www.brianriley.us

"We believe such a linguistic background is necessary if we are, indeed, to play a living, participating role in a dynamic, and for us, bilingual and bicultural society."—Merv Garretson, 1980

The Bilingual-Bicultural Revolution in Deaf Education

By Brian Riley
Presentation given at UC Davis: Thursday, May 21, 2015
Emended version posted: June 21, 2015, 8:16 pm Pacific Time

Gallaudet University is the world's only university for Deaf students, and it's very interesting how I was attracted to go there as a master's degree student. I thought I was just fascinated with American Sign Language. It's a fascinating language. I saw a flyer for the Linguistics program at Gallaudet: "Sign language linguistics" — that was a new idea. As soon as I saw that flyer, I knew exactly what I wanted to do for my master's degree, so I set my sights on Gallaudet. I went there a year before to check it out, and I'm so glad I did, because I had the most fascinating experience.

There was a researcher. His name was William Stokoe. He started out as a Gallaudet professor in 1955 in the English Department. He was invited there because Gallaudet wasn't accredited yet. Does everyone know what accreditation is? It's pretty important. An outside agency comes in and looks at your curriculum and everything to see if you meet certain standards. The Accreditation Movement wasn't always there, so it took a while for it to catch up with Gallaudet, so by the Fifties, people realized that Gallaudet needed to be accredited. Stokoe was one of the people recruited to help — I don't think "modernize" is quite the right word — I don't know, "overhaul" the curriculum at Gallaudet? — because Gallaudet started in 1864 as the "National Deaf-Mute College." In the first few years they adopted that name. So it's pretty old, actually, and Congress was very liberal in giving money to get the college started. A lot of beautiful buildings were built in the late 1860s to 1880s, but then interest eventually kind of declined.

The founding President of the college was Edward Miner Gallaudet. He was the son of the famous Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet who, along with Laurent Clerc and Mason Cogswell, was a co-founder of Deaf education in North America in Hartford, Connecticut. Edward Miner Gallaudet was actually President for forty-six years from 1864 to 1910, so he had a profound influence on setting up the college and getting it started on a certain course. When he retired, my tentative view right now — I'm writing my dissertation — is that the College entered kind of a period of stagnation until the

next president came in in 1945, and he started this modernization project and wanting to get accredited.

So Stokoe was brought in in 1955 and made the chairman of the English Department. He had to take some sign language training because he didn't know any sign language. He had been a scholar in Old English and Middle English, a Chaucer scholar, and so he was very familiar with analyzing language. He noticed that it seemed like the Deaf students, when they were signing among themselves, were signing quite effectively and differently than how he was being taught to sign. He was being taught to sign one sign for every English word — a very slow and cumbersome process. Eventually, little by little, he came to the conclusion that what the Deaf students were using, that sign language, was actually a full-fledged language on its own, in its own right, and so he started a research project in 1957 and had two co-researchers, both Deaf, Casterline and Croneberg. Dorothy Casterline is interesting. I think she grew up in Hawai'i, so she may have even been exposed to a different sign language (Hawai'i Sign Language). She might have been multilingual. Then in 1960, William Stokoe's very famous paper was published, called "Sign Language Structure," and this had a profound influence on Deaf education. In that paper he invented the term "American Sign Language" and he proposed that it was a full-fledged language, but in visual terms. In other words, it had nothing to do with sound. It had nothing to do with the English language. A lot of people thought that sign language was kind of like a code, you know when secretaries write shorthand? What they're doing is writing a code for the English language. Or, braille is a code for the English language. People thought sign language was, too. But actually, no. He showed that it's a coherent thing in itself and that it evolves through social contact among Deaf people just like spoken languages do.

Has anyone heard of the famous Deaf President Now protest? One person? William Stokoe met with a lot of resistance. People didn't like this idea that sign language was a "real" language, so he had a long uphill battle — a very long uphill battle. He more or less got kicked out of the English Department when he voluntarily chose to leave it and become a full-time researcher, so they set up the Linguistics Research Laboratory, which he was the director of, and that's where he did most of his work in the Seventies and Eighties. Now back to where I mentioned that I visited Gallaudet the year before I started. I just walked into the Linguistics Research Lab and saw William Stokoe there and introduced myself. I was very bold [*laughs*]. He was just walking around in the hallway and I said: "I'm a prospective graduate student and I'd like to talk to you for some career counseling." I guess this had happened to him a lot and he had figured out how to work people into his schedule, so he just said: "Well, come with me. Jump in my car. I have to drive downtown." So I went for a ride with him in his car and we had a great conversation.

It didn't really fully hit me what he was telling me until years later when I was remembering back at exactly what he told me. He was advising me to look at the social context. When doing linguistics it's very, very important to look at the social context in which the language is evolving, because a lot of linguists instead are focused on some very technical issues and they're trying to create abstract models, which relates to

Noam Chomsky's work. That was excellent advice. He actually advised me not to enroll in Gallaudet. He said I'd be better off getting a PhD in anthropology at American University. But I was so excited about the idea of going to Gallaudet, because I wanted to get that experience of being around Deaf people and learning American Sign Language better, that I enrolled and I'm glad I did. I spent two years living there in the dormitories and had a fascinating experience. I don't know, maybe one or two of you might end up going there. Talk to me about it if you're interested.

Why was I so interested? I didn't really figure it out until years later. When I was six and seven I had ear infections and it turns out that that probably affected my hearing in a way, not so much decibel-wise but in what's called "endurance" — hearing endurance. So all throughout grade school I wasn't able to as easily pay attention to the teacher the way my classmates were, and by the time I got to fourth, fifth and sixth grade I was driving my teachers crazy. We didn't know what it was actually. I found out as an adult. It has to do with hearing endurance. That was probably, I'm guessing, a subconscious motivation as to why I wanted to go to Gallaudet, because when I'm in the visual world, signing, I have no endurance problems whatsoever. So the endurance is strictly an auditory thing, not visual. In visual language I had no hurdle to overcome. So that, I'm guessing, is why I went. I was able to compare my undergraduate education that I had gotten with the education that the undergraduates were getting at Gallaudet, and I went to a class with my Deaf girlfriend once and was absolutely flabbergasted — horrified at the lack of the ability of the professor to communicate with the students. I couldn't understand what was happening. It was kind of nightmare scenario. There were only maybe, oh I don't know, forty Deaf students kind of in a room like this [*Everson 176 at UC Davis with stadium seating*] and the only students who could really understand the professor were three hard-of-hearing students sitting in the front row, lipreading the professor. I looked around and I saw other Deaf students doing other homework behind their textbook. I was shocked. So I started asking my professors, "What is wrong here? Why can't the professors communicate with the students?" So — Yes?

Question: So he wasn't signing?

Answer: Yes, the professor was signing and talking at the same time, but if you weren't able to hear the words the signs were very sparse. It would be like you're in a chemistry class and you just hear one or two words here and there. Try to imagine a weird, kind of Twilight Zone experience. That's what my Deaf friends, the undergraduates, had to go through every day. Not all professors were like that. Some could sign well, but a lot of them could sign hardly at all. So I began thinking: "How did that ever get that way? Why was signing so undervalued?"

So I brought this up — All of my graduate-level linguistics classes were done in 100% American Sign Language, so that means: no sound, no talking. The only sound you might hear might be a Deaf student going like this [*tapping on the table*] to vibrate the table to get somebody's attention. All of my classes were in American Sign Language, and this topic came up and I asked the professor about it and I remember vividly, the professor saying: "Well, the students need to…[*signing*]." Anyone know what that

means? Hmm? “Strike,” “protest.” So it is very vivid in my mind, that professor doing that and thinking: “Strike. Oh! A student strike? Really?” I tossed the idea around with another professor and asked: “What do you think about what so-and-so professor said that the students should go on strike?” Guess what this professor’s answer was? It was really quick. He said: “Of course!” So, it was really bad and a lot of people were noticing the communication problems that were happening on campus.

By my second year, in September, a third professor (of the three full-time linguistics professors at the time), who I haven’t mentioned yet, asked me to find some Deaf students whom we could videotape to analyze their signing for linguistics research. I found three Deaf students in the cafeteria and one night after we were finished videotaping there were several of us in there, those three Deaf students, a couple other Deaf people, and a hearing professor. There were several of us in the room and we started talking about this: “A strike, a boycott. Yeah that’s a great idea!” So we kind of decided to form a little committee right there on the spot and explore this idea of starting a student strike to improve the communication between the professors and the students.

The sticking point was that the official communication policy of the college was what was called the “Simultaneous-Communication Policy.” In other words, “simultaneous” means that professors should talk and sign at the same time. When you do that, though, what they’re signing is not American Sign Language. It’s some kind of choppy, mixed-up soup of signs that don’t necessarily make sense, and the Deaf student is expected to look at that and lipread the professor and try and imagine what the English sentences are. It was a horrible policy. So we thought, well, what we should do is go on strike, boycott classes and demand that the Simultaneous-Communication Policy be changed to a different one. I gathered some ideas and actually wrote up a petition. I gave the petition to one of the undergraduates who was on the committee, and our goal was to find a student leader, an undergraduate student leader who would help lead the student strike. So she brought it to the student who she thought would be the best leader and he read it. It’s a 15-page petition. He ended up saying: “Well, it’s not the right time this,” because the very next month Gallaudet College was going to have a ceremony and become Gallaudet University. It was an important turning point in the history of the college. He said: “No, no. People are too excited about becoming a university,” so that was the wrong time for that, and so we just put the whole thing on hold and I actually didn’t think too much more about it. Then that same student who my friend thought would make a good leader of the strike ended up actually leading a strike a year-and-a-half later! But it was for a different issue. That became the “Deaf President Now” movement. (See also, *Deaf President Now*, by Christiansen and Barnartt, page 51.) So, I guess we’ll never know what the exact connection was between him reading that petition and thinking about a strike and then later actually playing a role in starting a strike that shut down the college. There were five days when there were no classes at all. It was a major event. By the time it happened I had already graduated and was back in California, but I was getting updates every day because I was so excited about it.

What had happened was, it was time to pick a new president of the university and this student — his name is Jerry Covell, who I keep talking about — he was trying to whip up a lot of enthusiasm for choosing a deaf president. It would be the first deaf president in Gallaudet's history. And then there were other people, too, alumni members associated with the National Association of the Deaf, trying to whip up enthusiasm for that. There was a big rally where over a thousand people came and everyone was wanting a Deaf president. Well, the day came when the announcement was to be made and instead of any real formal announcement, a staff person came and handed out some flyers. This was on a Sunday and people were standing around reading the flyers and it said who the new president was. It was not a deaf president. It was a hearing person. People were really saddened and shocked, because they thought it was time — a historical turning point — that finally there should be a Deaf president — someone fluent in American Sign Language, who understands Deaf culture, but instead they chose someone who didn't know any sign language at all and was supposed to be skilled at being a good fundraiser and talking with Congress people.

What happened next was that the Executive Director of the National Association of the Deaf, Gary Olsen, led those people who were standing around reading those flyers. That small group went to the middle of the street, Florida Avenue, in front of the college and he sat down and said: "I'm just going to sit down right here." So they sat down and blocked the street and that started the major protest that lasted all week long. Classes were shut down. Jerry was there. I wasn't there yet. I flew in later. So the idea that these people had was they were going to march to the hotel and confront the Board of Trustees for the selection that they made instead of choosing a deaf president. By this time there was a really large group of people. So how do you get all of those people, most of them deaf, to start marching down the street? Somehow Jerry managed it. He just signed and shouted: "March!!!" — because a lot of Deaf students are hard of hearing and you can get their attention that way. So the whole crowd started marching down Florida Avenue and went to the hotel where the Board of Trustees were. They waited for the chairperson of the Board of Trustees to come down to talk to them, but she took too long, so they decided to leave and march to the the White House and then the Capitol building, and then they came back to campus. By the next morning, when the students and alumni members blocked all the gates with their cars, the campus was sealed off and for that entire week students boycotted their classes. On that Wednesday I was actually interviewed on the news about it.

I managed to dig this video clip out of my collection of old video tapes. That's Jerry right there (at the 0:29 mark). So I did fly there and we actually did succeed in getting the Board to reverse their decision and choose a deaf president. It was quite an amazing experience. The reason it probably succeeded is because we got some members of Congress on our side and they applied pressure. When you can get that, that's a pretty effective way to get what you want in a protest. It doesn't happen that often that way. So the University got its first deaf president. His name was I. King Jordan. There was a lot of goodwill and a change in consciousness, so to speak, that happened because of this protest. If you want to read a book about that, there's a book called *Seeing Voices*, by Oliver Sacks, that talks about it. He talks about that change in consciousness that

occurred as a result of the protest. Historically, Deaf people have been seen as defective, but is that the way we really should see deaf people? Is this organ that people have that most people are able to use to hear sounds — is that so critical to the nature of being human that if you don't have that ability to hear that means you are defective? Well, that was the historical view. So this was a big change in consciousness, both within education and within general society, because the people of American society were paying attention to this protest. It was on the news. It was really big. A lot of younger Deaf students were very inspired to shoot for the stars in their careers and more Deaf students started studying to get PhDs and become law students, among other examples.

It was a very fascinating historical time period in Deaf culture. Unfortunately, some sectors of the medical industry/medical lobby didn't support this view, as you can imagine. Medicine — I think it's not probably the same today, but in those days the trend was stronger where doctors viewed the body as a collection of parts, and if you fix one part that means you have "fixed" the person. That represents an overreliance on specialization. What would be not that view? Does anyone know? — that the body is not just a collection of parts, that if one part is "broken" then it needs "fixing" — What would something else be that wouldn't be that? Does anyone know? [*pause*] Well, a more integrated, holistic view. In other words, humans are conscious beings. We're not just collections of parts. One of the most important things about us is our consciousness, right? So if a doctor gets fixated on a Deaf child's lack of hearing and thinks that is the only important thing to worry about — hearing aids, cochlear implants, whatever, just "fix" that part — there's a lot being overlooked. You have a whole Deaf child there with a mind. A lot of Deaf children were being traumatized by this over-specialized approach — It's called "the pathological view of deafness" (or "pathologizing"), if you want to google it. The other view, which is the more encompassing view, to take a view of the whole child, is called "the cultural view of deafness."

That's why Stokoe's work was so important, because what he showed — What he did was he raised the question: Is sign language — Is American Sign Language a full-fledged language? Over time a lot of people assumed that he actually proved in the Sixties that it actually was, but more of the proof came along in the Seventies at the Salk Institute through the research of Klima and Bellugi (and their co-researchers: Battison, Boyes-Braem, Fischer, Frishberg, Lane, Lentz, Newkirk, Newport, Pedersen and Siple). If you want to check out their book in the library, it's a very important book titled: *Signs of Language*. They did psycholinguistic research to confirm Stokoe's hypothesis and gave a lot of evidence that yes, it is indeed true that American Sign Language is a full-fledged language. It's a visual language. It's not based on English grammar or English words or anything like that.

All throughout the Seventies this idea was gaining steam. By 1988 when this protest occurred, people were ready for this change in consciousness. The important point is, when you show that American Sign Language is a full-fledged language, what goes hand in hand with language? Culture, right? That's how the validity of Deaf culture started coming into play in academic circles, and people started getting away from the

pathological view of deafness. Any questions so far? If you're really interested and someone challenges you and says: Well, what do you mean, American Sign Language is a full-fledged language? Look in this book (*Signs of Language*), because there's a lot of good evidence there — Yes?

Question: My daughter was looking at possibly doing her eighth-grade report on sign language and so I got to look at some of the books. There's a lot to learn here. Just for her eighth grade middle school project, they had to come up with a project where they were going to learn a new skill or learn about something that they were interested in, and so we were looking at maybe her doing sign language. I know a couple people that are signers, so it's definitely a language of its own. I don't know how complex you can be with signing compared to what we can do with words, because it's not quite the same, and also how you translate that let's say into — I mean, I don't think there is even a universal sign language, or is there?

Answer: Excellent points, thank you. Yes, the question of: OK, so American Sign Language is a full-fledged language. The next thing that people notice is: Well, it's lacking in technical vocabulary. Look at English. It has yay many tens of thousands of words. What about American Sign Language? Well, if you look in one of the chapters of *Signs of Language* it basically answers that question. There *are* actually tens of thousands of lexical items in ASL — in other words, vocabulary items — and the way that it happens a lot in American Sign Language is through compounds. When you put two signs together you can get a new sign going that has a different, but related meaning, compared to the two signs done separately, and there are some famous examples of that. I was thinking of that same exact thing as I was getting ready to enroll in Gallaudet, because I was reading a book (*Lexical Borrowing in American Sign Language*) co-authored by Robbin Battison and he was saying: Well, American Sign Language *does* have — It *is* a powerful language and you *can* express the most abstract ideas with it. And I'm reading this — and so far my experience had been with Deaf people in my hometown and not many of them had college degrees.

So my prejudice at the time was to think of American Sign Language as a new language. Maybe it was not a strong language where you can express all abstract ideas. Well, boy was I wrong! Because when I got to Gallaudet — that was the thrill of being at Gallaudet, because becoming fluent in American Sign Language and watching, you know, sitting in the center of the cafeteria where the most fluent Deaf students would gravitate. Since ASL is a visual language, nobody is keeping secrets, because you can look anywhere and see what anyone is saying, right? You have to really get used to that [*laughs*]. So I was sitting there with my girlfriend. We had to start developing a few code words, because anybody can see what you're talking about. That was quite fascinating, and through that, meeting the most fluent Deaf students, I learned how you can express the *most* abstract ideas in American Sign Language. Granted, it may not be as standardized as English, but it is possible. I had an interesting experience [*laughs*] on that exact same question when I gave a lecture in Uruguay, I brought up that point. I said to the audience: "Would anyone like to just give me any word, any concept and I'll explain how it's signed in American Sign Language," and this

older professor — Oh, gosh, she came up with an obscure word ("purport," from reading Louis Hjelmslev), and I wasn't even confident that I knew the full meaning of it, because I was pretty young. Be careful when you make challenges like that. That was probably silly of me to do it that way.

So, "universal sign language." Right. There is no universal sign language. Someone tried to invent one. It's called "Gestuno." It's actually an artificial language. People tried to invent it. Does anyone know what the so-called "universal" language for spoken language is that someone tried to invent? Anyone happen to know? [*pause*]… "Esperanto." One guy tried to combine several European languages and tried to come up with a universal — so-called "universal" — It only combines European languages. He tried to invent one that would be similar to all of those. People have tried to do that with sign language, too, and they came up with Gestuno. It's basically a bunch of vocabulary signs that they tried to popularize for international meetings. I think there is a kind of international thing that happens when Deaf people go to international meetings, but I'm pretty sure it's not Gestuno. That's another whole fascinating topic, the idea of gestures, making up gestures on the fly. That's a whole other phenomenon that ties in with sign language linguistics and is an area of research in itself. Imagine if you were to sit down with a person from another country and you didn't share a language, so you started drawing pictures with each other on paper. I actually did this once when I was in East Berlin of all places, and there was this guy from Poland there. We couldn't communicate, so we just started drawing pictures back and forth. It was very, very effective, because visual symbols have a lot of common meanings around the world. Well, a similar thing happens with Deaf people. They can kind of do that with making up gestures, but it's a very fluid thing that they do.

So, there was a change in consciousness and the fruits of the research that had been going on in the Seventies with Klima and Bellugi and their collaborators, and William Stokoe and his collaborators in the Linguistic Research Lab. People were anxious to put that into practice, but sectors of the medical industry were still following this "parts mentality" — a focus on the parts, so there was resistance there. So after Deaf President Now there was a backlash coming from the direction of these sectors of the medical industry, because cochlear implants had been in development for a while. Is everyone familiar with cochlear implants? In other words, a wire — You have to actually open up a deaf person's skull and insert something in there and leave it in there — Oh, and while you're in there you have to poke a wire into their cochlea and it rips through, as it curls around and destroys whatever residual hearing they have in that ear, but once the wire is in the cochlear implant is able to stimulate the nerve somehow. I don't understand the technology too well, but it's a little bit on the crude side. Really the first idea for the cochlear implant was not to restore hearing, but it was just to give deaf people an ability to pick up words, so it was mostly word-based, to help with spoken language, and I think now they're claiming they also help to restore hearing and that sort of thing.

The backlash set in during the Nineties. There's an elementary school on the Gallaudet University campus. It's called the Kendall Demonstration Elementary School. In 1991 they set up a new policy which involved really focusing on using American Sign Language. Unfortunately, this idea of "turn off your voice" — It was a horrible way to promote that policy, because it scares hearing people. They say: "What? You have all these deaf students there and they're telling the deaf students to 'turn off your voice' and sign." That idea of "turn off your voice" kind of backfired and the new president of Gallaudet who was deaf ordered the school to shelve that new project, so they went back to the old way. So that was a big setback, but in the meantime, two years earlier — And that new policy there came about partly as a result of this paper ("Unlocking the Curriculum" by Johnson, Liddell and Erting), which comes up with a plan for bilingual education in the Deaf classroom, what came to be known as "the Bilingual-Bicultural model" — Who has that heavy book that I was passing around? (*The Eagle Soars to Enlightenment*, by Ken Norton)... Can you start passing that around again? That book is about the history of the California School for the Deaf at Fremont, if you want to thumb through there, if you haven't seen it. The California School for the Deaf in Fremont was one of the schools that spearheaded this new proposal. (See page 84 in Ken Norton's book.) One other school in Massachusetts actually started a little sooner, and also there was a new program at the Indiana School for the Deaf and soon also the Maryland School for the Deaf. So throughout the Nineties, bilingual-bicultural education was growing, and these students were getting a pretty good education. I don't know if the figures have been made public, but the School for the Deaf in Fremont has a really excellent success rate in having their students pass the minimum skills achievement tests. The students who have been there for most of their K-12 experience have a really good success rate in passing the same achievement tests that the hearing students pass, so that's pretty good evidence there. I don't know if that's been made public, but that's what they say if you talk to them at the school. What I'm trying to say is that this whole movement is really new, and so there are lots of ways to get involved if you're interested in it. It's a very exciting area of research and practice, if you want to be a teacher of the Deaf or a sign language linguist researcher or do other kinds of research.

So, the backlash from the medical industry — the first evidence of that backlash was in 1991 when the Gallaudet president ordered the elementary school on campus to shelve the new bilingual program. The researchers who were promoting cochlear implants were gaining a lot of influence, so by the time it came time for that president to retire and for a new president to be chosen in 2006, guess what? There was another controversy and another strike — another huge protest, because of this same conflict — or similar conflict between the pathological and cultural views. Students and alumni of Gallaudet, myself included, didn't like the next person chosen to be the next Gallaudet president and thought that the person who was chosen would be not supportive enough of Deaf culture and American Sign Language, and so that choice was reversed as well. So that's really unprecedented, to have two major protests like that at a university and have the board's intended choice for president be reversed twice like that. That's very, very unusual. I was involved in that protest, too (Unity for Gallaudet), and it lasted much longer, from May until end of October 2006 and it got much nastier than the Deaf President Now protest. A bulldozer, a front-end loader-bulldozer was brought in and

protesters' tents were pushed out and there are eyewitnesses who say that no one checked to see if there were people in the tents, because the bulldozer just came in without warning. It was an amazing, amazing several months. The worst of it happened there in October. What had happened was the Board had given the president there, who had been president for 18 years, almost carte blanche to do whatever he wanted, and that's a big problem. So they weren't following up on their responsibility of what the board members should have been doing, paying attention to him and watching the strategic plan of the University evolve through all its phases. So this president had gradually allowed himself to become heavily influenced by sectors of the medical industry. He apparently had a vision for the 21st century of cochlear implantation becoming the standard procedure for most deaf children. So that was overturned by the protest and we got a different president. There's a lot of fascinating recent history in Deaf history that's really interesting to talk about, and there needs to be more research done, especially including anthropological research and ethnographic research. Like the professor said in his announcement for this lecture, the whole area that I'm talking about is really understudied.

This is a video that I made after the news video. After they interviewed me on TV I talked about it, just to record my thoughts. This is how I signed back then, and you can see that my mouth is not moving very much. There's a lot of confusion, too, when you see Deaf peoples' lips. It looks like they might be speaking English words, but yes and no. A lot of those lip movements lose their status as anything to do with English and they become tied in with the sign language, like the sign that is translated as "important," you go [*signing*]: "po". "Po" on the lips doesn't have too much to do with "important". The whole thing about the lips is an interesting thing that needs to be studied, too. These could be called "mouth pictures" (or "mouth gestures"). That's a little example of signing there. I'm not a native signer, since I didn't start learning it until I was 19 — Yes?

Question: I have a question, going back to the history of signing. I know at first it was strictly oral and then if you did use sign language you were punished, so how did that transition to: it's OK to sign?

Answer: Yes, this is a very deep, historical topic, and there's a book that goes into that rather nicely (*Forbidden Signs*, by Douglas C. Baynton). Most people don't know this, but actually the pro-sign language method of education started out first in Paris in our historical stream of influence in the US, and that trend was later overturned. That was around 1760 when that started at the famous school for the Deaf in Paris. It was very supportive of Deaf students using what we now call "Old French Sign Language." Then in 1880 there was an international conference in Italy where this Oral movement really gained steam. It was basically pretty fraudulent, because they tried — educators, if you want to use that term — tried to pretend that this was a wonderful international meeting with representatives from all over the world and that they had a democratic discussion, which wasn't true, and decided that deaf education should be oral, in other words, that deaf students should only be taught to lipread with no sign language allowed. If you want to read more about that it was called the "Second International Congress on the

Education of the Deaf" in Milan. So that philosophy of "Oralism" started to spread and it spread in the US, too. Over the course of the next decades more and more Deaf students in elementary schools were not allowed to use sign language. There was a very oppressive atmosphere and they were expected to mostly read the teachers' lips. As you can imagine, that is extremely difficult and so expectations and standards became way low. It wasn't very effective with high school students either, so a lot of times they allowed the teachers to sign with the high school students. That oppressive atmosphere throughout the 20th century is what was building. As William Stokoe started his research in 1957, that was the atmosphere he walked into, that pro-Oral atmosphere.

If anyone has any questions that they want to ask me individually, feel free to come up and ask.

LINK:

http://brianriley.us/the_bilingual-bicultural_revolution.html

HOME