

Preface

I was a nervous elementary schoolgirl the first time around, and I often boarded that big yellow schoolbus with a knot in my stomach. I was never sure what I would suffer that day at the hands of my teachers, who were probably completely professional, well meaning, and competent, but who often seemed like omnipotent savages to me. So many of the rules of school were implicit. For many of us, public schools are mysterious places structured by rules that are learned best after breaking them. I never wanted to break a school or classroom rule, but at the same time, I was never good at figuring them out.

Attending second grade all over again as an adult was only a little bit easier. Almost every day, as I parked near Aspen School, the familiar “school stomachache” visited me again. I signed on for another year of elementary school, though, for two reasons—I needed to gather data so I could write a dissertation, and I needed to revisit elementary school and problematize its oddities so that I could make sense of a school phenomenon that puzzled me. This phenomenon is called “mainstreaming deaf children.” I did my research using ethnographic methods because I wanted to see mainstreaming and self-contained classes from the participants’ viewpoints. It was a frightening and thrilling year in the field.

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By a stroke of genetic luck, I inherited not only deep and tenacious curiosity but a refined sense of the ridiculous. For this, and for many years

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