Associate Professor KATHLEEN EILERS-CRANDALL, PhD
English Department, National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY, USA

Professional Biography

Kathleen Eilers-crandall has worked in various capacities at NTID for the past 26 years. She has been an administrator and a classroom teacher. Although her primary faculty role is in the NTID English Department, she also teaches in NTID's Master's program for Secondary Education of Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing Students and in NTID's Applied Computer Technology program. Prior to her NTID years, she earned a BA in English linguistics and literature and an MA in Deaf education at the California State University at Fresno. She earned her PhD in communication sciences and disorders at Northwestern University. She has worked with Deaf people in a variety of educational settings and has authored many publications and presentations related to her work.

READING AND WRITING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: VARIABLES TO CONSIDER FOR DEAF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Presented by KATHLEEN EILERS-CRANDALL

ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

Deaf students are asked to learn to read and write in languages they do not hear. If these students are studying abroad, they may need to learn a second and even a third auditory based language. Teachers who provide instruction to Deaf must understand this unique learning requirement and employ strategies to maximize success. In this presentation several factors that contribute to the learning of a foreign language are discussed. Examples are included of how these elements have been incorporated into the curriculum at NTID.

Deaf students are challenged with a most arduous task – they are asked to learn to read and write in languages they do not hear. Students who expect to study abroad are asked to learn not only one of these languages, but the language of the country in which they wish to study as well. If teachers are to provide the needed education for Deaf students to achieve this task,

we must have a better understanding of the learning requirements that these languages impose and then employ strategies that will allow Deaf students to achieve success.

Let us start today by considering several of the elements that contribute to the learning of a written language by deaf or hard-of-hearing students:

a) Linguistic interdependence
b) Using sign languages
c) Writing as a foreign language

For Deaf students to take advantage of the features of linguistic interdependence, we need to understand if Deaf students with a strong first language base in a sign language will be able to use that knowledge to learn to read and write in what is to these students a foreign language. Will cognitive and academic literacy transfer across native sign language and a written language?

Students who are able to read and write in one language will transfer some of these skills when learning to read and write a second language (Krashen, 1997; Cummins, et al., 1984). We do not yet know how the transfer applies when the first language is not one that is written. For the hearing population, there is not similar evidence for this positive transfer when learners are not literate in a first language (Rivera, 1999). Does learning a native sign language as a first language develop broad conceptual and cognitive abilities that transfer to a second language that is being learned as a written language for literacy purposes?

How can we best use sign to support the learning of a foreign language? There are unanswered questions:

a) Can a sign system such as that being used in most academic situations – one that uses much of the word order of English and considerable fingerspelling, but incorporates the spatial grammar of ASL – be used to support English syntactic and lexical literacy? (See Fischer's (1998) definitions of sign languages and sign systems.)
b) Could a sign system provide a connection between a sign language and a written language and build a basis for literacy in English?
c) Does cognitive and academic literacy in a sign language or system transfer to cognitive and academic literacy in a written language?

For the typical language learner, linguistic difficulty progresses from: receiving communication signals from speakers or signers to expressing oneself in speech or sign to reading to writing. We also know that spoken English is the most direct route to learning written English, but it is not clear exactly how interdependent these skills are (Celse-Mucia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

Deaf students must bypass this direct route when they learn to read and write. Deaf students cannot rely upon the grammatical rules of a language they already know when they learn to read and write. However, hearing students who use the direct route must learn that there are differences between speaking and writing (Bruce & Wasser, 1998). The mastery of these differences frequently poses difficulties for hearing students.

Written language is not just written speech. Written language needs to be more exacting and precise than spoken language. Once an individual has mastered basic reading and writing skills, that individual uses these skills to further their linguistic knowledge. That is, this

individual uses reading and writing to continue developing their knowledge of that language. Many Deaf learners have never reached the point at which this is possible.

Signing about a topic establishes conceptual knowledge about a topic. It does not establish lexical, morphological, syntactic knowledge for writing English. So, how can sign languages or sign systems serve as a bridge to a written language?

Even though we do not have clear answers to these questions, we must continue our teaching. We may be able to improve our teaching by considering the essential elements for successful language learning and literacy (Bruce & Wasser, 1998) and by taking advantage of the elements that are available for Deaf students.

As teachers we have the ability to exert some control, some influence, in three areas. We should consider environmental, teacher/mentor, and learner variables in designing curriculum and providing instruction (*Table 1*).

Table 1: Three Dimensions of Language Learning Variables

Environment	**Teacher / Mentor**	**Learner**
Clarity	Respect and esteem	Importance of language
Quality	Knowledge of language	Self-esteem and value
Meaningfulness	Attentiveness	Motivation
Comprehensibility	Frequency of use	Ability and Attentiveness
Frequency of opportunity	Immediacy of feedback	Frequency of use
	Variety and consistency	Previous experiences

Within the environmental dimension, teachers must provide perceivable input; e.g., all communication must be clearly visible to all students and of a quality sufficient to stimulate learning. Communication must be meaningful while providing a level of comprehension that challenges a student to learn. The environment should address students' needs for language learning by providing a non-threatening atmosphere in which students feel comfortable experimenting with language and have frequent opportunities for doing so.

The teacher or mentor as well as the society in which the student resides must respect the learner and have esteem for the learner's language. The value that majority language users place on the minority language influences the learner in either a positive or a negative manner (Cummins, 1984). The value toward sign languages has increased over recent years with the recognition of ASL as a language to study in universities and increasingly in secondary schools. The teacher's knowledge of the student's language, attentiveness to the learner, and the availability of the teacher demonstrate respect for the learner. For learning to occur, a language must be practiced in a real environment with feedback from users with skills beyond those of the learner. Furthermore, there needs to be a modicum of consistency among the various teachers and mentors who provide this feedback.

The individual learner should appreciate the importance of the language being learned. Self-respect and self-esteem are developed when students see progress. This progress, in turn, fosters motivation for learning and a deeper commitment to learning. The learner needs to have many opportunities for working on all aspects the communicative process – receiving, processing, and comprehending the target language as well as conceptualizing, processing, and delivering it.

Technology and especially its interactive features offer new opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing students to learn and use written communication in situations that offer increased concentration for these variables.

Today, I would like to show some of the ways in which technology can be used to address these areas.

Interaction and Technology

- Learning to use technology (*Figure 1*)

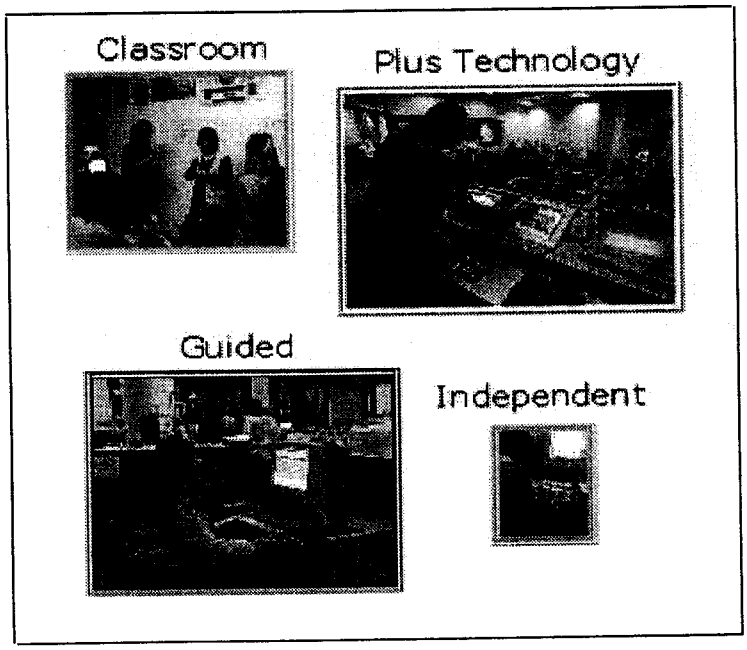

Figure 1. Scaffold of instruction

- Using Email

  To submit assignments

  For keeping in touch

- Using Web Forms

  To conduct joint student and teacher research

  To practice reading and writing

http://www.rit.edu/~kecncp/forma.htm (*Figure 2* and *Figure 3*)

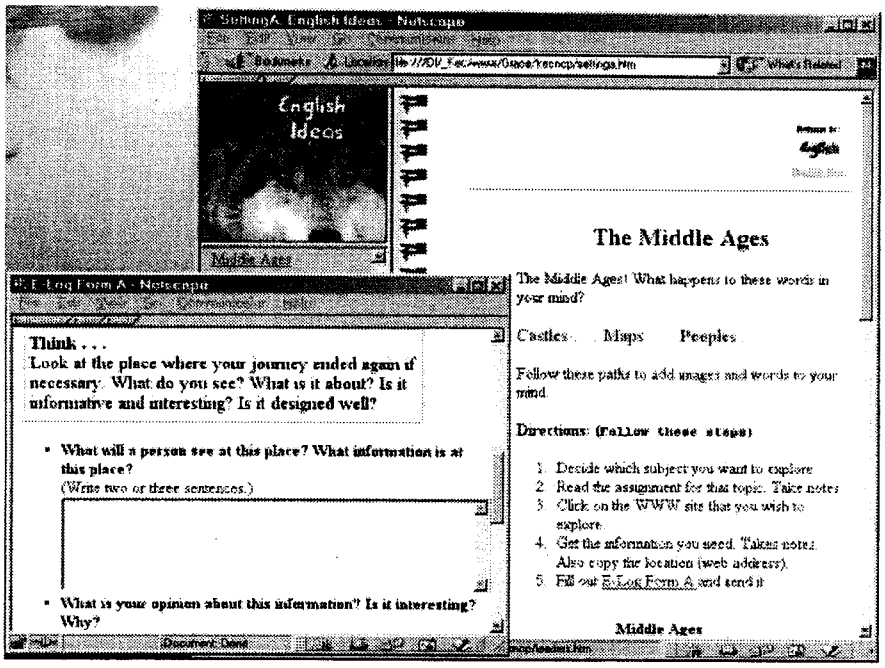

Figure 2. Using web forms to practice reading and writing while collecting information.

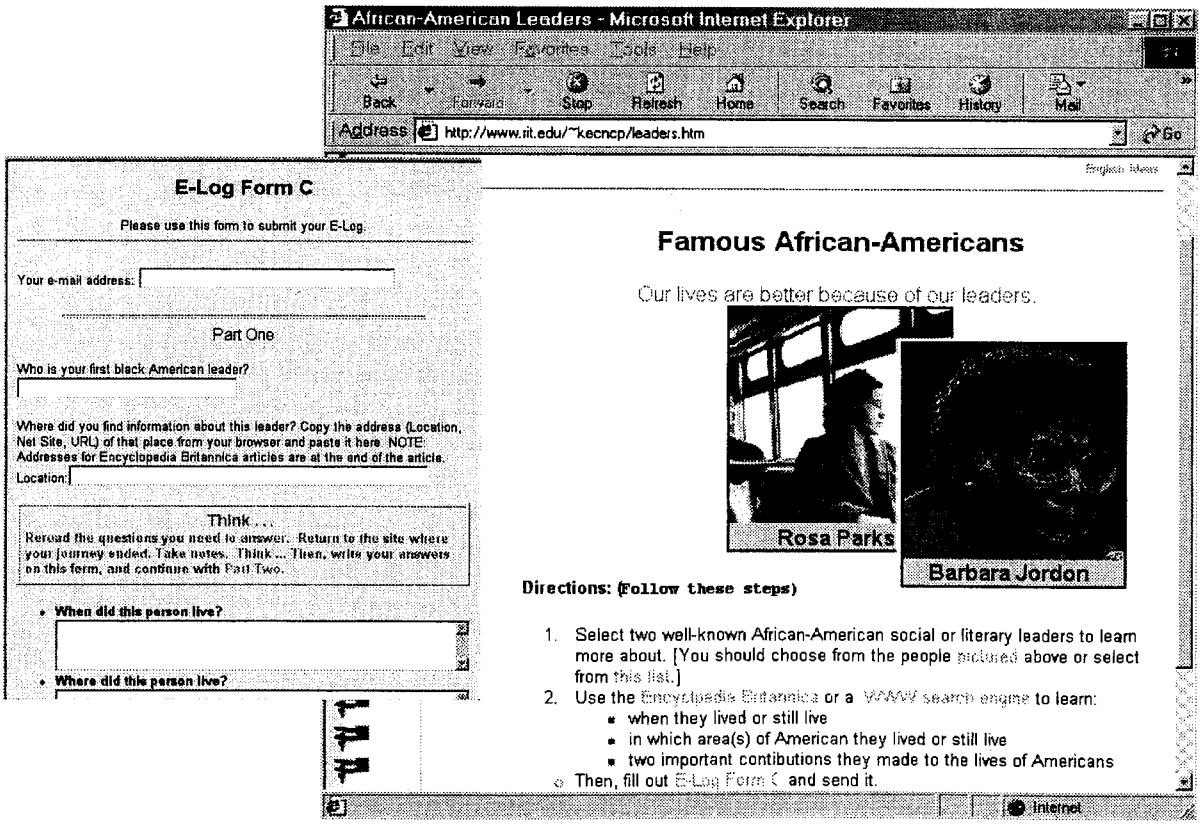

Figure 3. Using web forms to reinforce active reading and writing.

Interactive Communication

- Message Boards for written language practice

http://www.rit.edu/~jfknc4/discus/ *(Figure 4)*

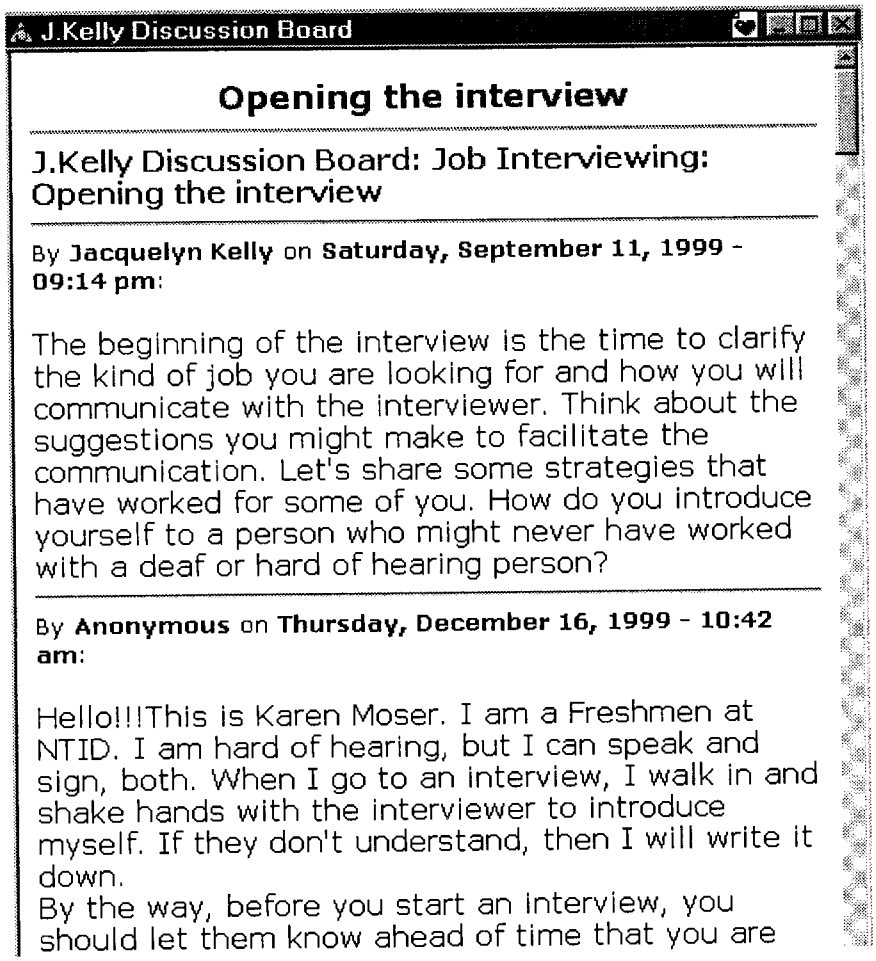

Figure 4. Message boards to simulate job interviews.

http://www.rit.edu/~kecncp/discus/

- Chat rooms for written language practice

http://esl.about.com/education/esl/msub1.htm?iam=mt&terms=%2Bchat+%2Brooms+%2Bfor+%2Blearning+%2Benglish

Web References

- Online Language Translations/Dictionaries

http://www.babylon.com (*Figure 5*)

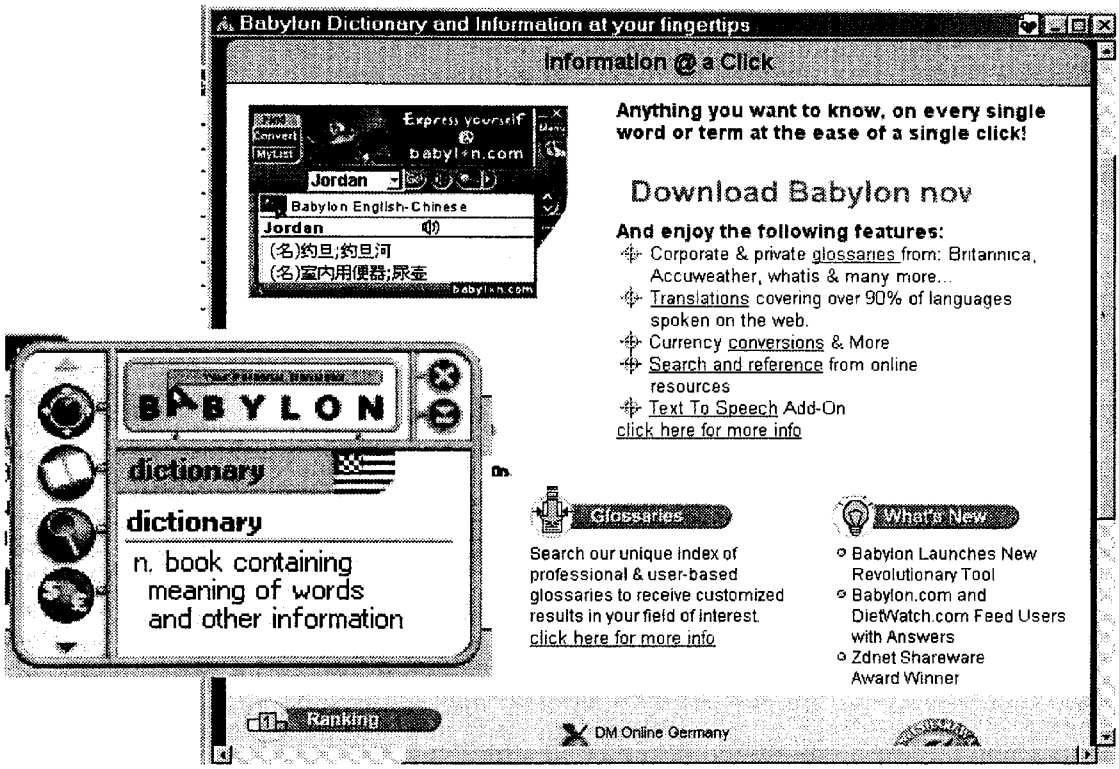

Figure 5. Independence is fostered with online translation dictionaries.

http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/rbeard/diction.html

- Online Sign Dictionaries

ASL Browser: http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm (*Figure 6*)

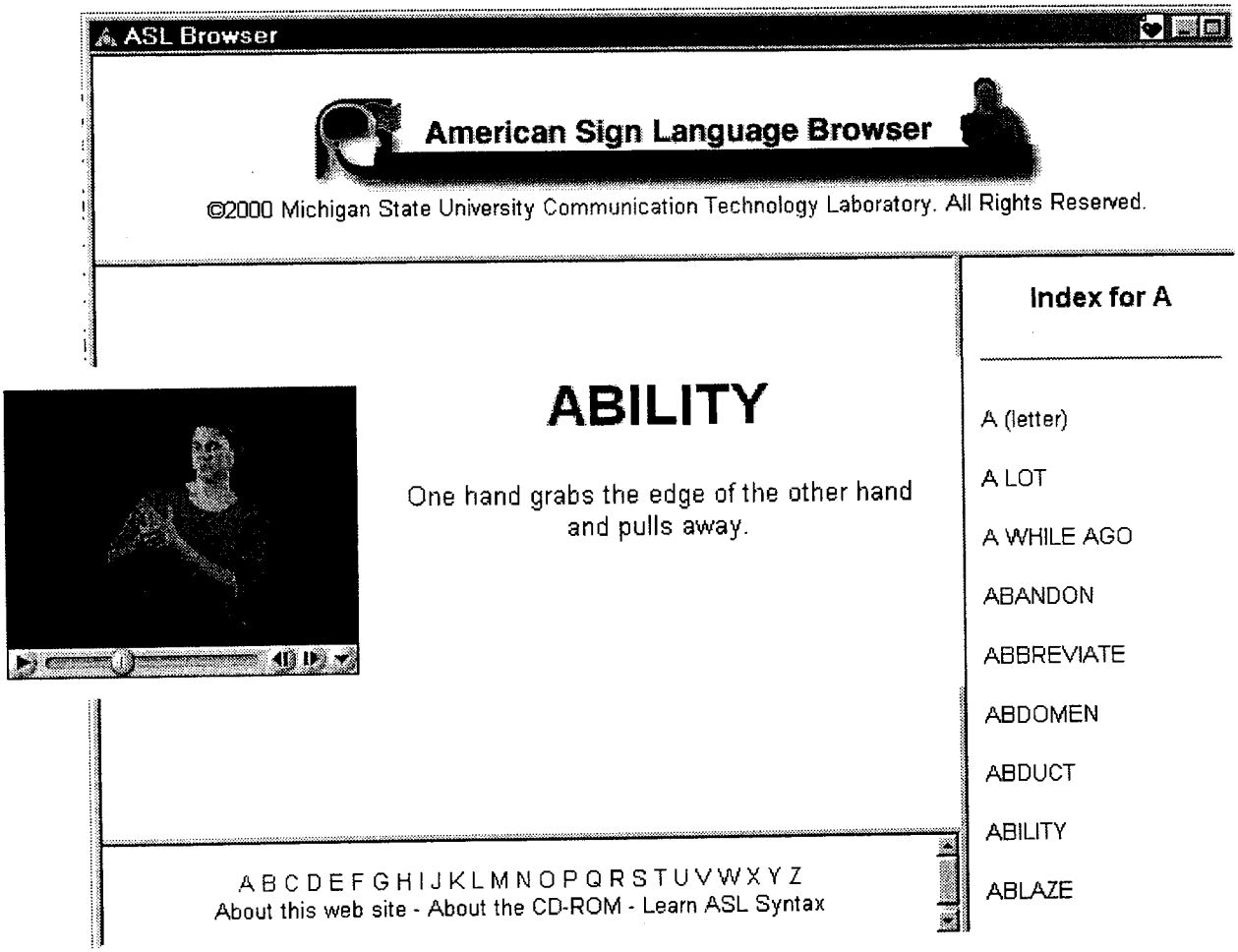

Figure 6. Online ASL dictionary/browser from Michigan State University.

▪ASL Dictionary (with links to other sign languages): http://dww.deafworldweb.org/asl/

- Self-Study Quizzes

▪http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/

These essential elements – perceivable input, comprehensible input, non-threatening environment, feelings of self worth, need to learn, and opportunity for interaction – can already be incorporated into our English language programs. Technology makes some of these elements easier to implement and in turn the read and written language more accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing student.

References

BRUCE, Bertram C. and WASSER, Judith Davidson. (1998). An inquiry model for literacy across the curriculum. *J Curriculum Studies. 28.* 3. 281–300.

CELSE-MUCIA, Marianne and LARSEN-FREEMAN, Diane. (1999). *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course*, 2nd edition. USA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

CRANDALL, Kathleen Eilers. (2000). http://www.rit.edu/~kecncp [accessed 8/30/00].

CUMMINS, J., SWAIN, M., NAKAJIMA, K., HANDSCOMBE, J., GREEN, D., & TRAN, C. (1984). Linguistic interdependence among Japanese and Vietnamese immigrant students. In C. Rivera (Ed.), *Communicative competence approaches to language proficiency assessment. Research and application*, pp. 60–81. Clevendon, England: Multilingual Matters. (ED 249 793).

FISCHER, Susan D. (1998). Critical periods for language acquisition: Consequences for deaf education. In A. Weisel (Ed.), *Issues unresolved: New perspectives on language and deaf education.* pp. 9–26. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet U Press.

KELLY, Jacqueline. (2000). http://www.rit.edu/~jfknc4/discus/ [accessed 8/30/00].

KRASHEN, Stephen. (1997). *ERIC Digest.* Why bilingual education? Charleston, WV: ERIC/CRESS (ED 403 101).

MAYER, Connie and AKAMATSU, C. Tane. (1999). Bilingual-Bicultural Models of Literacy Education for Deaf Students: Considering the Claims. *Australian Journal of Education of the Deaf.* vol 2. pp 5–9.

RIVERA, Klaudia (1999). *ERIC Digest.* Native language literacy and adult ESL education. US: District of Columbia. (EDO-LE-99-04).