

Grupido's Testimony to LEAD-K

March 6, 2022

"It is amazing to see how visual accessible language makes an enormous difference in my deaf and hard of hearing students' lives. Language should not be a barrier but a pathway towards self-actualization and becoming self-contributing citizens of society," wrote Natalie Grupido in her Philosophy of Education questionnaire after being selected as Roseville Community School's Middle School Teacher of the Year for 2021-2022.

Natalie Grupido, who is deaf with an Educational Specialist degree, has over 25 years of experience as an administrator, educator, and mentor in preschool to post-secondary education. She has taught deaf, deaf-blind, and hearing children, and their families, in regular (all hearing) classrooms, self-contained deaf/hard of hearing and deafblind classrooms, co-op classrooms with both deaf/hard of hearing and hearing, mainstreamed classrooms, and a residential setting for the deaf and hard of hearing. She has taught at several universities and colleges throughout the nation.

Natalie has obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education and Educational Specialist Degrees from Gallaudet University as well as her Master of Arts in Special Education (Deaf Education; minor in Deafblind) and Educational Administration certification from Michigan State University. It is her lifelong ambition to obtain a doctorate degree in emotional intelligence and its impact on deaf learners.

I was in the middle of a lesson with my deaf/hard of hearing social studies class, when the school board president as well as the superintendent came into my classroom and presented me a letter, *"Your nomination by our district is a tribute to the skills and commitment that you bring to your students and your profession. This honor is all the more significant because it reflects the respect and admiration of the teachers and administrators with whom you work every day."* I was stunned. More so because throughout my professional career of 25+ years, I have encountered innumerable contentious debates on the education of deaf and hard of hearing students, who often are disabled by the lack of linguistic proficiency. It was greatly appreciated that recognition was given for my deaf/hard of hearing

d in Deaf education?

Look closely, you'll find that it holds whatever you fill within on top,

As the pieces of glass shatter



bottle-picture-
iEuXRpBRahhtPB-btBCIDLU0v5LofQo=

...ct, I am a proud Deaf
...ean waves and swam to shore
...am to another. Or so I
...ngst the constant turbulence
... deaf/hh students need while
...pains me when I see our
...s me...still is.

...ottles and with each
...loser to the edge...until it falls.
...grab a broom, sweep the
...istic. They will eventually



move out of the educational system, and it is no longer a problem of ours. Or is it? Onward to the next student who arrives on the conveyer belt...

Regardless, the "law" prevails. Never mind that our deaf/hh students are in dire need of developing their social language skills before succeeding in the academic classrooms, we must drill these confused, language-deficient minds with academic nonsense because, by law, classrooms must be filled with academic-rich curriculum even if these glass bottles are sinking and shatter on the ocean floor.

Never mind that these deaf/hh students have cognitive gaps that become larger as they mature, the law says that we must be involved in the political mumbo-jumbo of IEPs, LREs, ABCs, and even XYZs. Oh, and do not forget, those hands-on background experiences that are crucial to any individual to base their growing knowledge on, we must be cautious that these students are in a safe, enclosed classroom because we cannot risk safety liabilities and such.

Never mind the importance of allowing our deaf/hh students develop a positive self-identity through exposure of visual language fluency, positive Deaf role models, and learning about their Deaf community and history. The psychosocial development which is argued by such well known hearing researchers as Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, Gordon Allport, Carl Jung, Viktor Frankl, and even Abraham Maslow; never mind applying them to deaf/hh students because they've yet to receive the much-needed life preservers of visual language acquisition.

Never mind the hidden agenda of politics. Do not forgot, our lawmakers are working hard on trying to pull their states out of their financial deficiencies...so cuts are made here and there with their decisions made on statistics, not human beings.

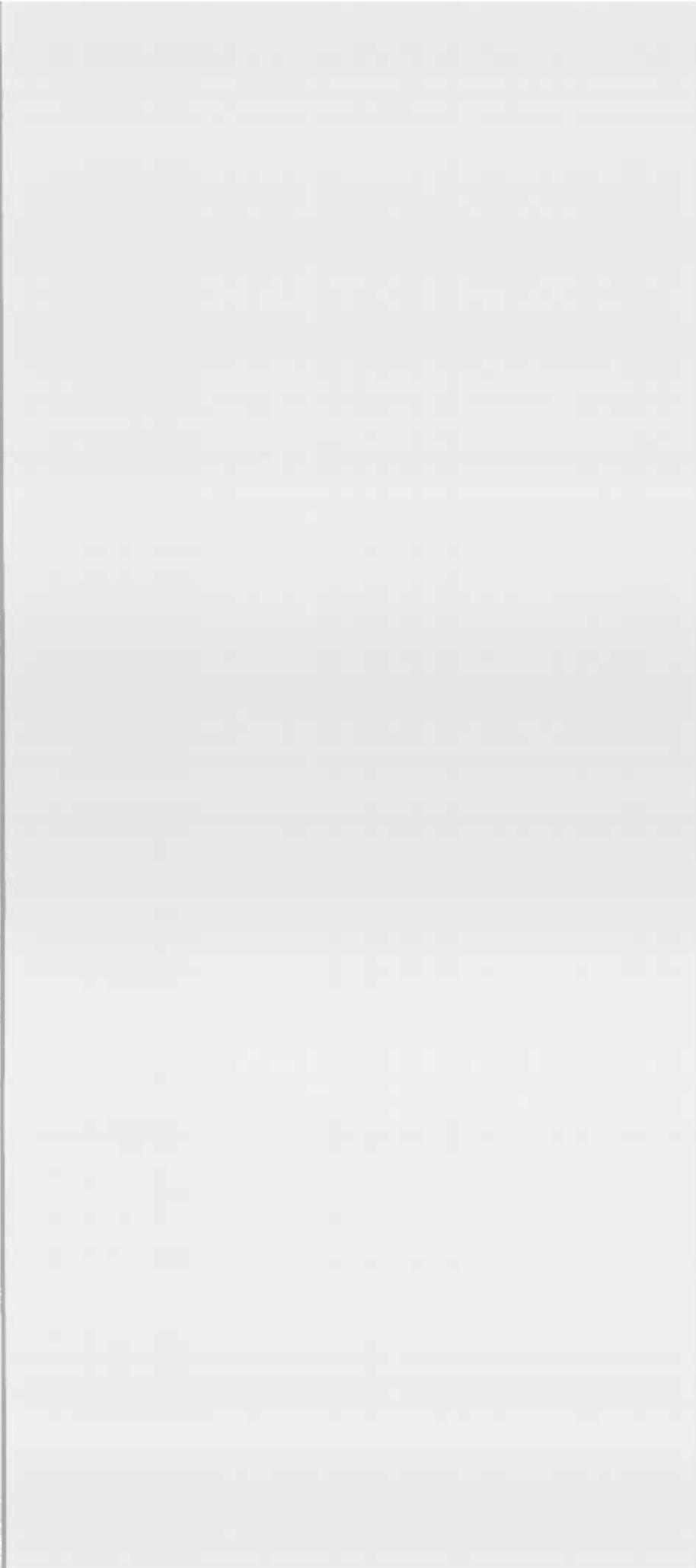
Oh, and do not forget, it is tough to reach out and instill to the majority of hearing folks who are our educators, counselors, lawmakers, and the world, how deaf/hh students think and learn because they are constantly bombarded by the cumbersome requirements of the "law."

AD-K

o. I am a Deaf professional
-ponging in different programs
s were convinced that their
at was appropriate for a deaf
al while struggling to make
ne, my mama knew better
al, and socio-emotional
uld you feel if you were placed
d classroom and oftentimes
aunts? How about when stones
ain while sitting on a handful of
ik?

atmare filled with
ould escape behind a book,
ommunication around me. I
me emotionally, not being able
t barriers. Guess what? I speak
disbelief that "no way you are
ivilege for you because you'd
to understand you because "no
life with my sense of humor of
t that "I'm deaf." I'm so deaf
aves people astounded that I

e back in the program for the
efore I earned my bachelors,
til I taught in various special
h deaf and hearing students
ing (with a mainstreamed



Don't forget, we are people of the "eye." Though there may be some who benefit from auditorial means, each and every one of these deaf/hh students benefits wholly from visual means. The greatest fear should not be on listening with the ears but having the capability of listening with the eyes and allowing them to cognitively grow towards becoming self-sufficient, successful beings.

These shattered pieces? Not only do they apply to the students but to programs and ourselves as well. How do we, deaf and hearing alike, come to common grounds to calm the turbulence waves and open the eyes, minds, and hearts of our deaf/hh students? That is the question.



teacher in general education), 1:1, you name it. I taught on the east coast (Washington DC and Virginia) and the west coast (Las Vegas) before returning home to Michigan. I was in bliss when I taught at Michigan School for the Deaf because for the first time ever, I didn't have to exhaust myself trying to decode communication and language around me. I became an administrator for a few years before life came calling me back home. Guess where? I returned, just like I swore I would, to the very same middle school deaf program that I attended when I was a deaf teenager. I walked into the classroom and it broke my heart.

These students were disabled emotionally, socially, and linguistically. They were so language deprived that they just existed in a teenaged body. They were so handicapped in lack of self-sufficiency and selfhelplessness. Every time I went home, I cried. I cried because this is an unseen crime that has been committed to these children's well-being. I cried because these innocent children did not deserve to be thrown into a world of void communication because of the constant contentions and battles of "Free and Appropriate Education" for them. I cried because I knew they were going to be a statistic of either dependent on the government for survival, jail, or six feet under like several of my deaf classmates. I cried because as a teacher, I had to figure out how to prepare these helpless souls in a very short time before they go into high school and soon to become adults. In the long run, who suffers? They do. Not you. Language deprivation is their unseen enemy. That's unfathomable. Most importantly, it is most avoidable.

That's why LEAD-K is so extremely important. It is your duty and responsibility to make sure not another one of our deaf or hard of hearing children become a statistic of society. It is your duty and responsibility to ensure that our deaf and hard of hearing children receive that is rightfully theirs, language and communication. Why, can you tell me, is that so hard?

**Deaf= big "D" denotes being culturally Deaf with pride in their identity, Deaf community, and use of American Sign Language.*

