

D/deaf Writing Does: An Investigation of D/deaf Literacy Theory and Narratives

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How the academic community regards and defines literacy plays a critical role in the inclusion and agency of people from all walks of life. D/deaf voices, historically excluded from such scholarly conversations, re-envision and redefine preconceived notions of what it means to be literate. This two-part essay investigates the multiple methods and modalities that D/deaf writing encompasses by reviewing past and current D/deaf literacy theory, drawing on the works of Ursula Bellugi, Brenda Jo Brueggeman, Todd Czubek, and others. It then examines the literacy narratives of two D/deaf individuals, applying theory and identifying emergent themes in their literate lives. These themes expose ways in which D/deaf writing rejects exclusion, finds empowerment, and challenges literacy scholars to consider where the boundaries of literacy lie and how blurred these boundaries may become.

Words fly across the stage. Poets weave poems in thin air and send them rocketing through space to land slapdash in the laps of those who would receive them. Yet, to receive these poems is not to audibly hear them. To read these poems is not to decipher words on a page, although that can be (and often is) done with the recognition that somehow it just isn't the same. Such an experience confounds traditional notions of literacy—the idea that reading and writing are restricted to one specific mode of print communication. Peter Cook and Kenny Lerner's "Flying Words Project" busts this understanding wide open. A collaboration between D/deaf¹ and hearing poets, this poetry troupe seeks to blend American Sign Language (ASL) with spoken and written English. The result is a new hybrid literacy that boggles the mind and opens up new avenues of possibility for the fields of writing studies and rhetoric, as these poets create and communicate through written, spoken, signed, and acted modes. Rather than resigning themselves to traditional paradigms of literacy based strictly on the written and spoken word, the troupe rejects ideas imposed on them that ring with words like "lack," "can't," and "doesn't." Instead, these D/deaf poets reinvent writing. This is writing that *does*.

In a digital age when the envelope encompassing traditionally literate practices is pushed ever wider, D/deaf individuals have the ability to move beyond dominant hearing-based systems and concepts of literacy from which they may be isolated. They embrace and embody new literate voices as a source of empowerment and agency. Their writing *does* by utilizing highly innovative thinking and multiple modalities to communicate through creative, professional, academic, and every day endeavors. These emerging, performative models of literacy challenge notions of D/deafness and disability, as well as expand our understanding of literacy as a whole.

This investigation draws on records gathered by the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, which aims to embrace and catalogue various literate voices through their stories about reading, writing, and communication. The literacy narratives of D/deaf individuals detail the specific ways in which D/deaf writing *does*—its unique motives, methods, processes, and products as revealed by D/deaf writers themselves. Investigating the literate lives of D/deaf persons opens our eyes to the possibilities surrounding concepts about literacy as a fluid, multimodal endeavor, as well as its relationship to disability as a means of empowerment. Before listening to these narratives, I will

first examine past and current D/deaf literacy theory to see how these understandings may be linked to actual D/deaf experience. In doing so, I will identify what shapes these new literate practices take, what they mean to those whose employ them, and how they may be studied in the future.

Examining the Conversation: A Brief Overview of D/deaf Literacy Theory

Conversations regarding how D/deafness should be viewed in relation to language, cognition, and literacy have an extensive history within the academic and education communities. This dialogue has carved its way through the D/deaf community as well, becoming a driving factor in the shape of the D/deaf landscape. More often than not, this conversation has included only the voices of the hearing. Yet, modern trends seem to be shifting to include the voices of the D/deaf. It is crucial that members of this group are included to authentically reveal what D/deaf writing does (rather than doesn't do). Literacy narratives serve as a site of rich opportunity for doing just that. However, to properly analyze these narratives, I will first attempt to define and answer several key questions regarding deafness, language, and literacy. Does ASL constitute a language as complex and diverse as those based in oral communication? What inferences can be drawn regarding cognition and D/deaf language/literacy? Finally, where and how does D/deaf literacy find its place in the constantly shifting lens of what it means to be literate?

Early academic conversations regarding D/deafness centered on the subject of language, as researchers attempted to include (or exclude) the D/deaf community based on their communication practices. First developed in the 1970s, the American Sign Language dictionary brought with it the first argument for ASL as a formal language. Previous popular beliefs regarded ASL as nothing more than a system of symbols that directly represented English words. As merely a substitute for spoken English, this view regarded ASL as lacking the complexity, grammar, and lexicography that constitutes a formalized and distinct language (Bellugi 54). Previously, ASL was cited as possessing only between 1,000 and 4,000 signs, a number far below the vocabulary found in even the most basic oral languages (Cohen, Namir, and Schlesinger qtd. in Bellugi 56).

Ursula Bellugi, however, proved that this limited view of D/deaf vocabulary was unfounded by studying the three aspects of signs that make them unique: location (where the sign is made), handshape (the form the hands take while signing), and movement (direction, speed, etc. of hand movement) (Stokoe qtd. in Bellugi 54). By closely studying the use of ASL by its native speakers, Bellugi discovered that much like pitch, tone, and volume of voice in spoken language, location, handshape, and movement in ASL provided lexical variations and distinctions that created new words and grammatical structure (Bellugi 56–57). Essentially, ASL was composed of a formal structure and vast vocabulary that scholars had never known. This argument dawned a new way of looking at ASL as a language (as well as those who speak it). Bellugi asserted that “the human capacity for building complex linguistic systems is the same—whether we speak or sign” (72).

Perceived cognitive defects and disabilities associated with D/deafness have also been central to academic discussions. Scholars such as Walter Ong wrote about a perceived relationship between sound/orality, thought, and proper language (7). This idea is not new to the academic community. Rhetoric and literacy scholar Brenda Jo Brueggemann points to similar beliefs sprouting during the Enlightenment, known as the “Will to Speech.” According to this theory, the human voice and the ability to speak out thought with words were regarded as the “vessel and content of reason” (*Lend Me Your Ear* 11). Brueggemann poignantly asks what such attitudes tell us about D/deafness, as well as what they imply about D/deaf people and their abilities (or in this view, lack thereof). To Ong, oral communication and writing are the vehicles of cultural consciousness and thought. He writes, “some non-oral communication is exceedingly rich—gesture, for example. Yet in a deep language, articulated sound, is paramount” (7). Literacy scholars must then consider what

such connections between language, sound, and consciousness imply for the D/deaf, and how the hearing-dominant system views their cognitive abilities.

More recently, cognitive development and abilities have been linked with the functions of language rather than the forms they take (Czubek 375). It is how we use language to communicate and connect that truly matters. Sociolinguist Oliver Sacks wrote that it is not lack of hearing, but lack of language that creates cognitive defects (qtd. in Couser 224). As shown by Bellugi, scholars have already proven that the D/deaf community possesses a rich and vibrant language full of complexity and nuance. It follows that I should now ask *how* they use this language to communicate or “write.” How does this language function as a means for their ability to connect, analyze, and find identity? In order to further explore and possibly answer these questions, I must first examine how writing and literacy are defined.

ASL can be considered not just a replacement for spoken language, but one that is enacted and “written.” In “Blue Listerine, Parochialism, and ASL Literacy” scholar Todd Czubek calls for “new directions” in defining literacy and literate practice (373). He pushes back against academics like Stephen Nover, who claim that ASL is not written in the traditional sense and thus does not qualify as a form of literacy. Rather, they would seek to define and isolate ASL as “signacy” (Czubek 374). Czubek’s argument is that such views see literacy as only reading and writing rather than as an “advance of ideas and technology” (374). Today, with modern technology poised at our fingertips, the use of ASL to communicate through computers, smartphones, and other technological devices must be viewed through the lens of a constantly shifting and evolving definition of what it means to be literate. New literacies, such as those practiced by the Flying Words Project, are evidence of what forms this technology can take through their utilization of multiple modalities.

In response to Czubek, Peter Paul describes three separate forms of literacy that have resulted from our technologically savvy society. These forms include script literacy (traditional written language), performance literacy (concepts acted out physically and in person), and captioned literacy (the combination of script and performance to represent concepts through both words and actions) (383). As a highly fluid literacy form, ASL falls under each of these three categories. It molds and adapts to various contexts and audiences. When used for face-to-face interactions, it is an “oral literacy,” but when it is “captured via technology” through platforms such as vlogs (online video journals), video chats, and YouTube content, it becomes performance literacy (Paul 383). These definitions are helpful, but to date, the academic community has only just begun to explore the relationship between the D/deaf community and these literacy practices, including how these practices are used and the choices that are made about what to use when and with whom.

Brueggemann urges the fields of literacy theory and rhetoric toward these new planes of study. Her work moves away from current debates regarding what D/deaf writing cannot do and pushes readers to examine what it *can* do and how. She writes about the predisposition for universities, educational fields, and past rhetoric to focus on what D/deaf writing “lacks” (“Writing Insight” 316). These views are often what results when we focus on literacy as “communication” rather than “language” (*Lend Me Your Ear* 33). Literacy as communication views literate practices, such as writing, as a product (written text), which can be correctly or incorrectly produced and successfully or unsuccessfully carried out. Literacy as language, however, regards literate practice as a process that is a mode of belonging; it is changeable based on the needs and motives of the individual. In this instance, writing is subjectively *defined* by a person as opposed to such writing *defining* them; it functions to serve their purposes for communication and identification without imposing an outside “right versus wrong” mentality.

Members of the D/deaf community more often than not reject labels of disability and “lacking” to define their own literacies. Often times, this rejection involves the formation of diglossic modes of communication and writing (Woodward 119). James Woodward defines diglossia as a

system of communication with two forms: the traditional method of discourse used in interactions with the dominant group, and the new, which is prioritized within the minority social group. In the case of the D/deaf community, English becomes the academically accepted literary form, and ASL becomes the colloquial form that is accepted by the people at large and used to maintain the “social identity and group solidarity of the Deaf community” (122). The impact and uses for diglossia in individual D/deaf lives serves as an important locale for the study of D/deaf literacy. It becomes a site where we may study how new literacies form as reactions against dominant discourses that may stifle or silence minority voices. As such, diglossia serves as an example of D/deaf writing *doing*—uncovering how D/deaf individuals accept or reject dominant prescriptions for discourse and embrace their own.

As I have discussed, these new literacies take on a wide variety of modalities and domains. Czubek describes Gee’s “semiotic domains” as an individual’s attempt to recruit “one or more modalities” to communicate (378). D/deaf literacy embraces these semiotic domains as it functions through a variety of multimodal “texts” and languages combined in infinite variations (Brueggemann, “Writing Insight”). These variations include the mass of communication methods through the continuum of ASL and the introduction of ever-increasing technology with Simultaneous Communication through sign and speech (SimCom), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), American Sign Language (ASL), interpreting, closed captioning, video systems, vlogs, and the list goes on and on. Rather than focusing on a “product-centered and strictly linguistic” approach, D/deaf literacy must be viewed through a “process-centered, person-dominated” lens as the D/deaf community defines its own literacy (Brueggemann, *Lend Me Your Ear* 27)

This process- and person-centered approach finds rich opportunity in the genre of D/deaf literacy narratives, as they reveal D/deaf literacy practices while also serving as examples of multimodal opportunities for D/deaf writing. As a site of autobiography, they have the potential to reveal the “double, even multiple, possibilities” for D/deaf writing and D/deaf lives that Brueggemann describes (“Writing Insight” 318). D/deaf lives, their experiences, trials, triumphs, fears, and joys, are largely grounded in the search for communication and connection in a hearing-dominated world that historically stamped out and stifled such endeavors. Thus, D/deaf literacy narratives become D/deaf autobiographies as they recount the ways in which individuals embrace D/deaf identity and write themselves, taking power and agency in writing their own lives their own way. The literacy narrative becomes a product that is a construction of the individual’s identity and reveals this identity to the world at large. In this way, literacy narratives have the potential to become what Egan describes as “mirror talk,” a way for D/deaf individuals to make themselves visible and heard (qtd. in Brueggeman, “Deaf, She Wrote” 76).

As discussed, the academic community has worked to define the point where ASL and the literate practices of the D/deaf merge with language literacy. Contemporary researchers such as Brueggeman and Czubek have pointed to the potentialities for what D/deaf writing looks like and can do, where its abilities and strengths lie. Research now must turn to include the voices of those who define and engage in these methods. D/deaf literacy narratives hold vast opportunities to provide insight into D/deaf literate practices, the relationships between individuals and literacy, the roles of multimodal communication and diglossia, and the shifting definition of literacy itself. These narratives and practices illuminate how new literacies develop, what they may look like, and how these voices can be included in the academic discussion to provide a richer, broader view of how humans communicate, connect, and create identity.

Entering the Conversation: Applying Theory to D/deaf Literacy Narratives

Ohio State University’s Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN), developed by Cynthia Selfe and Louis Ulman, currently contains thousands of literacy narratives that have been uploaded

by independent authors as well as contributing partners. Literacy narratives individuals across all walks of life can be found in a variety of modalities (print, audio, and video recordings). As the DALN itself proclaims, “people of all ages, races, communities, backgrounds, and interests” are invited to “contribute stories about how—and in what circumstances—they read, write, and compose meaning” (Selfe and Ulman). As such, D/deaf individuals have also shared their literate lives and stories to contribute to the online historical record in a special collection titled “Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Contributors.” This small collection, which currently contains eight narratives, is comprised of contributions from D/deaf individuals who are connected with the academic sphere. They include professors, ASL instructors, and graduate students. Each narrative contains several files, including recorded video of the author’s interview/story, a transcript, and a diagram of the room layout where the locations of the author, interviewers, interpreter, and camera can be seen.

I analyzed two of these literacy narratives, referred to here as Narrative One and Two. While each narrative is the unique product of its creator, detailing his/her personal life, experiences, and literacy practices, several promising common themes of study have come to light, as well as gaps where information is lacking and could be examined further through additional literacy narratives in future studies. The following sections outline and analyze these themes, situated in the previously-discussed attitudes regarding D/deafness and literacy.

Diglossia: Prioritizing English vs ASL in D/deaf Literacy

Diglossia is a phenomenon that occurs frequently in the D/deaf community as individuals reject the privileged academic discourse of a dominant population (English) and embrace a colloquial language that defines their community (ASL). Both Narrative One, authored by ASL instructor Chris Driscoll, and Narrative Two, authored by an anonymous senior university lecturer, recognize diglossia as an early influence on their literate lives. Chris Driscoll writes that in his experience at the Florida School for the Deaf, “teachers would always . . . encourage our English, tell us to get better at that.” Emphasis was placed on “writing correctly” and rewarded with candy if done well, yet English had no place in the community of D/deaf peers in the dormitory. He remembers, “If you couldn’t sign very well, you were just kind of rejected from the group.” This rejection served as a motivator for Driscoll to improve his ASL, as he “practiced [ASL] and got better and better.” Social acceptance and ranking within the community was prioritized over the mastery of English literacy and speaking in the classroom. Interestingly enough, Driscoll refers to the group of students who were proficient in ASL as “the smart-kids,” as opposed to those who excelled scholastically in English.

The anonymous author remembered similar experiences. During her short time at a School for the Deaf, she recalls “a strong emphasis on speech, and oralism.” Yet in communicating with other D/deaf children she says, “we signed outside of the classroom in the hallways.” Coming from a home that also prized oralism and English speaking/literacy skills, she describes this brief period of time interacting with other D/deaf children as “my very first exposures to deaf, the deaf community in a sort of microcosm sense.” Their ways of communicating and connecting with one another made lasting impressions as she still remembers “many of the signs that we used in the hallways outside the classroom even though it was a very short experience.”

Both D/deaf authors recalled a distinct difference between the D/deaf student community’s use of ASL and the dominant, “normalized” practice of utilizing English. This marked an embrace of power, position, and acceptance through the marginalized social group, as opposed to the formal majority. James Woodward identified this difference in prioritization of literate practice in his studies in the 1970s and 1980s, identifying the social belief that it is not seen as appropriate in the D/deaf community to use ASL in formal classrooms (122). Rather, a form of Pidgin Signed English

(PSE) is used that more directly correlates with transliterations of English vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.

While these literacy narratives breach the question of diglossia, they do not further explore how this practice affects the D/deaf person's literacy, attitudes, and relationships to this day. Driscoll addresses the fluidity of his use of ASL depending on classroom context, citing that "really one signing style would adjust depending on what kind of teacher [students] had," in other words, changing based upon whether teachers were "strict" in their requirements for proper English usage or more accepting of traditional ASL forms. Yet the narrative does not reveal how this experience may have affected his attitudes regarding English literacy today or how he uses English based on current contexts and situations he encounters.

Finding Deeper Meaning: Simultaneous Use of ASL with Printed English

Multimodal literacy practices form a strong basis of memory for both authors, though the use and impact of each occurs at very different points in their lives. Driscoll's earliest memories of reading are associated with sign language. He recounts, "I was very young at the time and I remember buying a book, and I remember looking at the words and signing at the same time, and trying to figure that out. And as I went along I just loved it." Growing up in a home that encouraged the use of sign language, Driscoll grasped a connection between print English and ASL quickly. In this way, he became not just a consumer, but a translator and producer of text, absorbing concepts and then relating them through signs. This went beyond merely using PSE to sign the exact transliteration of English words. Driscoll remembers, "I wasn't reading just the words though, there were stories and I was including signs with them as I read." Essentially, Driscoll engaged in more than just reading aloud as most children and parents tend to do. He was interpreting and retelling the story, rewriting through sign.

For the anonymous author, the connection with ASL and printed English did not occur until her teenage years when she was first exposed to the D/deaf community through a Teen Club. As she revealed, English orality was the primary mode of communication in her home, and as such, she was introduced to reading English at a young age. Her mother would label each household item so that "it was visually accessible to [her]. For example, there would be a chair and she'd have a card attached to it that had C-H-A-I-R on it, the same with the table, everything that was concrete." This method helped the author gain vocabulary, but when it came to grasping the abstract concept of sentence structures, grammar, and larger meaning, she describes a much greater struggle. It was only when she began using ASL and associating signs with printed English words that concepts started falling into place. She explains, "With English sentences, oftentimes I understand the words and think I get it but I don't really understand the full meaning of the word." Yet, when ASL signs are paired with printed words, she is able to "really understand the meaning." This was also applied to her study of Hebrew in college. Traveling to Israel, living with a D/deaf Israeli family, and learning Hebrew sign language bolstered her grasp of the language (both written and oral). The implications, tone, and deeper meaning were more readily conveyed through sign and became accessible, empowering her to grasp complex meanings and concepts which led to the ability for her to become more comfortable producing and constructing her own thoughts and ideas.

Of course, the debate over the evolving definition of literacy still rages, causing doubt among even native signers. Driscoll echoes such sentiments as he fondly remembers simultaneously reading English words and signing. He confesses, "I'm not sure if that's just signing or if that's reading." Peter Paul argues that such practices *are* reading. He writes that anything that communicates information can be defined as literacy and engaged in as literate practice (383). By embracing the multiple modalities that become possible with constantly shifting and broadening definitions of literacy, D/deaf writers empower themselves to create voices that are uniquely their own.

Relationships with Literacy: Inorganic and Unnatural Experience

A large part of the anonymous author's narrative involves negative associations regarding writing. To this day, she avoids writing by hand as the practice is linked with difficult memories. She explains, "Using one hand [to write] felt negative to me. Because you know, I had been criticized while I was growing up for the way that I wrote." She goes on further to describe the pressures and expectations placed on her in a primarily oral public school. These pressures resulted in a sense of inferiority as she felt that she somehow lacked something, recalling memories of "People saying 'Oh, you're deaf, so...' So what?" Such attitudes are a perfect illustration of a focus on lack of ability, and the shame and isolation that results.

Where did this D/deaf woman find her voice? Interestingly, going to college and learning to type on the computer was a freeing experience for her. Typing was not associated with negative memories; rather, it reminded her of playing on her family's typewriter as a child and communicating with D/deaf friends through the TTY, a teletypewriter that transmits typed signals and allowed the author to place calls. It was a "natural transition" in which she felt "comfortable" and "confident." Going beyond this association with familiar practices, the author describes typing as a more natural experience in and of itself as she muses, "I don't know maybe it's because I was using both hands. And so that felt more natural than using one hand." In this sense, the mode of action that involved using two hands, as in ASL, to produce written text made all the difference. Brueggeman describes ASL as a language which is "enacted" ("Coming Out" 410). Thus, the process became more organic, and the author says, "I felt free to just express myself."

Driscoll also describes situations of discomfort in his relationship with literacy. His memory of using FM systems (audio-amplification devices) in the classroom vividly paints a picture of the struggle between English and ASL. The bulky devices invaded his natural sign space, and he remembers, ". . . every time I signed I would be hitting this box that's hanging from my chest. . . we would have to sign way out in front of us, unnaturally. It was a lot of stress you know, not the right ASL space. . . it was a very different, very uncomfortable kind of signing." Driscoll's description of the FM box, amplifying the teacher's voice while forcing students to sign outside of their comfort zones, is telling. Rather than focusing on teaching essential concepts and developing literacy and deep-thinking skills, teachers interrupted students' natural language and forced them to adopt a foreign method of communication. By prioritizing hearing English, teachers urged students to find their voices while simultaneously distorting the voices that come naturally to the D/deaf community.

Like the anonymous author, Driscoll also describes his experiences with computer literacy. However, he remembers learning how to type in school as an "awkward" experience. This awkwardness could stem from the fact that apart from one instance, Driscoll was learning to type by merely copying words from a published book onto a screen. He explains, "It was all about word processing, you know, how to take words off of a paper and type them onto a computer." This experience could draw parallels to those of many D/deaf children growing up and finding their identities in a hearing-dominated world. Rather than writing their own narratives and developing their own stories, they are forced to try to master the dominant discourse that surrounds them. This results in communication practices that may feel unnatural, oppressive, or unrelatable, and may put individuals in danger of being or feeling silenced. Relationships between D/deaf individuals and their literate practices through English, ASL, and multimodal methods must be studied further in an attempt to understand how alternative discourse is developed, suppressed, and embraced in a society with constantly shifting ideals.

How We Do: Access Through Technology

The final theme to emerge from these narratives regards the use of technology to engage in

literacy practices. Out of all the themes to date, this seems to be the most explicit in stating what D/deaf writing *does* through the use of modern media. Both Driscoll and the anonymous author discuss the importance of access, and the abilities that such practices afford. Both of them report using e-mail, text messages, and pagers on a daily basis. Each of them accesses news and information to learn about what is happening in the world around them. These multiple methods of access and communication facilitate connections between D/deaf individuals on a global and local scale, as well as situating them within the world-at-large. The opportunities for advocacy, awareness, and community are boundless. These online activities do not only facilitate the use of English, as the anonymous author mentions utilizing video-phones and vlogs to communicate and read online in ASL.

Attitudes between the D/deaf authors regarding this access and ability are varied. Driscoll feels that such practices both help and hinder the D/deaf community. While they enable more communication than ever before, he wonders if these practices actually limit the amount of face-to-face connection between D/deaf individuals and break down social bonds (not unlike the fears that hearing individuals may express regarding texting and the social media craze). He explains, “Deaf clubs used to be a real focus for communities, and no one had deaf pagers, so everyone had to come together physically to share ideas, to communicate.” In Driscoll’s view, the ability to connect via technology is important, but the bonds created by meeting and communicating in a physical space are prioritized.

The anonymous author feels otherwise. She believes that through these new literacy practices, the D/deaf community has become more self-aware and involved than ever before. She defines a literate person as one who is able to read the world, have “world knowledge,” and “advocate for themselves.” This type of world-literacy calls for individuals who know what is happening around them and where they stand in the midst of things, as well as where and how these two locales intersect. They must know how to reach out to others with the same (or differing) worldviews, and how to publish their own contributions to the growing global online network, affecting change and finding their voices in a sea of millions. The innumerable multimodal opportunities that technology makes available to the D/deaf community lend themselves to such a view of literacy. They allow the rejection of limitations placed on D/deaf writing through the preconceived notions of “doesn’t” and “can’t” and become the spark and kindling for defining what D/deaf writing *does*.

Where Do We Go From Here?

By defining its own literacies and rejecting oppressive systems that may (purposely or not) stifle its voice, D/deaf writing utilizes new methods to support, connect, and empower its communicators. The literacy narratives examined here have revealed the ways in which members of minority groups may feel dominated by a majority that prioritizes traditional literacy paradigms over new practices, as well as how those minority groups may use diglossia to create their own literacy to claim identity and agency. These narratives have also shown how various forms of communication, such as ASL and print English, can be combined to create hybrid literacies, and how technology may be utilized to evolve and share these practices.

More research is needed if literacy scholars are to begin to piece together how these narratives challenge preconceived ideas of what it means to be literate and perhaps change the definition entirely. D/deaf individuals must continue to submit their literacy narratives to the DALN, contributing their unique stories of various experiences and walks of life to the diversity of literate lives featured there. This growing archive of D/deaf writing provides rich opportunities for the academic community to explore and embrace new literate modalities and semiotic domains to reconsider just what literacy looks like, why humans use it, and how it encourages, inhibits, defines, and is defined by, its communicators. This future research must include the voices of D/deaf individ-

uals in the discussion regarding D/deafness and literacy—allowing D/deaf persons to speak for themselves by composing and sharing their literate lives. By exploring the relationships between D/deaf individuals and their literate practices, multimodal and technological possibilities and uses, and how these modalities paint a new picture of literacy as a whole, we can replace concepts of what D/deaf writing “can’t” or “doesn’t” do with what it *can* and *does*.

Note

¹Concepts of D/deafness encompass a variety of states in which D/deaf individuals and communities may situate themselves. When referring to an individual who is deaf, scholars and writers use the conventional lowercase “d.” However, when referencing Deafness, they are signaling the Deaf community as whole, with all its history, ethics, etiquette, and agenda. Thus, an individual may be deaf in that they experience deafness; they may be Deaf in that they situate themselves from the larger Deaf community standpoint; or they may be both (D/deaf). This exploration seeks to respect the various vantages from which issues may be approached and thus, uses the “D/d” form when referring to D/deaf people and D/deaf literacy practices.

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