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Wolter, D. L. (2018). *Ears, eyes, and hands: Reflections on language, literacy, and linguistics.* Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

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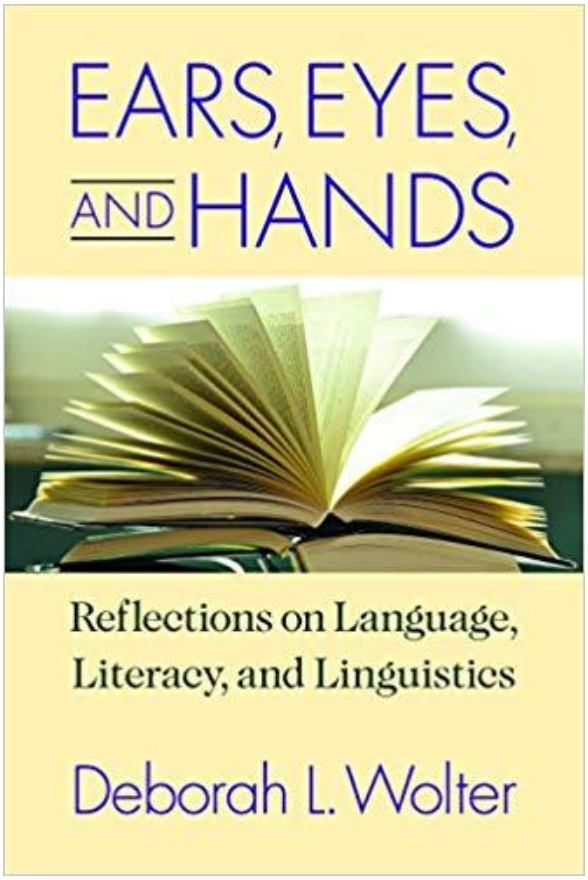
Reviewed by Adai A. Tefera (University of Arizona, United States) and Mary L. Johnson (University of Maryland, United States)



Ears, Eyes, and Hands is a book about language, linguistics, and literacies through the lens of author Deborah Wolter, who is deaf. Born in the 1960s before the passage of the Education for All Handicap Children Act (1975), Wolter recounts her intimate and challenging experiences of navigating a culturally, racially, linguistically and academically diverse world as a person who is deaf. Wolter's introspective and retrospective approach through storytelling forces the reader to rethink human communication and to consider the complexities of literacy for all people (e.g. d/Deaf, hard-of hearing, hearing). She does this by disrupting the notion of what it means to listen, explaining that hearing is a *physiological* act while listening is a *psychological* act. She explains, "[l]istening from both the head and the heart is a cognitive process of receiving information, grasping messages, feeling emotions, and responding to needs" (p. 27). We learn therefore that one can listen without hearing.

After her family learned she was deaf at the age of 3, Wolter enrolled in a school for deaf students focused on *oralism* (or spoken

language). Oralism is the practice of using lipreading and speech, whereas, *manualism* is the use of sign language. Although Wolter explains how American Sign Language (ASL) is more common today among those who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH), she describes the distinct and contentious history that exists between proponents of oralism and manualism. For an audience that may not be familiar with such distinctions, Wolter illuminates the importance of heterogeneity, or intra-categorical intersections (Artiles, 2013; McCall, 2005) that exist within the DHH community (e.g., recognizing the experiences of Black d/Deaf students).

What is compelling about Wolter's approach is her notion of the "innervoice" (p. 7). Using the term "voice" she challenges the myth that deaf people do not have a voice. Here, the innervoice is seen as a communicative tool within all of us. This voice actively addresses our joys, frustrations, passions, pursuits, and fears. In return, the language(s) we use are a cultural tool that signifies our various ways of being/becoming. As Wolter states, "there are no wrong roads to language" (p. 3); the ultimate goal is to listen, communicate, and learn from the innervoice within us and of those around us.

Perhaps the most imperative aspect of the book is when Wolter demonstrates how disability is associated with deviance and the forcing of students who are differently abled to fit into narrowly defined roles of what it means to be "good" and "listen." By doing this her thoughts align with a disability studies perspective (Baglieri, Valle, & Connor, 2010; Danforth & Rhodes, 1997), challenging notions of what it means to be "normal" in an intersectionally diverse society. By describing her experiences in school and the experiences of students that she teaches of continually being chastised for not "listening," Wolter demonstrates the interlocking of disability with deviance in schools.

Unfortunately, the examples Wolter imparts of the deficit perspectives and low expectations educators had of Wolter and her students were not surprising to the reviewers, who are scholars of color studying education equity. The deficit assumption, however, that DHH students are not expected to read or write well was eye opening. Much of this is based on the idea that not being able to connect sounds with letters can make literacy for DHH students challenging. However, Wolter focuses on what teachers and leaders can do differently to ensure the classroom is set up for the literacy success of DHH students. She does this by flipping the focus from deficits to students' assets. She also provides recommendations on how to promote literacy in the classroom for DHH students. From providing a visually rich environment to organizing seats in a way that optimizes access to information being projected, Wolter provides concrete suggestions for creating an inclusive classroom for DHH students.

Although her recommendations are useful, a deeper interrogation into the limitations of policy and the law in meeting the needs of DHH students at the intersection of multiple identities would have been useful. For example, some practitioners might believe that simply complying with the law by providing required accommodations is enough. However, additional recommendations might include going beyond the requirements of the law with additional training for teachers and leaders focused on dismantling deficit perspectives of diverse DHH students, and interrogating what daily practices inhibit and encourage the inclusion of DHH in classrooms and schools.

Importantly, Wolter argues that it is essential to define literacy beyond reading and writing, explaining the benefits of considering multiple forms of literacy – academic, adult, basic, functional, computer, cultural, economic, emergent, and more. Indeed, a

more fitting term is *literacies*. Wolter demonstrates how these different literacies can be deepened and strengthened over a lifetime, rather than, for example, demonstrating literacy with narrow standardized tests in school. She puts this philosophy into practice as she describes her literacy work with students, focusing on individual strategies rather than strictly adhering to a more prescriptive approach like phonics. Her own literacy emerged despite the expectations of her teachers, and therefore she does not have narrow expectations for the students she worked with. Instead, she focuses on students' individual needs, challenging the notion that literacy requires students to fit into a defined box.

Although Wolter is deaf, most of the students she works with as a literacy coach are hearing. She identifies in various chapters how family members, teachers, school officials and literacy consultants can all contribute to deficit views of DHH students due to oppressive racial, economic, and linguistic ideologies. Importantly, the chapter, "The Odyssey," looks into the ways teachers can confront deficit ways of thinking and shift their framing to an asset-based approach for the betterment of students' relationship with learning. For instance, Ms. Russell (an English teacher) critically investigated her students' "unengaged and apathetic" sentiments about books in the school library. Instead of labeling her students as lacking power, she engaged in a critical dialogue (with her students) around what kinds of opportunities and resources can provide them with a broader and meaningful sense of literacy. Ms. Russell positioned her students as *experts* of their experiences rather than exercising her authority of what knowledge is valued in her classroom. Wolter sharing this story is powerful because although Ms. Russell's moment of pause might seem small, it is empowering for children who have historically been treated well to receive this form of love, patience, attention and affection. As we consider new ways of teaching around language and literacy, it is essential that educators position all students as experts inside and outside the classroom. Ultimately, an asset-based approach teaches students that there are "emotionally safe ways to express and learn" (p. 185) about the brilliance, ingenuity and strength that comes from their ways of being.

Although this is a book about literacies, Wolter waits until the end of the book to focus on this topic more explicitly. First, Wolter asserts that limiting the definition of literacy to a dichotomy between literacy and illiteracy is archaic and unjust, particularly in an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse society. She therefore defines literacy as complex, controversial, and dynamic, explaining that:

> [L]iteracy falls on a spectrum, and there are many types, such as intergenerational literacy, cultural literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, academic literacy, and workplace literacy…Certainly, deaf and hard of hearing people are immersed in many forms of literacies. When we embrace multiple literacies, we can find strengths for learning, culture, identity, and productivity in all of us (p. 161).

With the majority of the book focused on the importance of leveraging different forms of literacy for DHH students, the reader has a clear understanding of what this looks like. Wolter's explanation of literacy is important as it compels the reader to think about the ways confined frameworks of literacy and language limit the voices and forms of knowledge that are valued in society. Wolter shows how students who are historically and multiply marginalized have been pushed to the margins of classroom dialogues, curriculum planning, and policy decision-making. As a result, the richness and sophistication of their lived-experiences are rendered invisible and often suppressed. Wolter's literacy work and student advocacy in schools illustrates how vital it is

that we (educators, parents, community members, stakeholders) pause, listen, and embrace multiple literacies that people bring to our everyday classroom practices. Wolter therefore advocates for sociolinguistic diversity and justice.

As a hearing-privileged scholar (second author) whose lifetime work is dedicated to the liberation of Black-Deaf people, it was refreshing to *listen* and think critically about identity and communication from a scholar who is deaf. Wolter's own positionality confronted several myths that are forced onto d/Deaf people. First, there is a spectrum of deafness and therefore, people who are d/Deaf do not all utilize the same form(s) of communication. For example, Wolter's shares that she does not utilize ASL, yet she acknowledges that ASL is a human language. As concise and versatile as any spoken language, ASL has its own grammatical structure including phonological, syntactical, pragmatic and semantic properties.

Second, cochlear implants and hearing aids do not "cure" deafness and many d/Deaf people are not seeking to be "cured" in order to assimilate to a hearing-dominant world. Simply put, they desire to have more opportunities to be *heard* and embraced as multi-complex human beings that contribute to the world's knowledge. Third, as Wolter revealed through her own personal history, a person can be deaf but not culturally Deaf. This is important to mention because hearing people must caution themselves from oversimplifying opinions, solutions, and/or accommodations for d/Deaf people that do not adequately address their varying needs. Similar to hearing people, d/Deaf people make perplexing choices and decisions everyday regarding their views of culture, community, and self-expression. Collectively, acknowledging and confronting these dangerously outdated myths leaves room for more exploration around how students' lived experiences, forms of communication, and social identities can be viewed from an asset-based approach.

In her conclusion, Wolter focuses on diversity, accommodations, humanizing research and compassionate listening for those who are most marginalized through manifestations of audism, ableism, classism, and racism. In particular, she addresses her hearing peers directly by telling them to advocate and intervene when she (and other d/Deaf people) are enduring relentless forms of oppression in the everyday struggle. As advocates of liberation for those historically marginalized, we take on the responsibility of Wolter's request. However, we believe the reader would have benefited even more from a discussion about the structural consequences of a continuous dominant cycle of hearing-centric ways of being. The hearing world must know that their liberation is interlocked with d/Deaf people's societal goals. What Wolter does make clear is that hearing people must intentionally advocate for the centering of d/Deaf youth, educators', community members', scholars', and activists' voices in decisions that affect the way language and literacy is taught and understood. As readers take up Wolter's call to begin to cultivate more "compassionate listeners," it is also clear we must find tangible ways to *protect* and uplift those who put their emotional, physical and spiritual health on the line in order to create a linguistic revolution worth fighting for.

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About the Reviewers

Adai A. Tefera, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the University of Arizona in the Disability and Psychoeducational Studies department: Special Education program.

Mary L. Johnson, is a doctoral student at the University of Maryland in the Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership department: Minority and Urban Education program.

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