CrossMark

Editor's Note for Special Issue

Stephanie W. Cawthon[1]

It has been a great honor to serve as a guest editor for this special issue of the *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*. The purpose of this special issue was to invite submissions on research related to deaf individuals and their development, broadly construed. There may be some who wonder why a journal with this title would publish articles specifically related to deaf individuals, many who do not identify as having a disability. Individuals that comprise this population are diverse in many ways, including their identification with a Deaf as a cultural group, the use of sign and/or spoken language, onset and degree of hearing loss, integration of assistive listening technologies, intersections with other identity markers. Identity as a deaf person is fluid, changes over time, and even from situation to situation. There are many ways to "be" deaf, both within an individual's life, and across the population. This special issue seeks to capture research that focuses on a broad range of identities within the deaf population.

The low incidence nature of the deaf population, as well as its heterogeneity, presents great challenges to the research field. The greatest is that authors run the risk of generalizing findings from one individual or study sample to those who may not share the same characteristics. I am pleased that the articles represented in this volume provide a rich and varied set of perspectives using a wide range of methodologies. These findings provide readers with nuances that depend not only on individual characteristics but also the varied contexts in which deaf people live. From family contexts to schools to the workplace, each article takes into consideration how the environments in which the studies take place impact how the findings are interpreted.

Given this context, I invite you to read each article with the following questions in mind:

> *How does this study explore an aspect of development that has unique manifestations for deaf individuals?*
> *How does the context of the study (e.g., within a school) shape the kinds of applications that can be made to different contexts?*

✉ Stephanie W. Cawthon
stephanie.cawthon@austin.utexas.edu

[1] The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA

⚫ Springer

How do decisions about the research methodology offer opportunities for expanding the research base in the field or suggest different approaches to the topics studied?

Nine empirical articles make up this special issue. Their ordering is, roughly, in order of developmental stage or age of participants. Although stage theory was not explicitly named in either the call or the articles themselves, it can be helpful to see how the authors contribute to a sense of journey, accumulation of experiences in the lives of deaf individuals. While the majority of research in deaf education, specifically, tends towards literacy and academic achievement, this collection of articles reaches beyond the traditional lines of inquiry for the field.

The first article (Musyoka & Clark), *Teachers' Perceptions of Individualized Education Program (IEP) Goals and Related Services,* focuses on the very young children and their readiness for school. Much of the emphasis in areas related to children with disabilities is on early intervention, and this study focuses on how early childhood education programs guided by federal legislation (in the US) articulate goals for the deaf children they serve. This study utilized a secondary data analysis on a longitudinal dataset with a relatively large number of deaf children ($n = 118$) in the sample. This study directly addresses contextual factors by looking at the relationship between the goals of targeted interventions and the educational setting and school language philosophy.

The second article (Kushalnagar, Bruce, Sutton, & Leigh), *Retrospective Basic Parent-Child Communication Difficulties and Risk of Depression in Deaf Adults*, focuses on early communication experiences and their relationship with current day levels of mental health, most specifically examining depressive symptomatology. This retrospective approach asked individuals to think about on their earlier experiences through a survey approach, also with a relatively large number of participants ($n = 143$). Analysis included an exploration of nunaces of this relationship including intersections with gender (both of the individual and their parent communication partner) and language history. This study indicated the particular importance of strong communication between same-sex parents, a family level contextual factor that has rarely been examined within the deaf population.

The third article (Wang, Paul Falk, Jahromi, & Ahn), *Predictors of English Reading Comprehension for Children Who Are d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing,* followed the more traditional line of research within deaf education: reading development. This study looked at elementary and early secondary grade students – the period in which students learn to read, but also shift into the reading to learn – using their decoding and comprehension skills in a way that supports learning new information across the curriculum. This study looked specifically at components of reading that add to the building of fluent reading and strong levels of comprehension. Contextual factors such as home language were included in this analysis as covariates. Morphological awareness, part of how readers understand grammatical structures within a language, was a strong contributor to overall reading comprehension scores, even after controlling for demographic factors.

The fourth article (Lissi, Iturriaga, Sebastián, Vergara, Henríquez, & Hoffman), *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students' Opportunities for Learning in a Regular Secondary School in Chile: Teacher Practices and Beliefs*, is special because it includes such rich

information from secondary grade teachers about their approach to teaching mixed deaf and hearing classes. The length of time the researchers were in the classroom, together with the depth of information gathered across different tools, provide a close look at pedagogy that is not possible using many research methodological approaches. Teachers in this study provided their insight as to contextual factors that both facilitate or serve as barriers in their work, particulary in the ways in which different supports are required to fully provide access for deaf students within regular education settings.

The fifth article (Wolsey, Clark, van der Mark, & Suggs), *Life Scripts and Life Stories of Oral Deaf Individuals,* capitalizes largely on qualitative methods to provide a sense of the nuances and importance of context in the development of identity for deaf individuals. Using cultural life scripts, this article focues on oral deaf individuals, comparing results from their narratives about life events with those of culturally Deaf individuals and hearing individuals. What is interesting about this article is that it captures the experiences that many of those who communicate using oral language methodologies early in life, and later, as an adult, have exposure to different ways of "being deaf". Developmentally, these transitions come with challenges and opportunities that adults may approach differently than children, or even adolescents.

The sixth article (Garberoglio, Schoffstall, Cawthon, Bond & Caemmerer), *The Antecedents and Outcomes of Autonomous Behaviors: Modeling the Role of Autonomy in Achieving Sustainable Employment for Deaf Young Adults*, takes an explicitly developmental approach by modeling the potential antecedents and outcomes of opportunities that parents provide their deaf youths to demostrate and practice autonomous behaviors. Expanding from the context education, this study examined the longitudinal impact of home experiences on long term employment outcomes. Attitudes often precede behavior; in this case, parents with high expectations were found to be important predictors of autonomy in young deaf adults, which was then linked to increased likelihood of early success in employment.

The seventh article (Stinson, Elliott, & Kelly), *Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing High School and College Students' Perceptions of Speech-to-Text and Interpreting/Note Taking Services and Motivation,* focused on three of the most commonly used accommodations across high school and college settings – speech to text, interpreting, and note taking. Each of these accommodations are used by students who seek to make classroom information accessible (either by creating a transcript of spoken language or translating it into sign language), with the additional support of notes taken by another student to account for the fact that it is very difficult to use one of the former supports and also take quality notes. This study tied in the construct of motivation – without initiative and interest in learning, students rarely engage at a level that is required for higher level thinking and advanced learning. Results indicate that students prefer the original version of the information presented, via transcripts, than summarized notes taken by a peer. The self report nature of this study provides insights into how students view courses with these accommodations, and points the field towards external validation of these results.

The eighth article (Marschark, Paivio, Spencer, Durkin, Borgna, Convertino, & Marchmer), *Don't Assume Deaf Students are Visual Learners*, also examined characteristics of deaf young adults, this time in postsecondary settings. This article investigates the commonly held belief that deaf students are visual learners. There are many possible layers as to what it means to be a visual learner (as well as what it means to be

a deaf student), including visual acuity and perceptional skills, visual-spatial skills, use of sign language as a visual communication modality, or more specifically for learning, to use visual imagery to a more significant extent within learning activities. This study examined specific skills through standardized measures of visual learning styles in deaf students who primarily rely on sign language, those who rely on spoken language, and hearing peers. Findings indicate that our understanding of what it means to use visual skills in learning may be different than what it means to "be" a visual learner. These analyses encourage a more complex approach to individual and group differences in this area.

The ninth article (Lynn, Schley, Tobin, Lengyel, Ross, Connelly), *Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Hearing Students in an Introductory Biology Course: College Readiness, Social Learning Styles, and Success,* also looked at learning styles, but from the perspective of approaches or atitutides towards learning experiences: Independent, Dependent, Avoidant, Participant, Collaborative, and Competitive. Utilizing the naturally occurring experiment available in their local context, the authors compared learning styles for students enrolled in similar courses of study but via different routes. This study captures some of the nuances related to postsecondary study – students often come to their chosen field with different levels of prior preparation in their secondary settings. The potential relationship between classroom learning style and academic achievement provides further areas for discussion beyond the deaf or hearing identity of study participants.

I am deeply grateful to all of our authors, reviewers, and the editorial staff for their contributions to this special issue. I hope that the perspectives described here can continue to inspire the field to explore the many nuances that are a part of how deaf individuals learn, develop, and grow in their families, schools, and communities. I look forward to seeing the complexities presented here spawn a strong corpus of research from which to develop effective and relevant policies and practices.