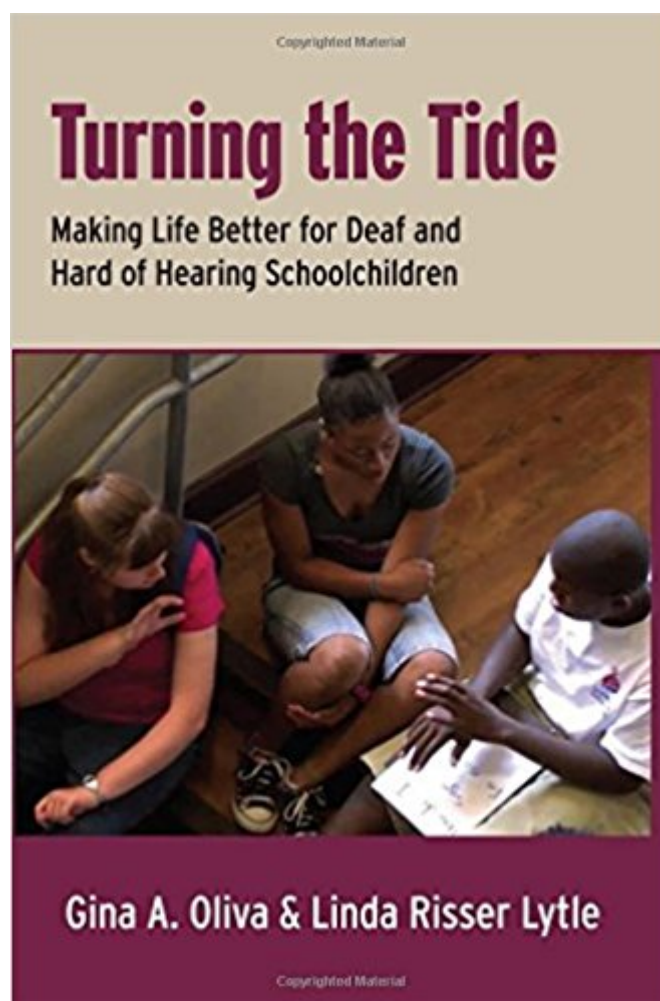


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Turning The Tide: Making Life Better For Deaf And Hard Of Hearing Schoolchildren



Synopsis

Both Gina A. Oliva and Linda Risser Lytle know what it is like to be the only deaf student in a mainstream school. Though they became successful educators, they recognize the need to research the same isolation experienced by other deaf and hard of hearing persons. In this way, they hope to improve education for current and future deaf students. Their efforts have culminated in *Turning the Tide: Making Life Better for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Schoolchildren*. *Turning the Tide* presents a qualitative study of deaf and hard of hearing students who attended mainstream schools. The authors conducted three focus groups in different regions in the country, enlisting six to eight participants with diverse backgrounds for each session. They also gathered information from 113 online respondents who answered the same questions used in the focus groups. The respondents discussed many issues, including the difficulties of finding friends and social access, the struggle to establish an identity, the challenges of K-12 interpreting and class placement, and the vast potential of summer and weekend programs for deaf students. Their empowering stories clearly demonstrate that no deaf or hard of hearing student should be educated alone. The authors also elicited comments on other changes that parents, advocates, and other allies could work toward to improve further the educational environment of deaf children.

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Customer Reviews

At Gina's 60th birthday party, she shared that she had been thinking for some time about writing a

second book. Her first book, *Alone in the Mainstream: A Deaf Woman Remembers Public School* was published in 2004 and she had been feeling for some time that the story was unfinished. The individuals she had featured in that book were among the first beneficiaries of IDEA. However, what she actually found was that the majority of them had received no support services during their K - 12 years -- schools were slow to actually enforce IDEA. Surely all these years later, you would think things had changed. However, Gina strongly doubted the changes were in the right direction. She wanted to investigate and this time around, she was hoping to not have to do it alone. Linda was at that birthday party and one of Gina's biggest writing fans. In fact, she later learned she was the first local person to congratulate Gina on *Alone in the Mainstream* - perhaps one of the first people to read it. After that book's publication we had invited each other to collaborate on several chapters in edited books, and we discovered we worked well together. Those brief writing endeavors only somewhat prepared us for our experience over the course of the past two years researching and writing *Turning the Tide*. That our combined academic and personal assets would so seamlessly produce a book-length publication that neither of us could have accomplished alone was quite a joy! We set out with a very general sense of who would do what in sharing the load, but as things proceeded we developed a natural give and take as well as a consideration for each other's constraints. If Linda was overwhelmed with the work her faculty position required, Gina would pick up the slack. If Gina was sequestered in her beloved and sacred beach town, Linda would do likewise. Happily, it just worked. We started out by getting together for coffee a few times to discuss our vision for the book, since we would need to send a proposal to the Gallaudet University Press. We knew we wanted it to be a follow up to *Alone in the Mainstream*, so that readers could see what changes have occurred as the result of IDEA being in operation for another decade. Data from focus groups and a survey of deaf and hard of hearing adults in the 18-34 age group would for sure become the core of the book. Fortunately Linda was still "working," meaning drawing a salary from Gallaudet, so we were hopeful we could get a little research funding to support the focus groups. We already knew of, but rehashed anyway, our mutual deep sense of responsibility towards the "children of our hearts" - deaf and hard of hearing children. Linda talked about her 30+ years as a practicing psychologist -- she has seen and heard first hand the challenges faced by these children and their families and also by the adults these children grow to become. She has worked with many "solitaires," that is, alone in the mainstream survivors. Gina talked about her father, and her perception that his life was greatly and negatively influenced by his lifelong alone in the mainstream choice. All she had learned in

her many years working at Gallaudet further fueled this passion - she had met many solitaires and recognized herself as one as well. We talked about Gallaudet University and our droves of students -- Gina had been on the faculty for 18 years and Linda for 7 at the time. Gallaudet enrolls deaf and hard of hearing students of all backgrounds and an ever-increasing number of students are from general education settings. We both had bright, capable students telling us miserable stories about their K - 12 years. It really bothered us that prior to coming to Gallaudet, many of them were so alone in their misery. As we chatted over our lattes, it hit us hard that life in general education classrooms was likely much worse for those who were leaving school with no chance of making it into college or perhaps not even making it to their high school diploma. All these bright stars, with their lights dimmed because doctors or parents or educators determined that they must be molded to be the same as everyone else -- as much like a "normal person" as one could be. Someone needed to speak up for all of these individuals. We agreed that our book would highlight the voices of people who had "been there, done that," meaning actual deaf and hard of hearing individuals who had been mainstreamed alone for a good part of their K-12 years. We were both totally sold on the idea of doing a retrospect, having "young" (meaning younger than the folks who Gina interviewed for the 2004 publication) adults tell us what it was like for them. We both believe strongly in the value of the retrospect. Deaf and hard of hearing children currently in school are not able to understand fully what they are missing, or that they in fact would like something different. We knew that children would often simply convey what they think significant adults want to hear. That our book would include information about summer and weekend programs was another easy decision. Using research grants, Gina had spent several summers (and several weekends) observing at 15+ summer camps and weekend retreats for middle and high school kids. Every fall semester her returning students would have animated discussions about how they had spent part of their summers working at these Deaf Camps. This gave her an intuitive sense that such camps and programs could surely provide the social support and connections that "solitaires" were missing when they were alone in the mainstream. We wanted to be sure to have a chapter or two about what she discovered with those grant funds. After ample reading of relevant, recent scholarly articles and books, we decided that everyone involved with deaf and hard of hearing children - parents, teachers, administrators, aunts and uncles, neighbors - everyone would do well to understand the back story and not-so-obvious issues embedded behind the scenes in the everyday lives of deaf and hard of hearing kids in school today. We aimed to have a chapter or two specifically about the two professions that have emerged along with the burgeoning of the alone in the mainstream phenomena. In talking with various classroom interpreters and

teachers we sensed their distress. We wanted our readers to understand that it is not individuals who are failing their students -- it is the educational system that is failing deaf and hard of hearing students. Thus we have a chapter that gives our best to help the reader understand the system and all its entrenchments, and we appeal to readers to do something, anything, to "make life better" and this includes ultimately working at state and federal levels. An additional chapter enlightens the reader into what certain individuals and organizations are already doing towards that end - we want to applaud these individuals. We want to show that we are not alone in our dismay at the current state of affairs, and that many savvy individuals have been and are being part of the change that is so desperately needed. All of us need others who are "like me." Society seems to understand why it is difficult to be the only Black student in the classroom, or the only Jewish student or the only openly gay student. Yet this message seems hard to understand when it comes to deaf and hard of hearing students. We hope our book will make a significant dent in this understanding. We hope too that it moves people to action. Overall, our hope is that deaf and hard of hearing students in general education classes will be much less isolated and much more connected with others like themselves as a result of our book.

Gina A. Oliva is former Professor, Physical Education and Recreation Department, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC. She continues to advocate for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. Linda Risser Lytle is Professor, Department of Counseling, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC. Dr. Lytle specializes in mental health counseling, identity development of deaf women, healthcare issues of deaf people, and private practice issues.

Some things are a given in the education of deaf students. First, parents are the deciders. They have the ultimate responsibility for effective two way communication at home, and educating their deaf children. Second, every deaf and hard of hearing student is an individual. They have different abilities and needs in education. Third, about 75% of deaf students are now in "mainstream" schools, rather than special schools for the deaf. Fourth, parents should know that federal special education law only assures deaf kids "some benefit" in school, a very low standard. All children, hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing deserve a better standard. The standard in education should be "Let's maximize the potential of the student,..academically, psychologically, socially, with the effective communication skills that support those potentials. Fifth, if you agree about this higher standard, it is because you love your deaf/hard of hearing child, and you realize that s/he must be skilled, confident, and resilient as adults in a more competitive world. Sixth, teachers, special

education administrators, school counselors, school psychologists are ethically bound to reach beyond the low federal special education standard. For example, the Council for Exceptional Children Special Education Professional Code of Ethics [cec.sped.org] FIRST standard is "...develop the highest possible learning outcomes and quality of life potential in ways that respect the dignity, culture, language, and background of students with exceptionalities." Now, former mainstreamed students with hearing loss, Drs. Gina Oliva and Linda Risser Lytle, have come forward with "Turning the Tide," a significant effort to identify the special challenges, unique psychosocial experiences, and communication gaps experienced by deaf students in mainstream schools. They got this feedback directly and in person from deaf and hard of hearing people who were educated in mainstream schools. This is just the information parents of deaf students and school professionals need. The authors then offer very specific recommendations to improve the academic, communication, and psychosocial outcomes with deaf and hard of hearing mainstreamed students. There are many wonderful mainstream programs for deaf students. But as I read "Turning the Tide," I had so many flashbacks about my own work with deaf mainstreamed students who were bullied, isolated, and friendless. So many stressed then defeated deaf students who relied on "mediated" communication via minimally trained interpreters. Boiler plate IEPs. No professional deaf or hard of hearing role models in the mainstream schools. Deaf students given behavioral medications for restlessness and "hyperactivity" because they are not understanding the instruction. Deaf students who could not benefit from school counseling services when they needed help or guidance. If you were a deaf mainstreamed student, would you want the minimally trained, poorly paid classroom interpreter to then interpret for the school counselor as you discuss drugs, abuse, depression? The good news is that so much of this can be fixed. The authors have moved the ball forward. I strongly recommend "Turning the Tide." Dr. Bill McCrone, Professor Emeritus [Counseling] Dean, Gallaudet University School of Education & Human Services [1995-2001]

This is an important book for all education professionals, parents, and kin of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children. It is based on a large Qualitative research project studying DHH people who received their K-12 education since the enactment of PL 94-142, known as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The book also reports other, related research, and concludes with recommendation for reform. The results of this study are disheartening. In sum, this book provides compelling evidence that IDEA has failed, and has negatively impacted the lives of thousands of DHH people and their families. I was most stricken by the incongruence of the cover photo with the study itself. The cover shows three young people, apparently DHH, two Black and

one White, studying together. This picture does not reflect the demographics of the subjects who partook in the study. This subjects of the study were mostly White. This is not because the researchers didn't attempt to include Black people. It is because few Black people responded to the initial survey. Why? I can only guess at this, but my guess is an educated one. I live among inner city African American DHH people, and immigrant DHH people. Recently, a substantial amount of my time has been devoted teaching basic literacy skills to intelligent inner city African American and immigrant DHH adults. It is my impression that the K - 12 experience of these people was so bad that they never acquired basic English literacy skills. I contend that despite the fact that these people are fluent in their own ASL dialect, they did not understand the survey well enough to respond to it. Further, it is my educated guess that the abject failure of IDEA - based education of affluent White DHH people is amplified many times among non - affluent inner city people. It's catastrophic. The authors' recommendations for reform are laudable, and have my full and urgent support. Nonetheless, given our current social - economic system, I cannot imagine how these reforms could reach the education of non - affluent inner city people. Trickle - down methods don't work. I want to conclude with a few reform recommendations of my own that would bring the suggested reforms to non - affluent inner city DHH people. Perhaps these reforms will be called "pie - in - the - sky, " and some people may call them "un- American," but I believe in them. First, I suggest a massive increase in the general funding of public education with much of this targeted for DHH education. This should include the training of more Deaf Education teachers and Interpreters, as well as substantial pay increases for these teachers and interpreters. Also, I'd like to see basic Sign Language skills become an essential element of all K -12 education. Where would this money come from? I support so - called "Robin - Hood" taxation that would move wealth directly from the wealthiest people and corporations to the education of non - affluent children. Finally, I would like to see qualified Deaf Education researchers bring their research to the inner cities. This last recommendation would require a great deal of imagination and creativity. It would not be easy. The researchers would have to embrace the communication and interaction style of the inner city. I think that turning the tide for DHH children requires an across the board understanding that we are all in this life together, we are all kin, and our principle should be "all for one and one for all."

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