

Title: Leadership for Language Justice: Re-centering Deaf Children in Educational Systems in Local and Global Contexts

Across deaf education globally, inequities in language access are often framed as instructional challenges or individual learner differences. Yet decades of research and practice demonstrate that these inequities are more accurately understood as outcomes of leadership decisions - decisions about whose languages are legitimized, whose knowledge counts, and whose voices shape educational systems.

Drawing in over a decade of experience in K-12 deaf education with deaf, hard of hearing, hearing, and CODA learners, as well as research in critical and deaf-centered educational leadership, this keynote reframes deaf education as a leadership and human rights issue rather than a purely pedagogical one. The presentation examines how well-intentioned inclusive reforms can unintentionally reproduce linguistic marginalization when leadership remains disconnected from deaf epistemologies and community knowledge.

Using illustrative examples from school systems, teacher preparation, and family-school relationships, the keynote explores three central tensions shaping deaf education today: Inclusion versus assimilation, access versus ownership of language, and representation versus genuine authority. Particular attention is given to the implications of these tensions within post-colonial and multilingual contexts, where deaf education is often influenced by imported models that may not align with local linguistic and cultural realities.

The keynote concludes by offering a vision of deaf-centered leadership grounded in language justice, shared authority, and community partnership. Rather than prescribing a single model, the presentation invites educators, administrators, policymakers, and deaf community members to reconsider how leadership can create conditions in which deaf children's languages, identities, and futures are not merely accommodated, but actively sustained and empowered.

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