

A CASE STUDY OF THE READING PRACTICES OF A FOURTH GRADE  
CLASS WITHIN A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

A Dissertation

by

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Major Department: Educational Leadership

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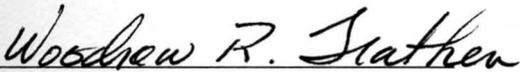
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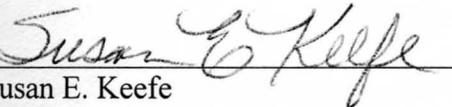
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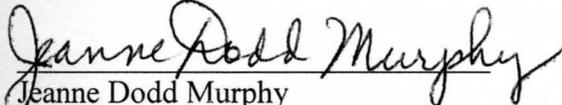
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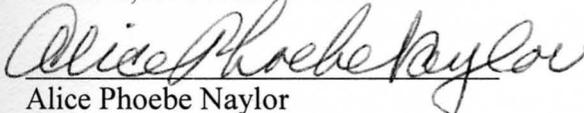
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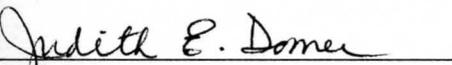
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## ABSTRACT

### A CASE STUDY OF THE READING PRACTICES OF A FOURTH GRADE CLASS WITHIN A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF. (April 2000)

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This dissertation was completed in two phases. The purpose of phase one was to examine and describe the formal literacy experiences of fourth-grade residential deaf students during reading instruction and their informal experiences across settings (i.e., dorm, library, hallways, home, etc.). Phase two of this study was designed and conducted to investigate and analyze systemic conflict that was observed during phase one. The purpose of phase two was to analyze the activities and organizational components of the educational system as they supported or hindered the literacy achievement of its students.

An ethnographic approach to research was utilized throughout this study. A combination of research methods was employed in order to capture, describe, and preserve the context in which data were collected. These methods included: participant observations, interviews, and observational checklists.

Results of phase one revealed literacy practices that did not consistently support literacy achievement. The fourth-grade deaf students were observed to experience numerous missed literacy opportunities across settings, spending only 1% of reading instruction time actually engaged in reading and giving no priority to literacy activities in the dorm or homes. There was no discussion of strategies among the teachers, parents,

dorm counselors, or administrators for providing literacy experiences across settings. The elementary school and its teachers were not provided with adequate funding to support a literacy rich environment. Lastly, the fourth-grade teachers inconsistently demonstrated practices that supported literacy achievement. These issues required more investigation. It appeared that the system itself was a barrier to effective literacy instruction.

Phase two of this research involved an examination of the educational system at three levels--the classroom, the local school system, and the state deaf school system--for its support or hindrance of effective literacy practices. Results revealed widespread conflicts, discoordinations, and disorganization that led to an inability to provide an effective learning environment for the deaf students. Systemic conflict resulted from work practices characterized by the ineffective use of dialogue among the three related systems, educational policy and practice not being based on sound theory, unclear roles and responsibilities of the community members, stagnation of the system, low literacy levels being viewed as a consequence of deafness, and the passive participation of students in the educational process.

Results of my study have direct implications for the future direction of research investigation and the manner in which educational research is conducted. In particular, my research reveals the need for deaf educational systems to conduct self-analyses of practices that hinder the deaf child's academic development.