

FOREWORD

In 1984, Gallaudet College (now University) hosted the First International Symposium on Cognition, Education, and Deafness. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this event. Never before had researchers, scholars, and teachers from these three fields come together to share their work, discuss their points of view, and learn from each other. It was a singularly successful conference, accomplishing even more than the organizers had hoped. From the conference came a book, *Cognition, Education, and Deafness*. Publication of this book extended the excitement of the conference to a wider audience and subsequently led to a second conference.

The Second International Symposium on Cognition, Education, and Deafness took place on the Gallaudet University campus in July 1989. Nearly fifty presentations were made, and the symposium attracted more than 250 participants from seventeen different nations. The symposium opened with a keynote address from Dr. Ursula Bellugi of the Salk Institute and closed with another keynote address from Dr. Howard Pollio of the University of Tennessee. Dr. Bellugi has spent much of her career studying the acquisition and use of sign language by deaf people. Dr. Pollio, a psychologist, has studied cognition from many different perspectives, but never before had he focused on the implications of deafness.

Dr. Bellugi, an “insider,” began by reminding the participants to look at the *capacities* of deaf individuals, not their *deficiencies*. She then described her twenty years of research on sign language. During the first ten years, she and the others in her lab had found that the properties of signed and spoken languages are very much the same, with similar organizational principles and complexity of grammar. Although they are very different on the surface, at deeper levels the languages appear to be much the same. More recently, Dr. Bellugi and her colleagues have been studying the effect that learning a visual language has on the brain.

Dr. Pollio, an “outsider,” ended the conference by giving us the benefit of an outsider’s point of view. He was able to observe the issues openly and objectively, without the biases and preconceptions often seen among those of us who spend our lives studying deafness. He cautioned the participants to be careful about how they define deafness, since their definitions will guide their thinking, research, and conclusions about deaf people. I was moved by his conclusion that “researchers in deafness must never lose sight of their phenomenon: the world as lived and experienced by the deaf person.”

The symposium was highly stimulating, with a wide variety of viewpoints and perspectives. Papers were presented in the areas of cognitive assessment, cognitive development, cognitive intervention programs, cognitive processes, language and cognition, and neuroscientific issues. In addition, the demonstration sessions enabled participants to see firsthand what is being done in applications in the field. This volume now presents those papers to the scientific and academic community. The publication of this second volume will add a great deal to the field of deafness research. Students of cognition, education, or language will

benefit greatly from this collection of some of the best current thinking in the field.

My personal thanks go to Dr. David Martin for his leadership both in the symposia and in the editing of the resulting books. It is through his vision and sheer hard work that such varied points of view can be collected in one text. I was fortunate enough to participate in both the 1984 and 1989 symposia, and I look forward with excitement to the next one.

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