



# RESEARCH AT GALLAUDET

A Publication of the Gallaudet Research Institute at Gallaudet University



Fall/Winter 2001-2002

## Letters to the Editor:

### High Stakes Testing and Deaf Students: Comments from Readers

The article, "High Stakes Testing and Deaf Students: Some Research Perspectives," which appeared simultaneously in the Spring/Summer 2001 issue of this newsletter and the Summer 2001 issue of the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's *Odyssey*, provoked an unusual amount of reader reaction. In the article, I pointed out that average scores for deaf and hard of hearing students taking Stanford Achievement Tests over the years suggest that a large portion of this student population will have trouble meeting required achievement levels on so-called "high stakes" tests in the years ahead. Some attribute this difficulty to the impact on reading comprehension of deaf students' lack of auditory access to spoken English. Others blame educators for not knowing how to teach deaf students more effectively. In either case, the goal of using preparation for standardized testing as a means of ensuring that all students reach wished-for educational levels faces an especially great challenge when applied to deaf and hard of hearing students.

I've been getting e-mail from parents of deaf children telling poignant stories about the effects of testing on their families, from educators of deaf students expressing concern about the impact of testing on schools, from deaf adults worried about the likely impact of high stakes testing on a younger generation, and from researchers striving to get more information and compare notes on a difficult issue. Different points of view concerning how best to teach deaf students have been forcefully expressed—often at great length.

Although these e-mail messages differ in many ways, they collectively suggest to me that concern about the possible effects of the educational accountability movement on deaf and hard of hearing students, their teachers, and their families is widespread and profound.

I have decided to include many of those e-mail messages in this issue. Although I've answered all of them privately, I have chosen, for the most part, to let the messages speak for themselves on these pages. (In every case, permission to print was sought and received, and privacy given when requested.) If readers wish to comment on or take issue with something a letter writer has said, I may print thoughtful, respectful responses (send to: [Robert.C.Johnson@gallaudet.edu](mailto:Robert.C.Johnson@gallaudet.edu)) in a subsequent issue. Be sure to indicate clearly which message or messages you are responding to.

I had some difficulty deciding whether or not to include letters recommending specific communication or teaching philosophies or casting blame for test failures on other teaching approaches. Ultimately, I decided to include the letters as newsworthy reflections of the kinds of debates heating up as a result of the testing dilemma. Although none of the views expressed in these letters should be interpreted as having received the official endorsement of Gallaudet University, the Gallaudet Research Institute is delighted to promote this fascinating exchange of ideas.

In my article, I commented that it seemed theoretically possible to design a bilingual education program in which both American Sign Language and Cued Speech would be used, but that I knew of "no program attempting such a marriage." I was surprised to get numerous e-mails directing my attention to just such a program in Minnesota. One of those messages, along with a thoughtful response from Dr. Melanie Metzger of Gallaudet's Linguistics Program (written at my invitation), appears at the end of this "letters to the editor" section.

Robert C. Johnson, Editor

#### Dear Mr. Johnson,

My research is smack in the middle of the deafness and testing topic area, so it was wonderful to read about other people's perspectives and concerns. I am most interested to hear that the National Task Force on Equity in Testing Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals is

Continued on page 3



## Dr. Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta Comes to Gallaudet and Meets . . . Dr. Seuss?

By Nan Truitt\*, 2001-2002 Walter Ross Fellow

Dr. Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta, packed her bags, gathered up her family, took a leave of absence from Orebro University in Orebro, Sweden, and traveled to Gallaudet to become the 2001-2002 Powrie V. Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies. Bagga-Gupta has a background in communication studies and is a senior lecturer and researcher on the faculty of the Department of Education at Orebro University. As co-head of the Communication, Culture, and Diversity – Deaf Studies (KKOM – DS) research group, her work is focused on ethnicity, literacy, functional disability, gender, class, and other aspects of diversity and how these relate to democracy. She is also interested in the relationship of multilingualism to literacy, communication, institutional practices, cognition, and culture. Her post-doctoral research is concerned with Deaf education in Sweden with a focus on Deaf bilingualism and literacy. While Powrie V. Doctor Chair, Bagga-Gupta will produce an English monograph that discusses her ethnographically inspired research on bilingualism in Sweden.



Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta

What we call “bilingual-bicultural” education for deaf children in America is a much talked-about but seldom realized approach to teaching deaf children, while in Sweden a bilingual approach has been the official model for teaching Deaf children nationwide since 1983. In Sweden Deaf children learn Swedish Sign Language (SSL) as their “primary” language and *written* Swedish as their “second” language. Spoken Swedish is not emphasized in Sweden’s bilingual system. Also, interestingly, Sweden does *not* use the term “bicultural” to describe their system, preferring to see Deaf children as using a distinct language as their primary language but not as being part of a separate cultural minority.

Like American Deaf children, Deaf children in Sweden are struggling to pass mandated standardized achievement testing, and this is one nationally-funded focus of Bagga-Gupta’s on-going research.

Life on Gallaudet’s campus is not all research and manuscripts, however, as Bagga-Gupta and her family adjust to American traditions, such as the 24-hour Cartoon Network. “At home, we have maybe an hour of Disney channel a week,” Bagga-Gupta responded to a question regarding the impact of American culture on her two sons, ages 11 and 5. The eleven-year-old, who is Deaf, has

adjusted well to American Sign Language and English. Compulsory education in Sweden begins at the age of 7. The five-year-old started school two years earlier than he would have in Sweden. Although learning to read at an early age is not formally focused on in Sweden, her son’s interest in reading prompted Bagga-Gupta to seek some appropriate American books for young children. A colleague in the Gallaudet Research Institute loaned her *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* written by Dr. Seuss, and her son quickly began to read the book on his own. Bagga-Gupta says that this development illustrates her point that learning a language is “a natural, interactive process” that needs to be documented.

In March Bagga-Gupta gave a presentation at the University of Pennsylvania. She plans to give a presentation on “Deaf Education in Sweden” at the Gallaudet University Kellogg Conference Center on April 12 and to educators in the “Star Schools Project” in Arizona on April 19. The Powrie V. Doctor Chair of Deaf Studies is supported and administered by the Graduate School and Professional Programs and Gallaudet Research Institute.

\*Nan Truitt, the 2001-2002 Walter Ross Fellow, is a graduate student in Gallaudet’s Clinical Psychology program. She is devoting most of her time as Walter Ross Fellow to the process of planning for a national conference related to high stakes testing and deaf students.

*Research at Gallaudet* is available free of charge. Address inquiries to *Research at Gallaudet*, Gallaudet Research Institute, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002-3660. Phone: (202) 651-5995 (V/TTY). Contributing to this issue were Nan Truitt, 2001-2002 Walter Ross Fellow, Robert C. Johnson, Editor, and numerous readers of the newsletter. Illustrations on pages 1-10 were created by Robert C. Johnson. Special thanks are due to Judith Mounty, director of Gallaudet’s Center for ASL Literacy and co-chair of the National Task Force on Equity in Testing Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals and Melanie Metzger, associate professor in Gallaudet’s Department of Linguistics and Interpretation for their responses to some of the letters. Thanks to Todd Byrd for the photo on page 11. Responses to letters or comments on articles are welcomed by the editor and may be sent by e-mail to [Robert.C.Johnson@gallaudet.edu](mailto:Robert.C.Johnson@gallaudet.edu).

Michael A. Karchmer, Director  
Gallaudet Research Institute

Robert Clover Johnson  
Senior Research Editor

Copyright © February 2002  
Gallaudet Research Institute  
Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

## High Stakes Testing, Continued

coordinating a conference in the upcoming year. Has there been any further information about time/place/duration since the newsletter was printed? I think such a dialog would help bring focus to our questions and how we might use research to help answer them.

**Stephanie Cawthon**  
**Department of Educational Psychology**  
**University of Wisconsin -Madison**

### Editor's Response:

A committee affiliated with the National Task Force on Equity in Testing Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals is now planning a conference, entitled "**No Deaf Child Left Behind**," scheduled to occur **November 15-16, 2002**, in the **Gallaudet University Kellogg Conference Center**. A final agenda and exact cost, contact, and reservation information have not yet been established, but that information will soon be posted on the Task Force's website (<http://gri.gallaudet.edu/TestEquity/index.html>). Anyone who would like to participate is encouraged to send a letter or e-mail to that effect. Send letters to "No Deaf Child Left Behind" at the address in the masthead on page 2 (include your e-mail address if you have one) and send e-mail to [hstconference@gallaudet.edu](mailto:hstconference@gallaudet.edu). Give your name and address and briefly state your "stake" in this issue (e.g., are you a teacher of deaf students, parent of a deaf child, an educational researcher, a deaf professional seeking licensure that requires taking a standardized test, etc.). This information will be compiled into a list for notification as soon as more definite plans are made.

### Mr. Johnson:

I wanted to thank you for the article in *Odyssey*. I received my copy in the mail today and it couldn't have come at a better time.

I have a 14-year-old daughter who is a freshman at [a private secondary school for the deaf]. Last year she was at [a nearby middle school for the deaf]. She took [our state's] basic standards reading test this summer for the second time. Her score remained exactly the same. Her IEP meeting is next week, and I have been agonizing over what I want to say at the meeting. I am going to talk about different options for her, i.e., taking the test with accommodations, etc. I agree with those National Task Force on Equity in Testing Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals members you described as saying that "anxious preparation is counterproductive to creativity and optimal learning." In [our state], if a student doesn't pass the basic standard reading test, they are required to attend summer school until they do. Last summer our daughter went to summer school for 6 weeks, and her test score

didn't improve one point. We also were unable to take our annual family vacation. Next summer, we hope to have our summer vacation, let our daughter attend the sports and leadership camps she loves, and I'd also like her to have some work experience. That will not be possible if she has to go to summer school again.

Of course, I still want her to continue working on her reading skills to the best of her ability. I agree that the better she can read, the better her adult life will be. But I have accepted that passing this test may not be "in the cards" for her.

Thank you again. I will be much more confident at the IEP meeting knowing that research and other people's opinions back me up. If there are any other materials you can suggest that might help my daughter, let me know.

**Appreciative parent**

### Hello Mr. Johnson,

I am writing regarding the article in *Odyssey* about high stakes testing and deaf students. We thought it was a very good article, but at the same time upsetting. We have a 10-year-old daughter who is hearing impaired. She is in a mainstream school and struggles with reading comprehension. That is her weakness, but we work on it daily. If you have any information that we could use to help solve this problem we would appreciate it very much. She really wants to go to college and become a vet, but after reading this article we think it may be very hard for her to accomplish her goal. I know she is very young to be deciding what she wants to become, but still, the hope is there. Thank you.

**Concerned parent**

### Editor's Response:

I'm very sorry if the article diminished your or your daughter's hopes for a career as a vet. Please don't assume that the average Stanford Achievement Test scores mentioned in this newsletter predict what your daughter or any individual deaf child can eventually achieve.

### Mr. Johnson,

Thanks so much for your timely article. I am the principal of a regional deaf and hard of hearing program serving 185 students in grades 6-12. In addition, I am the chair of a statewide association of administrators of educational programs for the deaf. The testing issue has been on all of our minds for quite some time. Our new state high school exam will start in 2004 and passing the test will require a 10th grade exit reading capability. One of our major concerns is that our ability to send students to Gallaudet University will be severely curtailed, since as





many as 85% of deaf and hard of hearing students are very likely not going to meet those standards.

Our program uses a direct instruction approach along the lines of the *cognitive strategies model* and has seen good success that we are proud of. Our averages are closer to a 5-7 grade reading level, which we consider admirable, but those levels are still not going to help many of our students graduate with a diploma.



When our statewide administrative group expressed its concerns to the State Department of Education, we were told that our expectations for our Deaf students were too low. This was a frustrating experience, since all of us really have high expectations and are working towards the goal of each

student reading on grade level. I would be very interested in more research or information on this topic or in helping any task force studying this issue. Thanks again for your timely article which I will share with my colleagues.

**Jon Levy, Principal**

**University High School, Orange County, California**

#### Editor's Response:

Gallaudet University President I. King Jordan has indicated that test-taking difficulties for deaf students will be taken into consideration when reviewing applications for admission. The Office of Admissions requires that applicants to Gallaudet's undergraduate programs submit scores from either the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT). These scores and other materials will be carefully evaluated in an effort to determine academic potential, independent of any high stakes decisions made as a result of state tests. In some instances, students may be accepted conditionally, their eventual status at Gallaudet depending on work done at the university. Readers seeking more information may consult the Admission section of Gallaudet's online *Undergraduate Catalog*:

(<http://depts.gallaudet.edu/oes/undergrad/catalog/>).

#### Mr. Johnson,

I want to say I was happy to see your article on high stakes testing. Although I am a Speech-Language Pathologist, by working in a school for the Deaf I have become very interested in the "test modifications" allowed by [my state] for students with IEPs. In [my state] students can have tests signed to them. Even the reading test can be signed. Some teachers of the Deaf are appalled by this but since the reading test can be read aloud to LD hearing

students I do not see the problem signing it to Deaf students. Something I have noticed is a tendency of some teachers to be reluctant to give the students every possible accommodation (test modification) in the fear that this is unfair. There seems to be a fear that ASL is iconic so that by signing to the students we "give the answer away." To me that relates to the unfortunate reluctance of some educators to truly believe that ASL is a language. At any rate, I wonder if you have considered the question of whether educators of the Deaf are using all the strategies at their disposal (i.e., test modifications on the students' IEPs) to ensure that Deaf students have a more level playing field.

#### Speech-Language Pathologist

[The following reply is by Dr. Judith Mounty, Director of Gallaudet's Center for American Sign Language Literacy and Co-Chair of the National Task Force on Equity In Testing Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals]

#### Dear Speech-Language Pathologist,

I read with great interest your note about testing practices in your state. It has been my experience that interpreting tests from English to ASL can change the test in many ways (not necessarily making it easier— sometimes making it more difficult or changing what is being measured) and does not necessarily level the playing field. Also, we need to be clear about what we want to measure. Thus, if a reading passage is interpreted into ASL, correct responses to multiple choice questions might reflect a candidate's comprehension of content and comprehension of ASL, but could not be said to be a measure of *reading comprehension*. Conversely, poor performance on multiple choice questions after receiving information via an ASL translation could be due to any of the following: 1) problems with the translation, 2) the candidate's lack of skill in ASL, 3) problems with the questions themselves (e.g., if the questions themselves are presented in inordinately complex English or have been translated into ASL but essentially make no sense in that language).

**Judith L. Mounty, Ph.D.**

#### Dear Mr. Johnson,

I read your article with great interest as I presently work at a school for the deaf as a speech/language pathologist. Our school follows more of a bilingual-bicultural (bi-bi) approach to teaching; however, we find that most of our students—about 95%—have trouble learning to read. Recent research in the area of reading clearly points to the importance of phonemic awareness for successful decoding of the written word. I feel this is the

missing link for many deaf individuals. ASL is a wonderful language but children are not given enough information through the signs which connects to written phonemes/letters. It seems that deaf educators have depended on the students to "memorize" letters, words, etc., which may explain their lack of comprehension and enjoyment in reading.

Are you aware of any changes in the methods used to teach reading to deaf students at Gallaudet? I hope that the testing that will become a part of all education in the U.S. will have a positive effect on how we teach deaf students. We need new methods and new ideas because I feel that deaf people are more than capable to be on par with hearing individuals, if they are taught appropriately.

Another point I'd like to make is that many deaf students are not exposed to the practice tests that hearing children take. In my state many schools spend weeks and months preparing children for the upcoming statewide tests, but deaf students often are not included in these practice sessions.

**Concerned Speech/Language Pathologist**

#### Editor's response:

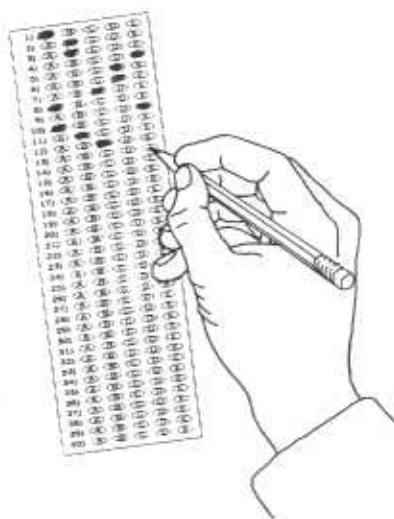
Literacy is a priority area for research at Gallaudet University and the Gallaudet Research Institute regularly offers support to a range of projects focused on one or another aspect of reading and writing development among deaf and hard of hearing students. Gallaudet's Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center has developed strategies for reading instruction and through its *Shared Reading Program* sends staff nationwide to conduct workshops in which parents, teachers, and administrators are taught principles for helping young deaf and hard of hearing children learn to read. The GRI's Dr. Leonard P. Kelly has conducted research suggesting that reading comprehension tends to suffer from a lack of automaticity in recognizing words and syntactic structures and that such automaticity may best be developed in deaf readers through carefully designed practice exercises. (See "GRI Researcher Uses Cognitive Theory to Address Reading Problems" in the Fall 2000/Winter 2001 issue of *Research at Gallaudet* for more details.) Research is also underway to determine if the visual "chunking" of text into discrete units of meaning assists in comprehension. These are just a few of many ongoing efforts at Gallaudet to address problems associated with developing deaf students' reading and writing skills.

As for test preparation, I hope school administrators read your letter and make certain that deaf students are being included in practice sessions at their schools as well as in actual testing situations.

#### Hello, Robert,

My name is Christopher Warner. I live in Rifton, New York, which is one hour south of Albany. Thank you very much for the Spring/Summer 2001 issue of *Research at Gallaudet*! Concerning your commentary on the high stakes testing, etc., it is really scary to me that we Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals are not really given a fair chance in life. As for myself, I'm married and have one child, so I don't need to worry about myself! But it's the younger generation that needs our help! I think the whole issue/problem of forced testing of everyone is very ridiculous. Thanks for the articles!! Keep them coming!!

**Sincerely, Chris Warner**



#### Mr. Johnson,

I want to tell you how much I agree on your commentary "High Stakes Testing". I am a teacher at a high school in Georgia. It has been very frustrating to watch my students do well in classrooms, yet when it comes time to take the Georgia High School Graduation Test, they are coming up short. They end up graduating with a special education diploma. I understand very few deaf students in Georgia are passing the GHSGT because the language is too complicated. I have read the test and I know the frustrations my students have. They know the material but the test is written on a 9-10 grade equivalence level. I now have a parent who tells me her child will "pass the test or else." The child is a very bright student but she reads at about a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. I wish there were an answer to the problem.

**Debra Smith, Teacher**

**Thomasville High School, Thomasville, Ga.**

#### Dear Mr. Johnson,

Thank you so much for writing the recent article on testing. I'm an itinerant teacher in Oregon and have been faced with the same questions and problems with the statewide testing. The teachers in Oregon have been addressing this issue for several years now.

We have some adaptations and accommodations that are acceptable here in Oregon for kids with IEPs. We have not linked graduation or diplomas with passing these tests. Two school districts tried to tie graduation with passing the tests, but this was determined illegal (I'm not sure of the specifics on this case.)

My personal feelings on testing are that yes, it does take a lot of classroom time to test. I'm not a classroom teacher, so I'm not directly affected by the time or the outcome of the tests. My students take the tests at their home school. I've seen the students work harder to pass the tests than they do with regular academic work. Sometimes the grade for academics is not important or the subject matter is too difficult

(mostly because of the reading level). My students seem more willing to develop their skills when they know there is a goal of passing the test in the spring. I have seen their reading, writing, speech and other academics improve immensely since the adoption of these tests. The teachers emphasize the skills more and practice the specific reading and writing skills more often and in more subjects than just English. My students don't seem to be discouraged at all, just encouraged to meet the goal. The students'

self-esteem and confidence appear to be good when they are on the same academic playing field as the other students in the school. Students' expectations are high and I believe they strive to meet whatever expectations are realistically set for them.

Please understand that many of my students are the only hearing impaired or deaf student in the school. They, for the most part, are well adjusted and participate in extra-curricular activities and are happy people.

Thank you for allowing me to comment on this subject.

**Sigrid Johnson**

**Itinerant teacher, Oregon**

**Dear Mr. Johnson,**

As the father of a profoundly deaf 7-year old boy who communicates well using spoken English (no sign language used) and who has a cochlear implant, I read with interest your article "High Stakes Testing and Deaf Students: Some Research Perspectives" from the Summer 2001 issue of *Odysey*, published by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. The article was very timely since I had just received the state test results from my state's school for the deaf, where ASL is used.

The state's assessment program has 5 achievement levels:

- 1 - step 1 (demonstrating minimal knowledge)
- 2 - progressing
- 3 - nearing proficiency
- 4 - proficient
- 5 - advanced

Tests were given in reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and health. There was not a single student from the state school who scored at the proficient level in any of the tests! Most stayed at levels 1 or 2 through eleventh grade. These results are horrendous. When 20 of 21 eleventh-grade students score at the lowest possible achievement level for reading/writing, something is drastically wrong. What is wrong? The thing that is wrong is not the tests, as your article seems to imply.

No, what these results and probably similar results from other states show is that ASL-based instruction of deaf students is a complete and total failure, regardless of whether that ASL-based instruction is renamed the "bilingual-bicultural" approach or whatever new term is coined once "bi-bi" is recognized as a failure.

What I see happening now, though, because there is no way to cover up these test results, is a propaganda effort to say these tests really don't matter and that they don't measure what's important to deaf students. While the propaganda effort may succeed, that won't change ASL-taught deaf students' mastery of reading, writing, math, science, social studies, or other subjects.

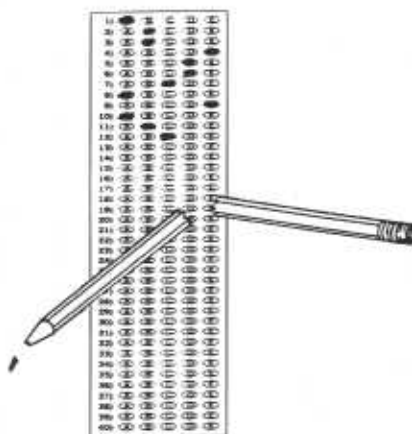
While you and others may feel you are doing a service to deaf children by trying to de-legitimize the tests, what you are actually doing is contributing to the continued inferior education ASL-taught deaf students receive.

Why does no one from Gallaudet have the courage to admit what these test results show—that ASL as the method used for communication in the education of deaf students is a complete failure? Cheating deaf children of the opportunity for a decent education is not doing them a service.

**Father of 7-year-old deaf boy**

**Editor's Reply:**

The debate between oral and sign language instruction has been going on for centuries and certainly shows no sign of diminishing in this age of cochlear implants. The Gallaudet Research Institute welcomes this opportunity to air varying points of view.





**Mr. Johnson,**

I read with interest your commentary as well as the information in the newsletter. For years the general reading level of deaf and hard of hearing students has remained painfully low. There has been a significant amount of emphasis devoted to developing different standards for deaf and hard of hearing graduates. I am pleased that there seems to be some recognition that all students and graduates need to be evaluated by the same standards.

Your principal thrust points to the lack of English fluency as a major point in the problem. In the course of your discussion, you cite several investigated approaches with little expectation of considerable improvement. In all that you review, you have consistently ignored what seems to be the most obvious and most direct approach. Expose deaf and hard of hearing children from the earliest possible time to the language they will be using, English. There have been a number of studies supporting this, but they are rarely, if ever, brought to your readers. For a start, I suggest you look at the work done sometimes individually and sometimes in concert by Mary Pat Moeller and Barbara Luetke-Stahlman. There is also work done by Dr. Linda Taylor. There are also two recent articles in the *American Annals of the Deaf* whose results, although fearfully cautious, point to the same conclusion. In addition, a twenty year study in Singapore provides further proof. Whatever we do with those who have gone through an educational system that has been somewhat less than successful, we best start young children out with the tools they will really need. Studies clearly show that, in general, those who internalize and know the vernacular in which they have to read and write, do it successfully.

The first few years in a child's life are important in ultimate language acquisition. Better than 97% of the parents of deaf children are hearing. With the majority in this country knowing English, it is not much of a mental stretch to recognize that English is their most likely language choice. The next step is equally logical. The way to get language exposure for the child is to model an English-based sign system. Current studies and thousands of anecdotal examples prove this to provide good results.

The emotional resistance to Signing Exact English has, for too long, been allowed to adversely affect the education of capable deaf young people. There is no reason those same young people should not be conversant with ASL or any other language. The really important immediate concern relates to the provision of a consistent English environment.

In the course of the very many workshops we have held over the past 12 years in many parts of the world, there has been a consistent message. In surrounding deaf

children with the language they will need in order to read and write, we maintain clear interest and respect for other modes of communication. Certainly that includes American Sign Language along with Cued Speech and oral expression. That basic attitude has promoted an air of acceptance among those growing up in SEE programs. One result is that they readily accept and become skillful in other modes. We would be happy to work together to have deaf children everywhere achieve their educational potential.

**David A. Zawolkow**

**SEE Center for the Advancement of Deaf Children**

[www.seecenter.org](http://www.seecenter.org)

**Dear Mr. Johnson,**

Your article, "High Stakes Testing and Deaf Students: Some Research Perspectives," was thought-provoking and interesting. I want to respond to you because of your mention of Cued Speech and ASL, and the statement, "In theory, Cued Speech and ASL could be used in concert with each other in a bilingual educational environment, but I know of no program explicitly attempting such a marriage." I am writing to inform you that our Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Learners has exactly that marriage, and therefore a bilingual program with such a model does indeed exist. Our public school program serves deaf and hard of hearing learners in a regional program in the south/southeast metro area of Minneapolis/St. Paul in Minnesota. Our program embraces exposure and immersion in ASL, and embraces exposure and immersion in English conveyed through the visually complete system of Cued Speech used in the running conversational context of cued English. (See "note on cued English" on next page.)

You stated in your article, "...educators have yet to formulate educational procedures that predictably yield these exceptional results" (i.e. abilities to grasp the subtle nuances of spoken language reflected in the text of statewide accountability tests). We have embarked on a pioneering effort in setting a different course in the field of deaf education in establishing a bilingual program embracing both ASL and English with the goal of achieving better literacy results among deaf and hard of hearing learners. Our model differs from the current prevalent bilingual model in the nation and other countries. We believe our model is considerably more

grounded on principles of linguistics, language accessibility and natural language acquisition.

We continue on our course despite the fact that the majority of our professional colleagues around the country look askance and still do not understand the linguistic rationale why cueing makes the most sense among manually coded English systems to provide visually complete access to English. We set our course and changed our paradigm about six years ago after investigating the abilities and results of "cue kids," and after analyzing the linguistic information present (and not present) among the various manually coded English sign systems and what we know to be critical factors of natural language development. Briefly, cueing conveys the information of a traditionally spoken language completely within all required components and levels of the linguistic hierarchy (phonological, morpho-logical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic), whereas PSE and manually coded signed systems do not convey English at the phonological level, and minimally and/or deficiently at the morphological and syntactic levels. The absence of critical linguistic information at the structural level of a language thus prevents accurate reception and



**Note on "cued English":** Our program refers to the manner of communicating English via cueing in the context of discourse and natural communication interaction as "Cued English." Dr. Orin Cornett invented the manual code in 1966 and named the system "Cued Speech" no doubt because the consonant-vowel phonemes represented through cueing correspond to those conveyed in the traditionally spoken language of a given country. However, we use the term "Cued English" when identifying the medium-cueing-being performed paired with the target language-English-(albeit via the system called Cued Speech), just as is done with the other mediums which convey the consonant-vowel structure of English completely, i.e. "spoken English" and "written English." The act of cueing requires a completely different set of articulators than the act of speech. Of the articulators required for speech-i.e., voice, manner (airflow), placement (tongue), etc.-only mouthshape is a shared articulator in cueing. Articulators in cueing consist of handshape, hand placement and mouthshape. As the hands are physically incapable of producing the auditory product of "speech," there is, in our opinion, no "speech" in the physical production of Cued Speech. While it may seem irrelevant to "split hairs" on terminology, I believe the choice of terminology to describe the different contexts and purposes for which Cued Speech is used has greatly influenced the myths and general lack of understanding surrounding the use of cueing in the field of deaf education.

comprehension at the semantic and pragmatic levels. For an excellent description regarding the linguistic information present in signed languages, manual signed systems and cued languages, I highly recommend the book, *Cued Language Structure: An Analysis of Cued American English Based on Linguistic Principles*, by Fleetwood and Metzger, Silver Spring, MD: Calliope Press, 1998, from which the above information is derived.

An additional tenet of our program is the firm belief that advanced proficiency in a language requires internal mastery of that language. We believe internalization and mastery of a language occurs most effectively and efficiently through natural communication and discourse via immersion in the target language, and not through translation and access-to-language-via-print-only methodologies. Children must acquire an internalized mastery of a language in order to acquire phonemic awareness and the ability to "decode" a coded (i.e. print) form of that same language for reading. The word, "decode," literally means "to convert (a coded message) into intelligible language" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield, MS: Merriam-Webster, Inc. Publishers, 1984). I believe many deaf and hard of hearing learners in this country unnecessarily lack the internalized mastery of English required to make the printed code intelligible to them. They likewise need an internalized mastery of English to be able to "encode" that language into the printed code of written English.

Although we had been a PSE/ASL program, my colleagues and I determined we could no longer participate in methodologies which contribute to the legacy of low, dismal reading abilities of very bright, capable deaf and hard of hearing learners, learners who are capable of reading and writing abilities commensurate to hearing children if given the appropriate linguistic environment to acquire English. I have always said "the stakes are too high" for deaf and hard of hearing learners to do anything else if we are aware of a methodology which consistently produces high literacy results. It is extremely painful to me to see very capable and bright deaf and hard of hearing learners graduating with 2nd-4th grade reading levels, deaf and hard of hearing learners who could have both ASL and English skills if we could achieve some major changes in their language-learning environments. I believe this requires some major education and dialogue among deaf educators. We know well the myths and the fears surrounding the use of "Cued Speech;" we have heard them



all. I have been working with deaf and hard of hearing individuals for 24 years, and come from a background of working and teaching at residential schools and regional programs for the deaf, and working as an RID-certified sign language interpreter. It was a *major* paradigm shift to be willing to learn about cued languages. Now, when I see the results of those learners who have had significant exposure to English via cueing, learners who are able to pass the statewide tests with ease, there is no going back to instructional linguistic environments that provide inadequate access to ASL and inadequate access to English.

I concur with many of the concerns stated in your article regarding statewide testing, not only for deaf and hard of hearing learners, but for all learners. However, I agree for the reasons stated that they often are not a good measure of learners' true abilities, and also believe it is very dangerous to be withholding diplomas based on single measures which are biased towards many learners in our country. I do not agree, however, with those who believe that deaf and hard of hearing learners should be exempt because of their traditional difficulty with reading and writing tasks, as I believe that is a result of the failure of the linguistic environment for acquiring language for most deaf and hard of hearing learners, and not any inherent capabilities of these very capable and receptive children.

Please contact me if you are interested in reading the Language of Instruction document we developed for our program, as well as other information describing our program practices and the rationale supporting them.

**Kitri Larson Kylo, Assistant Director,  
Intermediate School District 917,  
Rosemount, Minnesota**

#### Editor's comment:

Lacking the expertise to respond adequately to Ms. Kylo's letter, I appealed to Dr. Melanie Metzger of Gallaudet's Department of Linguistics and Interpretation to respond. Dr. Metzger is well-known for her research in ASL linguistics and the field of interpretation, as well as for her studies of Cued Speech. Her response follows:

#### Dear Mr. Johnson,

At your invitation, I am writing in response to Kitri Larson Kylo's letter to the editor. In it she states: "Ours is a program that embraces exposure and immersion in ASL, and embraces exposure and immersion in English conveyed through the visually complete system of Cued Speech used in the running conversational context of cued English." To my knowledge, the program she is referring to is a unique realization of the model ASL-cued English programs discussed in Paul and Leidel (1991) and Cornett (1991).

In 1998, the Deaf Leadership Council of the NCSA, made up of Deaf native cuers of English who were also fluent signers of ASL, made a political statement and left the NCSA Board of Directors, claiming that it was time for that organization and the world at large to understand and recognize cued languages as visual languages rather than focusing on Cued Speech as it relates to speech and hearing. Since that time, the emergence of the Cued Language Network of America (CLNA) and the Cued Language International Center (CLIC), as well as of such programs as the one described by Ms. Kylo, suggests that a linguistic and cultural minority have made a difference. The position of the Deaf Leadership Council was that deaf and hard of hearing children have the right to visually accessible languages, including cueing the language of the home for those with hearing parents. Based on the principles addressed by Deaf adult native cuers, and in addition to incorporating a Deaf perspective into its design, I would like to applaud this regional program established within the Minnesota public school system for several reasons.

First, it is willing to be innovative and it has based its design on research and theoretically supportable practices, rather than on the latest fad. The growing body of research about the use of cued languages such as cued English, cued French, and cued Thai has focused on a variety of issues including prosody (Metzger 1994, Hauser & Klossner 2001), language acquisition (Kipila 1985, Moseley & Williams-Scott 1991, Metzger 1994), bilingualism (Hauser 2000), and literacy development (see Leybaert 1993 and Leybaert & Charlier 1996 for a summary), as well as the fact that Cued Speech itself is not so much a method of communication, as it is an articulatory system that makes consonant-vowel languages accessible in the visual mode (Fleetwood & Metzger 1991, 1998).

Many purported bilingual programs that I have seen do not actually incorporate bilingual curricula. For example, some programs use cued English and Signed English, but not ASL. Others use ASL, but only cue English for 20 minutes or so per day. The program in Minnesota clearly establishes two languages (ASL and English) as the underlying goal of the program, and uses two visually accessible and distinct modes (signed and cued) for communicating them.

The designers of the Minnesota program had to research the relevant literature and overcome prejudices in order to develop a program that incorporates the linguistic manifestation of a system called "Cued Speech". Second, they have made programmatic changes that reflect sensitivity to students' needs and backgrounds. That is, they



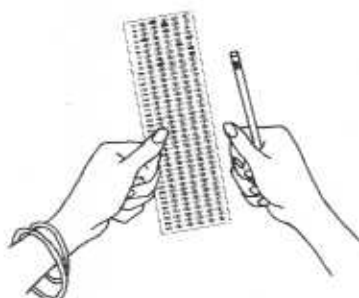
implemented changes with the youngest students, not requiring older students to suddenly and unreasonably adapt to new expectations. This requires extreme patience, as they work with the same problems faced by every program serving deaf children who may not have a language-rich environment at home, and wait for these young children to grow old enough to determine whether or not their exposure to ASL is sufficient and whether or not their exposure to English is sufficient.

Third, they have designed a program based on their goals, not on emotionality or popularity. Though used by a growing community, Cued Speech as a system and the use of cued English or other cued languages, have been less than popular and often—as many young Deaf native cuers have pointed out—subject to the same ridicule and discrimination once aimed at ASL before it was recognized as a whole and treasured visual language.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Minnesota program is that its leaders have kept their eyes on the goal. They are trying an innovative approach based on the successes they have seen with its component parts elsewhere. Their design is based on linguistic principles and those of natural language acquisition. But they also recognize the need for research to cull out what aspects of the program may be contributing to student outcomes. Without research, perhaps no attempt to resolve the high stakes testing issues for deaf children will be comprehensible in light of the multiple variables affecting the lives of the children being taught. With research and careful program design, there is a chance that increasingly improved language choices and teaching approaches can be developed and implemented for more deaf children. I hope that research funding will focus on unique programs such as the one in Minnesota, in support of professionals attempting to effect change without emotionally implemented experimentation on masses of deaf children.

Kyllo makes reference to alternate bilingual programs, such as ASL/written-English programs. Not all deaf children are the same and not all parents have the same goals for their children. It is true that written English and cued English contribute to different outcomes. Written English may be learnable by those who have acquired a first language, but there are aspects of written language that are not the same as those presented in face-to-face communication. The choice to use cued English is one aimed at acquisition of face-to-face English in addition to written English features. Native-like fluency in English, including the nuances of vernacular English, is an outcome for cuers (regardless of whether or not they speak) by nature of the manner in which they acquire

English skills. English skills of this nature may not be the goal of all programs for deaf and hard of hearing learners. Parents need to be aware of the goals of a program and align them with their own when choosing a program.



For those engaged in research or preparation of professionals working with deaf children, we cannot ignore the fact that various approaches in support of bilingual (or multilingual) education are being used in numerous programs across the country. Any concerns we may have about that should be documented in scholarly fashion, so that we can impact the direction and the frequency of such programmatic choices. If programs do not live up to the claims of their

advocates, let us find data-based evidence and spread the word so that others may choose more wisely. If they do live up to claims, let us find how and for whom from a corpus of data as well. Programs like the one in Minnesota that are carefully piloting innovative approaches provide the perfect source for this research.

**Melanie Metzger, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
Dept. of Linguistics and Interpretation  
Gallaudet University**

## References

- Cornett, R. O. (1991). A model for ASL/English bilingualism. In E. Lovato, S. Polowe-Aldersley, P. Schragle, V. Armour, & J. Polowe (eds). *Profession on Parade: Proceedings of the 1991 CAID/CEASD Convention*. New Orleans, LA, pp. 33-39.
- Fleetwood, E. & Metzger, M. (1991). *Signed English and cued English: A contrastive analysis*. Paper presented at Deaf Awareness Conference, Dothan, Alabama.
- Fleetwood, E. & Metzger, M. (1998). *Cued language structure: An analysis of cued American English based on linguistic principles*. Silver Spring, MD: Calliope Press.
- Hauser, P. (2000). Code switching: American Sign Language and cued English. In M. Metzger (ed.) *Bilingualism and Identity in Deaf Communities*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Hauser, P. & Klossner, C. *Prosody and cued English*. Paper presented at Visions '98, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC.
- Kipila, E. 1985. Analysis of an oral language sample from a prelingually deaf child's Cued Speech: A case study. *Cued Speech Annual*, 1, 46-59.
- Leidel, J. & Paul, P. (1991). An interactive-interaction bilingual-bicultural program model. In E. Lovato, S. Polowe-Aldersley, P. Schragle, V. Armour, & J. Polowe (eds). *Profession on Parade: Proceedings of the CAID/CEASD Convention*. New Orleans, LA, pp. 106-109.
- Leybaert, J. (1993). Reading in the deaf: The roles of phonological codes. In Marschark, M., and M. Diane Clark (eds) *Psychological Perspectives on Deafness*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. 269-309.
- Leybaert, J. and Charlier, B. (1996). Visual speech in the head: The effect of Cued Speech on rhyming, remembering, and spelling. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 1(4), 234-248.
- Metzger, M. (1994a). Involvement strategies in cued English discourse: Soundless expressive phonology. ms. Georgetown University.

- Metzger, M. (1994b). First language acquisition in deaf children of hearing parents. ms. Georgetown University.
- Moseley, M., Williams-Scott, B., & Anthony, C. (1991). *Language expressed through Cued Speech: A pre-school case study*. Poster Session presented at the American Speech-Language Hearing Association, Atlanta, GA.

## Dictionaries and the Standardization of Languages: An International Conference

On November 7-8, 2001, over 250 individuals interested in the process of creating dictionaries—particularly sign language dictionaries—gathered in the Gallaudet University Kellogg Conference Center for a conference called “Dictionaries and the Standardization of Languages: An International Conference.” The conference attracted presenters, panelists, and attendees from all over the United States, as well as from England, the Netherlands, Australia, Austria, Italy, Brazil, and other countries. Topics addressed included field linguistics, dialect variation, semantics, and technological advances as they relate to the development of sign language dictionaries.

Simon Winchester, best selling author of *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary* opened the conference with a captivating presentation of the story of William Minor, who spent much of the last 38 years of his complex life in England’s Broadmore Asylum for the Criminally Insane filling out thousands of 3x5 cards with quotations of the first usage of English words which he found during his extensive reading. He submitted these for inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary and thus contributed substantially to that dictionary’s development. As an example of Winchester’s wit, he pointed out that though he spent a considerable amount of time doing research in Broadmore Asylum, he fortunately “was allowed out each evening.”

A paper by Dr. Charles Fillmore of the University of California, Berkeley, was presented by Dr. David Armstrong, chair of the conference planning committee, because Dr. Fillmore’s travel plans ran afoul. The paper, “What Information Should Dictionaries Make Available,” pointed out that dictionary designers need to consider how entries for a given lexical item are likely to be used in order to determine what information about the item should be included and what system should be used to decide where in the dictionary the item should be placed.

Three collaborators, Drs. Melissa Axelrod and Jordan Lachler of the University of New Mexico and Dr. Jule Gomez de Garcia from California State University, San Marcos, discussed the delicate nuances of working within a community to develop a dictionary of that community’s

endangered language. Their presentation, entitled “The Roles of Literacy and Collaboration in Documenting Native American Languages: A Report from the Jicarialla Apache Dictionary Project,” points out that both the interests of the scientific world and the needs of the people to whom the language belongs must be respected.

Dr. Trude Schermer presented “An Overview of the Standardization Process of the Lexicon of Sign Language of the Netherlands (SLN) over Two Decades.” She discussed twenty years of research in which a small army of volunteers entered the deaf community and used video cameras to gather images of commonly used signs throughout several regions of the Netherlands.

Dr. Sherman Wilcox, Associate Professor from the University of New Mexico, discussed the difficulties associated with developing a computerized dictionary of ASL. Many decisions related to technology, business, and lexicography drove the project, but also catapulted the investigation in unexpected directions as the fast pace of technological innovation in the early 1990s both solved some problems and created others.

The topic of “Language Standardization and Sign Language Dictionaries” was presented by Dr. Trevor Johnson of Renwick College, University of New Castle, Australia. Dr. Johnson is from a deaf family and is a researcher of Auslan, Australian Sign Language, and the author of the dictionary, which now, in its third edition, exists in both print and CD Rom formats. His educational



Simon Winchester, holding volumes from various editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and conference organizers (from left to right) Dr. John VanCleve, Dr. David Armstrong, and Dr. Michael Karchmer.

interests brought him to the idea of developing the Auslan dictionary, but his deaf relatives brought him into the living rooms of many deaf families to collect his data.

Dr. Ceil Lucas, a professor in Gallaudet’s Department of ASL, Linguistics, and Interpretation, presented on the role of variation in lexicography. She explained that a dictionary validates a language and documents “socio-linguistic functions that go well beyond their job of describing the meaning of words.”



Dr. Fernando C. Capovilla, a cognitive psychologist from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, described how with little money he and many volunteers created a two-volume, trilingual, encyclopedic dictionary that includes 9,500 entries in Brazilian Sign Language.

The second day of the conference included several panel discussions. The first, concerning the creation of *The Gallaudet Dictionary of American Sign Language* was moderated by Dr. John V. Van Cleve of the Gallaudet University Press and included Rosalyn Gannon, Jean Gordon, Jill Hendricks, and Dr. Arlene B. Kelly.

A panel on "Issues in the Development of National Sign Language Dictionaries" was moderated by Dr. Robert E. Johnson from Gallaudet's Department of ASL, Linguistics, and Interpretation. The panel included Dr. Capovilla (Brazilian Sign Language), Dr. Franz Dotter (Austrian Sign Language), Elena Radutzky (Italian Sign Language), Dr. Charles Reilly (Tai Sign Language), Dr.

Trudey Schermer (Sign Language of the Netherlands), and Dr. Madan Vasishta (Indian Sign Language).

A panel on "Issues in Lexicography" moderated by Dr. Michael Karchmer, director of the Gallaudet Research Institute, ended the conference. Melissa Axelrod, Charles Fillmore, Jule Gomez de Garcia, Trevor Johnson, Jordan Lachler, and Sherman Wilcox participated.

This conference was sponsored by the Gallaudet University Press Institute. Mr. Winchester's appearance was made possible by the support of the Schaefer Endowment Fund.

---

Gallaudet University is an equal opportunity employer/ educational institution and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, hearing status, disability, covered veteran status, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, source of income, place of business or residence, pregnancy, childbirth, or any other unlawful basis.

RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

Fall/Winter 2001-2002

The Gallaudet Research Institute  
Gallaudet University  
800 Florida Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-3660



Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Washington, D.C.  
Permit No. 9452