

JADARA

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Volume 10  
Number 5 *PRWAD Monograph No. 4*

Article 5

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October 2019

## Preface

None None  
*None*

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### Recommended Citation

None, N. (2019). Preface. *JADARA*, 10(5). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol10/iss5/5>

## PREFACE

The Spartanburg Conference represents a significant effort to carry out a key injunction of professional psychology, namely “to protect the right of each individual to be soundly evaluated” and responsibly served (American Psychological Association, 1970, p. 265). The individuals of concern to the Conference are persons termed “the deaf”. The greater part of this little-known population constitutes a minority group of people of potentially normal mental and psychological endowment:

1. whose *physical impairment* lies in severe irreversible damage to the sensory-neural and/or cortical structures necessary for normal hearing, which condition is present since birth or from the formative years, and is not amenable to current medical or surgical treatment;
2. whose *disability* is a loss of functional hearing of such severity that the ability to hear and understand conversational speech as well as most informative messages conveyed through sound, both vocal and nonvocal, is drastically impaired even with the use of a hearing aid; and
3. whose major *handicaps* stem from the resultant break in the lines of auditory communication with the world such as to:
  - a. limit the input of information mainly to visual channels;
  - b. prevent the normal acquisition of all forms of verbal language—spoken, written, read;
  - c. block the auditory acquisition of knowledge;
  - d. impair the establishment of normal communicative relations with society; and
  - e. obstruct the normal processes of enculturation and maturation.

Over the decades, psychologists have entered the field of the deaf armed only with psychological backgrounds and experiences involving non-deaf persons in the belief that these would suffice for practice with deaf people. Such has not proved to be the case. Yet, despite the pressing need for special preparation to serve deaf children and adults, training programs designed to prepare psychologists for such practice have neither been developed, supported, nor funded. As a result, no established safeguards have existed against exposing deaf individuals to unprepared psychological workers and undesirable psychological practices.

With the expansion of rehabilitation services for the deaf population, the demand for psychological service providers has reached a new high for the field of the deaf. At the same time, the need for quality services has become increasingly acute.

The Spartanburg Conference was convened in the belief that it is high time the need was recognized, analyzed, and met; and, further, that the most effective means for safeguarding the interests of deaf persons is through the

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establishment of training programs through which psychologists can acquire the highly specialized competencies and knowledge that are essential in effective psychological practice with a deaf clientele.

The multidisciplinary Conference participants lay no claim to solving problems nor to producing blueprints for training. It is not easy to correct a situation in a few days which has continued in the same unproductive path for decades. Rather, the participants bent the full force of their talents, energies, and experiences in laying the groundwork and in setting up guidelines for training that will eventually insure the right of every deaf individual to psychological service providers of excellence and accountability.

The work of the Spartanburg Conference was only a beginning, thanks to the encouragement and support of the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare as represented by James F. Garrett, L. Deno Reed, and Boyce R. Williams. The work now remains to be followed through.

June 1977

Edna S. Levine  
Project Director  
Editor