accessibility measures. Even captioning would not necessarily assure clarity for a deaf student because both real-time captioning and interpreting have lag time. In a fast-paced debate the words or signs might not go with the speaker then moving his lips. To see what it is like, try watching CNN’s Crossfire with captioning on and sound off. Popular culture and current events need not be rejected as a context for assignments as long as the instructor makes sure they are accessible to all students. For instance, instead of assigning students to see a current movie, assign one that is available with closed captioning on videotape and arrange to show it on a television equipped with a closed captioning decoder. Similarly, the class could watch a tape of a debate in class and then discuss it immediately as a class. Deaf students would then already have whatever means they usually use to access classroom communication, the tape could be stopped from time to time for clarification, and students with other time obligations when the debate aired would still be able to watch it. Accommodations for students with special needs can benefit other students as well.
The fourth scenario presents another type of difficulty a deaf student might have with an otherwise perfectly reasonable assignment. Out-of-class meetings for collaborative projects probably means group meetings without an interpreter. These are doable, but I know from experience that it is not realistic for a deaf member of a hearing group to expect that the other members will always keep the group conversation accessible, especially when the group has just formed. Normal stress of collaboration multiplies quickly in such a situation. Collaborative writing already asks students to engage in a communicative practice—group writing—that may be unfamiliar. Since the assignment asks for collaboration, build guidelines for effective inter-group communication into the assignment. Ask all groups (not just the ones composed of a mixed group of deaf and hearing students) to be aware of all members' communicative styles and for all members to take responsibility that everyone participates.

I can virtually guarantee that the deaf student and her hearing partners will run into communication problems, but one of the main arguments for mainstreaming is that deaf students need to learn how to work with hearing people. Simply sitting in the same class is not enough; deaf students need to have the chance to work with their hearing classmates. Many instructors already use some sort of group work specifically to foster a sense of community among the students. This opportunity is even more important for deaf students than for hearing ones since hearing students rarely have prior experience communicating with a deaf person. Group work provides an ice breaker. Hearing students may or may not progress from group work with a deaf student to talking to them before class or on campus, but group work increases the odds
that hearing students will realize that they can communicate with their deaf
classmate. Instructors do deaf students no favor by excluding them from such
assignments; not only does the deaf student lose an opportunity to develop
communication ability with hearing students, but hearing classmates are sure to
resent the deaf student for not having to do the same work they do. Rather, the
instructor should design the assignment so that deaf students can participate.

Louisiana State University instructor Dr. Jean Rohloff, who taught
composition classes with deaf students over two successive semesters (with
two of the deaf students in both courses) occasionally used small groups in her
classes. She found that in the fall semester class group work did encourage
more interaction between the deaf students and their hearing classmates. In
the second course there was less interaction between the two groups. Dr.
Rohloff thought it was because the second class was formed of groups of
friends who enrolled in the course together; there was little interaction between
different groups of hearing students, either. Instructors should not be too quick
to attribute small group failure to the presence of a deaf student.

Deaf students do expect that they will encounter difficulties that their
hearing classmates do not. They also know that sometimes instructors want
their classes to do something their deafness interferes with. It is perfectly all
right for that to happen as long as the instructor provides an appropriate
alternative for the deaf students. That way they can learn what the original
assignment is designed to teach, and hearing students are less likely to resent
them. Not being able to do everything is part of being deaf in a hearing world.
Deaf people create their own alternatives in life; in school they need their
teachers to structure classes with appropriate options.

Ideally, deaf students would let instructors know when their hearing loss
interferes with their ability to complete an assignment's content or structure.
That is not a realistic expectation, though. Schooling culture teaches students
that their job is to do what the teacher asks, not to question the assignments.
Also, I know that as a mainstreamed deaf student I was highly conscious that I
was proving to myself and everyone else that I could do what hearing students
could do, so I resisted pointing out that some things I was asked to do were
difficult in a way the assignment was not supposed to be difficult. An instructor
can increase the likelihood that a deaf student will “speak up” if an assignment
is inappropriate if the instructor provides opportunities for the entire class to
suggest ways to improve assignments for any appropriate reason rather than
just because an assignment would be difficult for a deaf student to do.

English Usage

As I discussed in chapter four, many deaf writers display ESL-like and
basic writing characteristics in their prose. These problems are no more
indicative of the potential of deaf students than such errors are of the capacity
of hearing students. Rather, such errors reflect a lack of opportunity to develop
sufficiently internal monitors for Standard Written English. Common practices in
deaf education such as providing simplified reading texts contribute to the
problem. Considering that brain science and second-language learning theory
both support the notion that the ability to construct “native” internal grammars
drops off sharply after early childhood, with an optimal period for introducing
new languages ending by age ten. It is probably not realistic to expect deaf
students (any more than we expect other ESL students) to achieve the ability to
write flawless academic prose during a college freshman composition
sequence.

Nevertheless, deaf students should be given every opportunity to
become as proficient as possible within the time limits of a composition course.
Previous experience with school-based writing has probably already convinced
students with poor English language skills that they are not good writers, or
even that they should not expect to write well because they are deaf. It should
not be surprising that the intense focus on grammar exercises in traditional deaf
education classes leaves students convinced that they are “hopeless cases.”
Why should they think that another semester or two of English classes will help
them write well when all of the previous years have not?

In addition, many deaf students, especially those educated in sign-based
programs fostering membership in Deaf culture, will be aware that becoming
proficient in English would leave them open to accusations from their Deaf
peers of abandoning their culture for the hearing one. Instructors could initiate a
discussion about how social and cultural forces shape everyone’s language use
and consider reasons why Standard Written English is the written dialect
accepted in the business world as well as in the academy. Deaf students could
easily be unaware that their hearing classmates also have to master more than
one way of using language since they are probably all too aware that written
English is seen as transcription of spoken English.
Make sure deaf students understand that they can already communicate in writing effectively; they do so every time they use a TDD. Although they may not possess Standard English literacy, they are skilled in other forms of print literacy. Instructors also need to provide deaf students with plenty of exposure to standard written English. Remind them (and all of your students) that the best way to learn language is to experience it and produce it. The first writing assignment (on the first day of class, perhaps) could ask students about their background and experience in reading and writing. Not only would this allow the instructor to know the background of the deaf (and hearing) students, but would also emphasize the important relationship between reading and writing. Deaf students who have gone through deaf education programs which required little reading, especially advanced reading, and lots of grammar exercises, might not even realize how important reading is for learning to write well.

Conventions of TDD conversations would be a good example to include in a discussion of how context influences appropriate rules for writing. Punctuation conventions are one way TDD rules differ from those of standard written English. Although punctuation symbols are part of a TDD keyboard they are not always used. For instance, the accepted rule for indicating a question is to type "Q" after a question rather than a question mark. Periods may be used within a conversational turn but extra spacing may serve the same function. These usage conventions serve the needs of TDD interchange since typing a punctuation mark takes longer than typing a letter or extra spaces because on a TDD keyboard punctuation marks are located on other keys and require using
the shift function to access them. (All letters are automatically capitalized, therefore negating any rule for capitalization.)

Another way TDD conventions differ from academic English conventions is that abbreviations are not only acceptable but desirable in order to speed the flow of conversation. Other abbreviations are part of TDD etiquette, created especially for this unique medium. The two most necessary are "GA" and "SK" which stand for, respectively, "go ahead" and "stop keying" (or "send kill"); the first indicates the end of a conversational turn, the latter the end of the conversation. The "GA" allows each party to know when the other is finished saying something and ready for a reply. (It is not polite or efficient to cut in on a TDD conversation because the competing electronic signals garble the message.) "SK" lets each conversant know that both are hanging up. The two can also be used in combination, "GA or SK" meaning "I'm ready to hang up, but if you have more to say, go ahead." It is not polite to hang up until both parties have typed "SK."

Conventions for TDD writing could be compared to those for use with e-mail or in on-line chat rooms: all are examples of the way electronics have created new writing conventions. For instance, both TDD and internet communications have accepted conventions for indicating emotion or non-verbal components of a message. E-mail writers might indicate that they are amused by ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing) or possibly by an emoticon such as \(^{\wedge}\), but TDD users would type HA HA or (SMILE). Interestingly enough, I've seen the emoticon _i_i , which looks like the ASL sign for I LOVE YOU on e-mail, instead of the ILY abbreviation used on TDDs. This is a good example
of members of the same discourse community, the Deaf culture, using different ways to write the same message in different contexts.

Use the students' papers to teach appropriate usage in context by having them correct any errors on their papers. Instructors can then work with each student to help her identify error patterns so that the student knows what to look for when editing future papers. Since every English exposure is important for deaf students, make an effort to model appropriate usage when the context provides opportunity, such as when writing on the chalk board or a transparency, or when writing comments on student papers.

Donald F. Moore's research shows that deaf students learn written English in the same pattern hearing ones do, only slower. Deaf students and hearing students internalize language rules after repeated exposure as well as experimenting with their own language constructions; deaf students are behind because they have not had the same opportunities for English language growth that most hearing students have. According to Peter V. Paul and Stephen P. Quigley, both deaf education experts, "when acquiring the substructures within a particular structure, deaf students appear to proceed through developmental stages similar to those reported for hearing students . . . . Much of hearing-impaired students' problems with syntax is related to instructional practices" (183). Therefore, composition courses should provide deaf students the language exposure and chances to experiment with language to allow them to mature in their English language usage. Since people do learn written English much like anyone learns any language, it is reasonable to expect deaf students to grow in their English language skills over time. However, as Mina
Shaughnessy found in her work with hearing basic writers, it is also reasonable to expect new errors as students experiment with more complex English usage.

I am not arguing that instructors should ignore usage problems in the writing of their deaf students that they would mark in that of their hearing students. Rather, they should adopt grading practices that permit the experimentation necessary for growth for all students. Writers with typical "deaf English" problems need more than any one class can give them. Deaf students should be encouraged to take advantage of tutoring opportunities either in a campus writing center or through tutoring offered for disabled students since lack of quantity of English language experience is at the heart of deaf students’ struggles with English. Although deaf students themselves need to take responsibility for practicing their English, composition instructors are in an ideal position to intervene positively in the process. Instructors should not be tempted to grade deaf students differently from hearing students. It might seem cruel to force a deaf student to repeat composition courses again and again, but it is not kind to send the student on unprepared for the writing demands of other courses and of jobs.

READINGS/TEXTS

Since deaf students who have difficulty expressing themselves in written English will most likely also have difficulty reading college-level texts, reading assignments pose problems as well. Nevertheless, deaf students need those difficult readings both to develop reading skills to help them in future text-heavy courses and to get enough exposure to standard written English to improve their
own writing. No one learns the language of a new discourse community without needing to use it.

Any instructor who makes significant use of readings in a composition class, whether fiction, poetry, nonfiction prose, or some combination of these, should consider incorporating readings either by deaf writers or that in some way address the deaf experience. Like all other students, deaf students need the opportunity to see that people like them can write and be written about, and hearing students can benefit from learning more about deafness. Deafness-related readings can, of course, be used in classes with only hearing students. Reading works by deaf writers is especially important for deaf students who think that fluent English usage is a betrayal of deaf culture or simply an unattainable goal for a deaf person; they need the chance to see that other deaf people have written well, and that such writing can serve to affirm their deaf identity. In addition, deaf students with poor reading comprehension would have added incentive to complete the reading. Deaf students would also benefit from readings related to deafness since comprehension is higher when the subject matter is familiar.

Unfortunately, deaf writers are generally not well known, but there are many published deaf writers. Autobiographies are probably the most easily accessible because these life stories have a natural audience among hearing people who are curious about how deaf people manage to become educated and live their lives; autobiographies are thus more likely to be in libraries or even in bookstores. Autobiographies can hardly be considered to represent the lives of deaf people in general since only the most successful deaf people are able to
write and publish their stories. However, deaf writers have produced works in every genre, including poetry, drama, prose fiction, newspaper and magazine articles, and so on. Many of these writings could easily be integrated into a composition class because, in any genre, deaf writers often reflect on language learning and the importance of communication.

A good place to start a search for literature by deaf people is Jack Gannon’s *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* (1981). Gannon’s book provides an excellent, comprehensive introduction to deaf culture in the United States and includes a chapter on “Publications of the Deaf” which is devoted mostly to newspapers and journals (many published by and for the deaf community) but also includes a short section on the “literary efforts of deaf persons.” This section provides brief information about several writers and mentions the books of several more and can thus serve as a starting point in a search for literature by deaf writers. Gannon also scatters fourteen poems by deaf writers throughout the book; instructors who want to include a poem on deafness need look no further.

Of course, publications by deaf writers did not stop in 1981. Two recent autobiographies by deaf men are especially notable because of their successes in the hearing world. Henry Kisor, book editor of the Chicago Sun-Times, tells his story in *What’s That Pig Outdoors? A Memoir of Deafness* (1990). His success in such a highly literate job proves that deafness should not be an obstacle to literacy, and his tale of his education (discussed briefly in my chapter 3) shows one method that worked. The second autobiography, *When the Phone Rings, My Bed Shakes* (1993) by Philip Zazove, tells how the medical
doctor, deaf from birth, made his way through the hearing world from his education to his career. Chapters or parts of chapters from either book make provocative reading. Neither man is part of Deaf culture since both identify primarily with the hearing world; most successful deaf autobiographies are by primarily oral deaf (in other words, those who rely heavily on speech and lipreading even if they know some ASL or other signing), possibly because these are the success stories that sell best. It is simply less exciting to read how a Deaf person succeeds within Deaf culture because there is less conflict to be resolved, and because most hearing people place a higher value on success within the hearing world.

There are, however, Deaf culture autobiographies. Leo M. Jacobs, a teacher at the California School for the Deaf, wrote A Deaf Adult Speaks Out (1977) to use his experience as a student and teacher to inform the hearing world about deaf education and deaf culture. Bernard Bragg, a Deaf actor and founding member of the National Theater of the Deaf, published his autobiography, Lessons in Laughter, in 1989: the title of his book refers to one of his hearing teacher's attempts to teach him and his deaf classmates to laugh in a way acceptable to the ears of hearing people.

Most writing about deafness or deaf people, though, has been done by hearing people. Hearing parents have written about how they dealt with having a deaf child, hearing children with how they dealt with having deaf parents, hearing educators and other professionals with how they served deaf clients, and so on. The intended audience for these writings are other hearing people; deaf people or deaf culture becomes an object hearing people can examine.
among themselves. Examples include Harlan Lane's *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community*, Leah Hager Cohen's *Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World*, Thomas Spradley and James Spradley's *Deaf Like Me*, and Lou Ann Walker's *A Loss for Words: The Story of Deafness in a Family*. All of these good books tell a lot about what it is like to be deaf in a hearing world, but all are written from hearing perspectives. Instructors who choose to use writings by hearing people on deafness and Deaf culture should remember that even those writers most empathetic to the experience of being deaf can not help but have their hearing biases reflected in what they have to say.

Portrayals of deaf characters in fiction likewise usually suffer from the biases of their hearing writers. In the introduction to his “The Rustle of a Star: An Annotated Bibliography of Deaf Characters in Fiction,” Jonathan Miller writes that one of his goals in compiling the bibliography is for readers to see patterns in how authors use deaf characters. “Deaf characters are often used, by hearing authors, as symbols of alienation . . . . Alternatively, hearing authors use deaf characters as sources of special knowledge unavailable to hearing people who are too involved in the clamor of life” (43). Miller also points out that even the best writers use terminology about deafness incorrectly (at least from the view of the deaf community), especially “phrases like ‘deaf and dumb’ and ‘deaf-mute’ [which] are not only inaccurate but perceived as insulting” (43). Miller uses Eudora Welty’s short story, “The Key,” as an example because Welty uses the wrong terminology even though she portrays deafness fairly realistically; her deaf characters are the ones in the story who communicate, but
she still refers to the misconception that deaf people are mute, when even those who do not speak can still make vocal sounds (like laughing or screaming). Deconstructing hearing writers' portrayals of deaf characters can reveal a lot about hearing society's thinking on deafness.

Comparing deafness-related reading material by both deaf and hearing writers provides the students (deaf and hearing) a chance to think about their own conceptions and misconceptions about the relationship between deaf and hearing people in our society. However, if an instructor uses only one deafness-related reading in a course, the work should be by a deaf writer in order to provide a model for deaf students and a deaf voice for all students to "hear." Depending on the structure and content of the course, the readings could be integrated in a variety of ways. Deafness-related readings can be used with thematic readings on education, language use and communication, culture, prejudice, and so on. They can serve as models for argumentative (persuasive) or expository writing, or teach about symbolism. In other words, there is no reason why in my entire English education from grade school through graduate school I was only assigned two readings that even touch on deafness, Carson McCuller's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Walker Percy's *The Second Coming* (and Percy's Will Barrett is only hard of hearing). I remember these books because they were the only ones that showed me ways I could write about deaf people. even though these books were written by hearing people, and even though the characters' experiences of deafness were not much like mine. It might seem like a little thing to include a deafness-related reading or two in an entire semester's worth of readings, but it provides deaf
students a rare chance to see their experiences acknowledged in the hearing academy.

Finding such material should not be difficult once an instructor has determined to include deafness-related readings. The suitability of possible readings, of course, depends on how the instructor wants to use them. The following possibilities for using selections from *Lessons in Laughter* and *What's That Pig Outdoors?* can provide a place to start; both books are widely available at libraries so that teachers can easily examine each text, and the books provide contrasts between Deaf and oral deaf experiences by men who are roughly contemporaries. Of course, selections from either book could be read alone.

One way to use the texts without introducing them specifically as readings about deafness would be to use sections of each as an example of writing about problem solving. Problem-solving is a theme that runs through deaf autobiographies because all of the authors have had to solve problems related to being deaf in a hearing world. In one section of his book, Bragg describes a problem he had getting the California Relay System to place a call for him to room service at the hotel he was staying at. The operator refused to do so because the relay system had a policy against placing relay calls between different extensions of the same telephone number. Bragg then describes his two part solution: he called a friend in the area and had her place the call ordering his room service and he took his complaint, documented by the printout from his conversation with the relay operator, to the relay system supervisor (193-198). One of Kisor's problem-solving sections describes the problems he had when he first moved into a high-rise apartment building and needed to be
able to answer knocks at the door, to know when someone buzzed his apartment from the foyer, and to use the telephone. Kisor’s solutions were a cat that reacted when someone was at the door along with electronic devices a friend rigged up for him: two different lights that flashed, one in response to the buzzer, the other in response to a caller’s voice (142-149).

Sections from both books could also be used as readings on job discrimination. Both men describe difficulties they had seeking summer employment while they were students; both men landed their jobs, Kisor as a camp counselor and Bragg as a dishwasher, but only after each refused to accept initial rejection (Pig 84-87: Lessons 39-41). Instructors are sure to find other ways to use either of these books. Both are entertaining, informative, and easy to read. Since both books provide hearing readers with examples of the challenges of life as faced by a deaf person in a hearing society, both are worth a teacher’s time just as aids to understanding the problems of deaf students; that either can be incorporated into course readings is an added benefit.

CONCLUSION

Since language learning is a slow process, especially for deaf students with limited access to English, instructors should have realistic expectations about deaf students’ progress in literacy skills over the course of a quarter or semester. Instructors can, however, provide an optimum environment for encouraging growth in reading and writing skills. Since a mainstreamed class has to meet the needs of hearing students as well, instructors need to find methods and assignments that can meet the needs of all students in the class. The problems posed by such diversity can be balanced by using the language
and cultural differences of deaf and hearing students to contribute to course content.
Epilogue

There are no shortcuts for teaching written English skills to deaf students any more than there are for teaching hearing ones. If teaching deaf students written English is more difficult, it is because hearing culture does not provide the same opportunities for deaf people to engage in the use of language: even deaf people who adapt to living in a hearing culture by using speech and speechreading still do not have as much incidental exposure to oral English. Since most English language learning for any deaf person has to be through the medium of print, composition courses provide an important opportunity for deaf students to acquire skills that will make it easier for them to succeed in the hearing world. This opportunity will be lost, though, if instructors do not realize how the combination of hearing impairment and the social construction of hearing impairment in society, including in the schools, together contribute to deaf students' difficulties with written English.

I have not addressed the special problems posed by multi-handicapped deaf students because the issue is too complex to cover within the context of this study. However, instructors do need to remember that deaf students can have learning disabilities that might be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms are difficult to distinguish from those associated with deafness. Other physical disabilities can compound the difficulty of providing accessible education.

I fervently believe that deaf students have the same capacity for language learning as their hearing peers, and that they have the right to the English literacy that will help them succeed in our information-oriented society.
Although their prime years for achieving native fluency in English are long past by the time deaf students enter college, improvement is still possible just as it is for their hearing peers who are basic writers.

I hope that some day my concerns about the accessibility of mainstreamed college composition classes for deaf students will seem archaic. However, I doubt that most deaf students will enter college prepared for the demands of academic writing. The same school system failures that hurt hearing children hurt deaf students more because they are less able to pick up information from non-school environments.

I also hope that more research will be done to assess the benefits of accommodations composition instructors can structure into their courses. For instance, what effect does including deafness-related readings in a course have on deaf students? How does asking deaf students to consider the role of non-academic written English in their lives (in the forms of TDD conversations and closed captioning, for instance) affect their attitudes about the importance of written English for a member of the Deaf culture? Finding answers to such questions would help instructors serve deaf students even better.
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Vita

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Tonya Johnson received her bachelor of arts degree in 1990 from Oral Roberts University, where she was an English literature major. She continued her education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she received her masters of arts in English in 1992. Tonya Johnson then went to Louisiana State University to pursue a doctor of philosophy degree in English with a concentration in composition and rhetoric for which she wrote this dissertation. She will begin teaching at Gallaudet University as an assistant professor of English in the fall of 1996.
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