



Abstracts

For

4<sup>th</sup> International Conference for  
Deaf Academics and Researchers

Dublin

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**4<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Deaf Academics and Researchers, Dublin Ireland  
June 25-27, 2008**

**Theme of Deaf Academics:  
The Role of Deaf Academics in The Pursuit of Social Justice**

**Presenter**

Laurene E. Simms, Ph.D.  
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MA: Deaf Education  
Gallaudet University  
Washington, DC

**Title**

“Being an Ally for Deaf People”  
Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation.  
Let us find our stride for the challenging journey ahead.

**Abstract: Multiculturalism and Global conflict**

The presentation will address different ways of introducing a human element into a dialogue for the purpose of conflict resolution and reconciliation. As a result, enemies will be viewed not only as adversaries, but also holistically, as human beings. Being an ally requires sustained dialogue and acknowledges explicit boundaries in a variety of fields such as profession, work place, and community. Through discussion, the participants will explore the roles of allies and how they can create healthy relationships among themselves and recognize the dynamics of oppression and social justice. Furthermore, sharing individuals’ stories at appropriate moments can be a powerful and authentic way of providing insight into how unresolved conflict can leave lasting scars.

**Patrick A. Matthews, Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin.**

### **Abstract Brief: A sign writing system for Irish Sign Language?**

My current PhD studies centre on the question of whether or not a sign writing system can be developed and used by Irish Deaf. One question addressed is whether ISL writing is really needed. In answering this question, we look at history behind the writing systems of spoken languages.

Societies' response to this new invention was interesting. The people within society who knew how to write used it to maintain power and control over the ignorant majority. Other societies with no writing system were labelled as inferior.

Many scholarly people warned that writing would make minds lazy, and be used for deceitful purposes. Others saw the benefits and promoted literacy and the idea of education for all.

The history of sign writing is fairly recent. Systems used at present are: Stokoe system, HamNoSys and SignWriting. The first two were developed with research in mind and are extremely detailed. They also use a linear format common to spoken language. SignWriting appears to be the most compatible. It was developed with writing in mind and closely resembles the compact structure of sign language.

Writing systems either spoken or signed use the 'phonology' of their language to create the writing symbols needed. For spoken language these are the sounds of the language, for sign languages, these are the handshapes, orientation of the hands, movements, placement, and non-manual features.

A good sign writing system would have two great benefits: fluent ISL signers and those learning ISL could learn to read, write and study the language. This will in turn promote the use and recognition of ISL.

My research will strive to develop such a system by adapting the best of existing systems thus creating an ideal writing system for ISL.

## Michael Schwartz (USA)

### ABSTRACT

I direct a law school clinic at Syracuse University's College of Law, the Disability Rights Clinic, where I supervise ten law students – all hearing – in advocating for the rights of Deaf people. My students arrive with a medical model view of deafness, seeing deafness as a deficit, rather than as a cultural and linguistic phenomenon. Teaching them to respect the Deaf community, the sign language, and Deaf culture, helps them to become better advocates for the Deaf community. I am the only culturally Deaf law professor in the United States, and I communicate with my students via sign language interpreters. The students thus become sensitized to sign language as “the centre of identity formation” for Deaf people.

The clinic's goal is social justice, and we litigate to advance the rights of the Deaf community to equality under the law. Using federal and state law, my clinic students and I hammer away at the walls of discrimination and bias. We sue balky employers; we talk to resistant medical doctors about their legal responsibility to provide effective communication access to Deaf patients; we give presentations to members of the Deaf community about their legal rights.

Law cannot guarantee what a culture is not willing to give. American courts are hostile to disability rights because American society is not prepared to make room at the table for people with disabilities, including Deaf people. Thus, the job of my law school clinic is to change the minds and hearts of hearing people so that changes in their attitude can influence how judges and lawyers address the aspirations of Deaf people.

I propose to make a 30-minute presentation on the work of my law clinic that would illuminate one overarching conceptual strategy in the fight “to break the cycle of subjugation and hearing domination.”

## **Science as Ammo for Social Justice**

Peter C. Hauser, Ph.D.

Deaf Studies Laboratory  
National Technical Institute for the Deaf

NSF Science of Learning Center on  
Visual Languages and Visual Learning  
Gallaudet University

The U.S. National Science Foundation Science of Learning Center on Visual Languages and Visual Learning (VL2) at Gallaudet University and the Deaf Studies Laboratory (DSL) at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf have been working collaboratively on a number of research projects that focus on deaf individuals' visual abilities rather than their hearing loss. VL2 and DSL represent a network of linguists, educational researchers, psychologists, and cognitive neuroscientists from different universities. Additionally, VL2 and DSL have developed programs to foster deaf undergraduate and graduate students' educations with the goal to bring more deaf individuals into fields of research. This presentation will first describe the infrastructure of VL2 and DSL to show how the center and laboratory were developed.

The second part of the presentation will cover recent findings about visual cognition and visual learning. Research often focuses on the negative impact hearing loss has on an individual and how to compensate for the hearing loss by using technology or models of instruction based on studies of hearing individuals. Instead, in DSL, we focus on how relying on vision and sign language experience actually improves some cognitive functions where deaf individuals outperform hearing individuals or where deaf individuals might perform similar to hearing individuals but use a different cognitive process to achieve the same results. The results of this research provide a better understanding of how deaf students cognitively process and learn information.

The final part of the presentation will focus on the importance of sign language assessment and visual research for changing policy. We believe that deaf individuals naturally adapt to the environment by placing a heavier reliance on vision and that this knowledge should be taken into consideration for educational planning. Educators and others have long tried to shape deaf individuals, with much difficulty, into the "molds" that fit hearing individuals. We hope others will follow our lead to study what the deaf mold looks like and how to shape growing deaf individuals into this mold as a way to advance the education and rights of all deaf individuals. We believe this is the type of research that the World Federation for the Deaf can use to help raise awareness of deaf individuals' abilities and advance the education of all deaf individuals.

**1. Title of the presentation:** Is research involving Deaf people always valid and reliable?

**2. Name and address of the presenter:**

Katie Rogers

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**3. Subject:** Research methodology, ethics and epistemology

**4. Abstract:**

Research into Deaf people and the Deaf community has historically been dominated by hearing academics who may know little or nothing about the value of Deaf culture. Reasons for their 'interest in the deaf' tend to vary, depending on the purpose of the research; whether it is social, medical, clinical, etc. For example, topics could include education, audiometrics, mental well-being, sign language, etc. The reliability and validity of research can be questionable, as it may stem from a particular model of deafness that is based on theories of professionals working in a particular field and that is not necessarily made explicit. This could influence the results and interpretation of a study.

Just like with any other minority community, it is too easy to draw conclusions from the general population. This has been an issue when considering the reliability of studies involving Deaf people; it is therefore important not to ignore the effects of variables, such as the tests and language used, and the demographics of the deaf sample. The design of the study and the research methodology need to be carefully considered. In the case of interviewing; we need to think about the interviewer and the effects they may have on the interviewee. Whether the aim of the study is useful for members of the relevant community (and not just for the interest of outsiders), is also an important consideration.

Furthermore, as all research needs ethical approval, the ethics committee concerned may not have the necessary Deaf awareness to fully appreciate the issues involved and exercise their responsibilities accordingly. Deaf people who may take part in research have the right to know its full purpose; however it is possible that some people are not actually fully aware of the purpose and implications of a study because of how these are communicated.

This paper will argue that it is not possible to achieve reliable and valid Deaf-related research without having insight into Deaf people's lives and culture and by having Deaf people involved in the research. This is a methodological point as much as it is a political or ethical point. Examples will be drawn from the presenter's own professional experience of both quantitative studies in psychology and qualitative studies in social research.

## **The Fritz Moen Case : Double miscarriage of justice against a Deaf Person**

by

Hilde Haualand, phd. Candidate, University of Oslo/Fafo research institute  
and

Odd-Inge Schröder, associate professor, cand.philol, University of Oslo.

A deaf man, Fritz Moen (1940-2004) was in a double miscarriage of justice, and he was then innocently sentenced for murders of two girls in 1978 and 1980. He was sentenced to jail for 21 years and 10 years in security. In 2006, he formally was acquitted for both killings. He was, however, by then dead. After the acquitting, the whole case has been subject to investigation by the Department of Justice. However, the role of failed communication and lack of qualified interpreters in this double miscarriage of justice that made such verdict possible was not recognised in the investigation report. To the extent there has been any kind of regrets or self-critique in the police, this has not been about lack of communication or deaf awareness. We shall discuss the implications of communication, sign language, deaf community, attitudes to deaf persons and the rights of the deaf in this case, and what light we as Deaf researchers can throw at these subjects.

**Annelies Kusters**  
**PhD-student**  
**Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol**

## **Deafhood on the lifeline of Mumbai**

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This presentation is a result of my MSc Deaf Studies dissertation that is situated on an intersection between Deaf geography, anthropology and Deafhood theory. During five weeks of participatory observation and interviews, my attention was drawn to the city's lifeline: the suburban train system.

It appeared that Deaf people tend to travel in specific compartments for people with disabilities that were set up about six years ago. They started to use these compartments – and also the train platforms - as important meeting places. My presentation will explain how this evolved and the reasons for traveling in compartments for disabled people rather than in general train compartments - reasons that have nothing to do with a 'deficit' perspective on deafness.

Not only has this way of travelling several socio-cultural consequences that appear to strengthen links in the Mumbai Deaf community; in addition the visibility of signing Deaf groups has caused a growth in Deaf awareness among hearing people in these 'disabled' compartments in particular and at the train stations in general. It is because of Mumbai's geography, its resulting population density and the heavy use of suburban trains unique for this city, that these several different effects were so strongly spread in both the Deaf community and among hearing people.

This research teaches us that other places than 'traditional' Deaf clubs, associations or schools can be very important for a Deaf community. It also tells us something about how Deaf people use public space in which Deaf minority culture is not oppressed by or subjugated to the hearing majority, and reach spontaneous positive social change among both the Deaf community and hearing people in general. I believe that one of the roles of Deaf academics is to try to understand such processes through ethnographic research and to bring those into attention.

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**ABSTRACT FOR PRESENTATION OF CONFERENCE PAPER**

**Tessa Padden MA**

**Deaf Professionals in Management – is there a Glass Ceiling?**

This paper is based on a dissertation submitted for the MA in Human Resource Management at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Findings from interviewing a wide sample of Deaf and hearing professionals confirm that the glass ceiling affects Deaf professionals and managers just as it does other discriminated groups, including women and ethnic minorities. The underlying factors are similar to a large extent - stereotypes, communication issues, lack of access to the informal networks of the dominant group. Exclusion, feelings of failure and being set up to fail are common.

Deaf professionals respond in ways that are similar to other groups. They seek mutual support and are beginning to set up formal professional networks. They are also aware of the experiences that other groups have been through and are trying to learn from them - how to develop strategies for combating the glass ceiling; thinking about how to use existing legislation and campaign/lobby for more.

The biggest factor that sets Deaf people apart is language. Although Deaf people can become more skilled in written English, with improved education through BSL, they will never be able to walk into the office and 'talk the same language'.

The author explores possible solutions, such as:

1. Would hearing people be prepared to learn Sign language in mainstream workplaces?
2. The value of all-Deaf or Deaf-run organisations.
3. The recommendation of some studies that Deaf services and Deaf-led organisations should be all-signing and non-speaking workplaces.

Tessa Padden

25 March 2008

## **DeafWiki Project**

**Jordon Eickman and Gergin Simeonov (USA)  
California State University at Northridge, LA**

The DeafWiki project, modeled after the well-known Wikipedia encyclopedia, aims to become a free-content, complete and reliable Deaf-produced encyclopedia covering deaf people and the Deaf-World.

In our technological age, it is essential that we, Deaf people, take action to develop our own reliable, on-line, editable, Deaf-centered source of information presented in signed languages, about Deaf people and the Deaf community.

Recently, vlogs and blogs have become popular means of exchanging information and opinions throughout the world Deaf community.

DeafWiki is taking a step further by utilizing Wiki software, developed by Mediawiki, and vlog-facilitating technologies to enable Deaf people to make contributions to DeafWiki especially in signed languages, and/or written languages.

This creates a framework not only for information sharing, but also for data collection and editing for Deaf-led research on-line in sign language. This will allow information to be presented in a Deaf-centered and visual way, utilizing vlogs, photos, maps, and signed and written content. Contributors will initially be encouraged to submit Deaf biographies, interviews, Deaf historical and signed linguistic data, news items, opinions and editorials.

The utilized technologies will enable development of protocols for producing several different mediums of signed communications and editing them in a fashion similar to Wikipedia's content-revising procedure.

DeafWiki and how to produce, upload and edit contributions using simple, inexpensive equipment will be demonstrated, showing the great potential of having Deaf people world-wide, without great expense, collectively contribute to, organize, and edit an accurate, on-line information resource that shares about the Deaf life experience and the Deaf community and provides opportunities for Deaf-led on-line research project participation.

All contributions to DeafWiki are and will always be freely available on-line, so that all people can increase their knowledge and awareness about Deaf people, the Deaf community and Deaf issues.

## **Giving back - Deaf professionals and the Deaf community**

**Maartje De Meulder (Belgium)**

**Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol**

The subject of this talk is derived from my MSc dissertation in Deaf Studies and is situated in the area of Deaf sociology. This is a largely unexplored area, due to the fact that there is still very little research attention for different groups and classes within Deaf communities.

My talk will focus on one group within the Deaf community: Deaf professionals and their relationship with the subaltern Deaf community. The Deaf professionals in this case study are four Deaf faculty members working within an academic Institute. I will examine the following issues:

- What does their professional status mean to them in a collective culture like Deaf culture, and how do they cope with this?
- How does their professional status influence their relationship with the subaltern Deaf community?
- How do they experience working as a Deaf academic within (hearing) academia?
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The data suggest that the Deaf professionals working within the Institute are confronted with many challenges, like cultural misunderstandings, and juggling with different roles and walking a tightrope (having to make decisions all the time). As members of a collective community, however, they are aware of the importance of approval from this community and of their duties towards it (which I have termed 'giving back'). The data furthermore suggest that while working within academia they may feel torn between their scholarly duties and their duties to the Deaf community.

More research is needed in several areas: the view of the Deaf community itself on the subaltern-professional issue, the experience of young Deaf professionals and their relationship with the subaltern Deaf community, and the experience of other minority faculty members within minority studies.

## **Deaf Academics Proposal:**

### The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill: Genetic Selection and the Deaf Community

*Alison Bryan, Teresa Blankmeyer Burke, Steven Emery*

In November 2007, Deaf academics responded to the ‘preference clause’ in the proposed UK’s Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill (HFEB), which states that persons or embryos known to have an abnormality or risk of abnormality must not be preferred to those without abnormality. Our panel will provide a brief overview of the Deaf community response to the preference clause and offer analyses of the HFEB from three perspectives:

1. Legal: To place this proposed clause in a legal context, and to undertake some comparative analysis (Ms Alison Bryan);
2. Philosophical and bioethical argument analysis: philosophical issues related to the status of genomic material for deaf embryos and D/deaf persons; ethics of denying reproductive liberty to Deaf parents; implications for the use of genetic technology regarding deafness generally should the clause become legal (Ms. Teresa Blankmeyer Burke);
3. Citizenship: the implications of the legislation on citizenship such as entitlement to social rights; interpreting the media responses and their cultural impressions of Deaf people; and evidence of emerging areas of technological influence in political campaign work (Dr. Steven Emery).

The panel will provide a ‘signpost’ through the maze of academic issues this clause has challenged Deaf scholars worldwide to address, and invite the audience to consider the key issues for the future of Deaf academics’ work in the field of medical genetics.