

The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
College of Education

EMBRACING THE WIND: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

A Dissertation in
Educational Leadership
by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2013

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Abstract

This autoethnographic research is based on the personal experiences of the researcher whose purpose was to explore the issues and challenges of educating deaf children. This genre of qualitative research makes use of the researcher's experiences to explore the culture(s) involved through an insider's perspective.

The primary source for data in this research is the personal history of the researcher as related in narrative form. Two field experiences were conducted as a means of further enhancing the data set used to answer the research questions.

The literature search was guided by the topics and themes which were evident in the researcher's self-narrative. The field experiences were planned and shaped by reflection on the written self-narrative, interviews with family members who were involved in the self-narrative, and artifacts from the researcher's life.

This blending of storytelling and research led to several conclusions concerning the education of the deaf. The current trends in education concerning the placement of deaf students and standardized testing indicate a need for more in-depth education for prospective administrators. It also concluded that the education of the deaf must be approached from a cultural, holistic perspective to address its various deficiencies.

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Acknowledgements

It is with great appreciation that I extend my thanks to all those who took the time and effort to assist me in conducting this research. I would like to specifically thank the members of my committee for their advice, candor, and undying patience.

Dr. Kai Schafft, who chaired my committee, was instrumental in guiding this work. His knowledge of research and keen insight were of great help.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Joseph Valente, who provided the suggestion I conduct an autoethnography and who never hesitated to provide valuable assistance. His willingness to render his advice and his time was integral to this work.

I thank Dr. Nona Prestine for her support and readiness to share her expertise as a researcher. Her patience and many kindnesses to me were of great benefit.

I also thank Dr. Charles Hughes for his generosity and input. His unreserved support added much to the value of my research.

It is with the deepest gratitude that I thank the Deaf community for all their help over the years. I cannot begin to fathom how much more difficult my life would have been had it

not been for their kindness, understanding, and unwavering support.

Lastly, I thank my wife and children for their love and willingness to provide whatever assistance was necessary to complete this work.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I snapped my fingers and the newborn turned her head toward my outstretched hand. I repeated the sound test on the other ear and got the same result. I was her father for all of twenty minutes and although I knew my test was somewhere south of scientific, I was satisfied that at the very least, my second daughter, Devon, was not deaf.

I was young and clueless and, as happens with many young men, my life had just taken direction and I didn't know it. Nor would I know it for some time to come. However, in that moment I was cloaked in the warm love ignorance has for the young and inexperienced. I was happy.

I wasn't as ignorant as most when it came to knowledge of the deaf, however. I had just two years before taken a course in American Sign Language (ASL). I did so because the woman who'd just given birth to my second daughter, my wife, was then a girlfriend who expressed an interest in learning sign language. She had worked with a deaf child very briefly while in nursing school back in the early seventies. The experience had stuck with her through the years and was brought to action when she spied an advertisement for night classes at the Cleary School for the Deaf on Long Island.

I found the prospect of learning sign language of nominal interest. My main motivation for taking the class was to spend more time with my girlfriend. Again, I plead my youth for such a deed. Still, I found the class interesting and it was the first step of my unlearning a great many things about the deaf.

In the course of this autoethnographic work, I will explore my great unlearning through stories from my own experiences as a parent of a deaf child. I will also explore the interplay of my role as a parent with my roles as an educational interpreter, a teacher of the deaf, and a school administrator tasked with facilitating the education of the deaf. I will also interview deaf persons concerning the issues raised in the autoethnographic process.

It should also be remembered throughout that Devon's mother was an equal partner in all of the decisions concerning her upbringing. The stories in this work are told from my perspective and even though Devon's mother was interviewed as part of the autoethnographic process, it may appear that I am the sole proprietor of Devon's rearing. I was not.

I have often been complimented by education industry insiders, outsiders, and parents of deaf children as to the amount of time and energy I spent pursuing the matter of Devon's education rather than her mother doing so since that is the usual narrative. To which I always replied, "Yeah, while I was

out doing all of the learning it was her mother who was working nights to pay for all of it."

Nevertheless, an autoethnographic study must in its most basic construction, attempt to answer the question as to why one is engaging in the practice. As in this case, 'Why are you writing about the deaf?'

It is with the hope that I may offer some insight on the perspectives of parents of deaf children and thereby help those who are responsible for the raising and educating the deaf that I execute my study. This research will not represent all parents of deaf children, be they hearing or deaf. Nor will it provide solutions to the myriad of difficulties they will face. It will however, address many of the situations with which those parents will grapple and in doing so, provide for further analysis of the topic.

Valente, in his autoethnographic book (2011), describes his experiences growing up deaf as a journey into Deaf culture. His study explores the totality of his interactions with the hearing and deaf worlds and the search for his place in either or both.

Dr. Valente's journey began when he lost his hearing at age one, and each subsequent event, action, perception, and experience, informed his conclusions. Indeed, he asserts that his conclusions are still evolving. Thus the journey continues.

But where did my journey into the education of the deaf begin? Was it when my older brother, Flynn, explained that a girl in his class wore a thing called a hearing aid because she was deaf? Thus I received my first information on the novelty of that condition and its unusual cure. Did it begin when I saw the movie, *Children of a Lesser God*—a film which, regardless of its merit, does a fine job of elucidating the struggle, or schism if you will, between the deaf world and the hearing world? Did it begin when I discovered that my child was deaf? Did it begin when I entered an undergraduate teacher program at Bloomsburg University or later, when I entered a graduate program for my master's degree in the education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing?

Like Valente, I am forced to draw my conclusions from the sum total of events, emotions, and experiences on the subject. Such scope of experiences to draw from, while helpful in formulating an overall narrative to the story portion of the research, presents the researcher with the difficulty of choosing data which is useful, informative, and provides future extant dialogue while not being self-indulgent (Sparkes, 2002).

In an autoethnographic study, one is tasked with putting oneself as the subject of the research (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011; Reed-Danahay, 2009). In a combination of autobiography and ethnography, the researcher

must systematically analyze those experiences he chooses to include in his study (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Although the ethnographer can supplement his research with pictures, documents, and interviews with those who shared the experiences under scrutiny, he must rely heavily on memory. It is a disjointed process as memories lead to other memories. Long forgotten pictures, videos, documents, spark still more memories (Chang, 2008).

It is impossible to separate the emotions from memories especially if it involves loved ones. Yet, it was the times in which I was most emotional, such as when I was doing battle with school officials, or enjoying a boat ride on a lake during vacation, that the details seem most plentiful and clear.

My memories of the early years came back to me slowly. Very often a conversation with Devon's mother would bring back a slew of long unattended memories. Reading the journals I had Devon keep during summer breaks from school brought back a cascade of memories which fulfilled my penchant for nostalgia, but were of no particular value to this research.

Autoethnography is a qualitative method of research whereby one analyses and interprets one's cultural assumptions (Chang, 2008). Such analysis and interpretation, based on the alloy of personal narrative and scholarship, does not come cheap. It

requires a sufficient knowledge of anthropological ethnographic study and painful honesty about oneself.

My personal narrative concerns a subject with ostensibly no norms and includes several cultures and subcultures which co-exist and indeed overlap in seemingly infinite intricacy. My journey in the deaf world may have begun with the snapping of my fingers in a larger than life act of stupidity, but, need not end that way.

Statement of the Problem

Parenting has always been a complex undertaking. While parenting a deaf child is fundamentally the same as parenting any child, it brings with it a great deal of extra responsibilities and concerns. Parents of deaf children must decide, among other things, which mode of communication is best for their child, what, if any form, of assistive technology to use, and what form of education will best serve their child's needs. Moreover, they must contend with providing for their child's social, emotional, and cultural needs.

Using the method of autoethnography, I plan to promote further understanding of the position of parent of a deaf child by using myself as the research instrument. As both researcher and subject, I intend to explore the challenges of educating a deaf child.

Statement of Purpose

The goal of this research is to provide a highly personalized account of being the parent of a deaf child and to examine some of the complexities and challenges which attend the task of educating a deaf child. Hopefully, this will enable others to reflect on their experiences as educators of the deaf.

Research Questions

In this autoethnographic analysis of being the parent of a deaf child I will examine the following questions and issues:

1. What challenges did I face upon becoming the parent of a deaf child?
2. What factors influence the formation of priorities concerning the education of the deaf?
3. How does knowledge of the deaf influence those challenged with raising and educating a deaf child?

Definitions

The following definitions will be used in this study:

1. American Sign Language- a language used by many deaf people which consists of visual-gestural units or signs
2. Autoethnography: A highly personalized genre of writing and research where the author uses his or her experience to extend understanding of a particular subculture.

3. Deaf- the community of deaf people who use American Sign Language as a primary means of communication.
4. deaf- a hearing impairment so severe that it precludes auditory development and comprehension of speech.
5. Deaf Culture- a group of people who share the same values, language, socialization, history, folklore and identity
6. Disability- any condition which interferes with ordinary life processes
7. Exceptional Child- a child who differs significantly from the average of the age group in one or a combination of several mental, physical and social characteristics: the extent of the differences is such that special education is needed.
8. Exceptionality- any physical, mental, or behavioral characteristics that differ from the norm.
9. Fingerspelling- a manual method of communication used by the deaf in which the finger alphabet is used with one hand to spell individual words of the written language.
10. Habitus- the embodied expression of the predispositions that in turn reflect a person's position within a social domain defined by class, education, status, gender, and ethnicity
11. Hearing Impairment- altered auditory sensitivity and, or damage to the integrity of the physiological auditory system.
12. Inclusion- the process of integrating hearing impaired students with hearing peers.
13. Individual Education Plan (IEP) - a plan for each child with special needs that is mandated by law. The IEP must include:
 - a. Statement of child's present levels of performance (PLOP) - academic and functional
 - b. Statement of annual goals - academic and functional - must support progress in regular education and needs specific to disability

- c. Statement of needed transition services for students beginning no later than age 16 (14 if determined appropriate)
 - d. Written statement of accommodations necessary on state and district-wide assessments
 - e. Appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining the effectiveness of the plan
14. Language- the system or code of information exchange that a culture or group agrees to use.
 15. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - an educational setting as near as possible to a regular class that will meet individual needs
 16. Local Education Agency (LEA) - a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted for either administrative control or direction of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision, or such combination of school districts or counties as are recognized as an administrative agency for its public elementary or secondary schools (Pub. L. No. 108-446, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq. 2004, Pg. 118 STAT. 2657)
 17. Mainstreaming- the process of integrating special education students into regular educational programs when not receiving special services.
 18. Regular Classroom- the classroom in which students without disabilities receive the majority of their educational program.
 19. Sensorineural Hearing Loss- the inability to hear caused by failure of the nerves to transmit sound impulses
 20. Special Education- education intended for children with special needs, i.e. children who, for various reasons, cannot take full advantage of the curriculum as it is regularly provided.

21. Support Services- transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education.

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to the viewpoints and experiences of one parent of a deaf child with input from the other parent and two children. This research is autobiographical in nature and thus limited to the recollection of observations and events, some of which took place over twenty years ago.

Organization of the Study

This study will primarily consist of a highly personal account of a parent of a deaf child which will be used to explore an understanding of the self and the culture to which the self is connected. The primary research data will be derived from personal narrative as well as interviews of persons connected with that narrative. Two field experiences wherein the researcher interacts with and interviews members of the Deaf community are also included as a means of viewing the primary research data in a broader context and thereby augment data analysis. Data analysis primarily will be through self-reflection.

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. Chapter one will serve to frame the research through an introduction,

statement of purpose, significance of the study, limitations, definitions to be used, and the research questions to be addressed. Chapter two consists of an outline of the research methodology employed in this research. Chapter three is comprised of autobiographical vignettes and a review of the literature relevant thereto. It also contains the results of interviews with family members associated with the vignettes presented. Chapter four is a description of my first field experience. Chapter five is a description of my second field experience. Chapter six presents the conclusions of the researcher.

Significance of the Study

The intent of this study is to provide educators of the deaf with a personal account of a parent of a deaf child which will enable them to reflect on the validity of their own practices. An exploration of the challenges and demands facing the parents of deaf children will yield insights which will be examined from an autobiographical perspective.

Summary

This research will analyze several autobiographical stories of the researcher in an attempt to provide insight into the challenges and perspectives of a parent of a deaf child. Using

the method of autoethnography, the researcher will explore the cultural aspects of raising a deaf child and how culture, cultural identity, and self influenced the decisions and actions of the participants in the selected stories.

The researcher's memory is the primary source for data in this study. Several participants in the study will be interviewed for the purpose of gaining their perspectives of the events included in the research.

The vignettes selected for analysis are taken from the memories of events which stretch over twenty years. It is this selection which will provide a data set that is culturally meaningful.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research wherein the researcher analyzes personal experiences to better understand social constructs, socio-cultural restraints, agency, and the self (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Reed-Danahay, 2009). The researcher's feelings and experiences are used to analyze and understand the social world being researched (Anderson, 2006).

Given that the researcher is, in this research method, providing the majority of the data set from his memory, it is incumbent on the researcher to adhere to methods which keep the study true to its purpose. Chang (2008) suggests avoiding the following "pitfalls" when selecting data for autoethnographic research:

- (1.) excessive focus on self in isolation from others
- (2.) overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation
- (3.) exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source
- (4.) negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives
- (5.) inappropriate application of the label "autoethnography"

(pg.54)

The first pitfall in Chang's list is perhaps the one to which ethnographers are most vulnerable. The researcher must resist being self-indulgent. This is a difficult task, given that traditional research requires the researcher to have no part in the outcome of research. He must provide results which compel us to pay no attention to him or at most cause us to see him as a disinterested outside party (Sparkes, 2002). Inserting himself into the research is a process unfamiliar to the researcher.

Yet the first feature of autoethnography is the researcher's complete membership in the social world being studied (Anderson, 2006). Often referred to as the Complete Member Researcher (CMR), the autoethnographer must be a participant as well as an observer.

The researcher must choose to scrutinize events which have relevance and fidelity to the purpose of the research. They may be wholly transformative or merely telling. The researcher must also support his choices and analysis with multiple sources and broad-based data (Chang, 2008). His memory must be supported and augmented by factual data.

The narrative portion of autoethnographic research must be interesting, evocative, and engaging (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011). Using the conventions of storytelling, the researcher

must convey information which is both insightful and informative.

Autoethnography is a relatively new form of qualitative phenomenological research. It depends largely on the autoethnographer's ability to combine writing, social analysis, empathy, and, perhaps most importantly, reflexivity (Reed-Danahay, 2009).

This chapter discusses the methodology of autoethnography which I employed to complete this research. It also includes descriptions of the methods used to collect and analyze the data for this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to promote understanding of the process of raising and educating deaf children through the combination of personal narrative, research literature, and theoretical and methodological tools. It is a highly personalized account of my experiences as a parent of a deaf child, an educator of the deaf, and a school administrator who supervises a Deaf and Hard of Hearing educational program. These identities will be examined from the inside.

Analysis of the data will enable educators and cultural members as well as cultural strangers to better understand the process of educating the deaf. It will also aid professional

educators of the deaf to reflect on their experiences and enhance professional practice as well as professional development.

Methodology

Autoethnographic research is essentially the combination of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011). It is a dynamic process. The method of mining one's memory for details of prior events often brings to light data which then forces the researcher to reconsider the focus, purpose, or the methodology of a given study (Chang, 2008).

The amalgam of narrative story, data collection, analysis, and interpretation in the proper degree is difficult to achieve. Ellis (2007) states, "Doing autoethnography involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience." (pg. 13-14)

Feldman (2003) argues that despite the difficulty in determining validity in qualitative research, doing so is critical since, when one focuses on oneself, one can never be certain of the accuracy of what one sees. The human propensity to avoid painful memories can and will reduce the quality of autoethnography if no attempt is made to ensure validity.

Feldman offers four ways to increase the validity of autoethnographic research:

1. Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work. That is either within the text itself or as an appendix, provide the details of the research methods used.
2. Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data.
3. Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study.
4. Provide evidence of the value of the changes in our ways of being teacher educators. (pp. 27-28)

The autoethnographic process is by nature a constructive process. The researcher is analyzing and interpreting data at each point in the method, data which very often leads to further areas of study.

Autoethnography is not a research method with a rigidly-designed process. Researchers must choose which of the various data collection techniques and analyses available which best suit their goals and achieves validity.

Butz and Besio (2009) suggest that researchers must employ an "autoethnographic sensibility" which requires academics to:

- (i) perceive themselves inevitably (even if not intentionally) as part of what they are researching and

signifying; (ii) understand their research subjects as autoethnographers in their own right, whose self-presentations in the context of research are reflexive, and (iii) conceive of research as unfolding in an expanded field where their own self-interested project of self-narration interacts with those of their research subjects in the context of an existing network of social relations. (pg. 1671)

In section iii, Butz and Besio (2009) are addressing how the act of writing about one's experiences reaches out and connects to external data. Autoethnographers must view their subjectivity as suspect. In addition to their memories, they must collect data from external sources such as documents, literature, visual artifacts and, perhaps most importantly, interviews (Chang, 2009). It is through these data collection techniques the autoethnographer can gauge the value of what is largely introspectively-obtained data.

Interviewing is a qualitative data collection method. The most commonly used interview technique is the fact-to-face verbal exchange (Chang, 2009). However, interviews as a social science research technique can be performed in many different ways. They can be either individual or group, structured or unstructured, via telephone, internet, and/or written. Many

researchers now employ the internet to interview via questionnaire surveys.

The traditional perspective of the interview is that it is an objective method of data collection which serves a legitimate scientific purpose. In practice, however, it is greatly affected by political bias and is contextually bound (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The choice of setting, structure, pace, reactions and involvement of the interviewer are all controlled by the interviewer and all can have an effect on outcomes (Chang, 2009; Ellis, 2004; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009).

In this research, I interviewed family members who were witness to the events I chose to examine. The family members interviewed were Devon, her mother, and her sister, Abby. All of the interviews were face-to-face with the exception of Devon's submission of a written response to my question concerning her memories of interpreting services.

Members of the Deaf community (deaf and hearing) were interviewed as a means of providing external data during two field experiences. I conducted interviews with persons who ranged in age from 22 to 90. Interviews were both structured and unstructured.

I chose not to videotape or record the interviews even though such recordings are perhaps the best means of collecting such discursive data (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). I felt the

presence of a camera, especially when interviewing persons previously unknown to me, would skew the results. I reasoned that interviewees would be less self-conscious and more forthcoming if the interview was not being recorded in any way other than my taking notes with a pen and paper.

There was also the matter of the limitations of recording technology itself. Obviously, sound recording would be of little use for those who communicated through sign language. Also, in the two group discussions I participated in during my second field experience, I would have needed a large group of cameras to record the session which would have proved awkward and likely to impede open interaction.

Initially, in the first field experience (see chapter 4), the interview process was to be structured. However, I quickly found that method to be largely unsuccessful with members of the group I was interviewing. That is, interviewees tended to give short responses or none at all. Moreover, writing specific answers is somewhat time consuming since much of the responses were in sign language and, as such, I could not write as the response was being given.

All respondents were permitted to respond in the mode of communication with which they felt the most comfortable, i.e. ASL, Signed English, English. Nearly all chose to converse with me in some form of sign language.

During the second field experience (see chapter 5), I chose to begin the interview with a general question concerning my research. This is sometimes referred to as the "grand-tour" question (Chang, 2008) (pp. 105). Subsequent questions became more specific ("mini-tour") as the interview progressed (Chang, 2008). (pp. 105)

I did not arrange or perform the interviews as a neutral scientific endeavor; I expected to be a part of the process. Interviewing my family was relatively easy, but, interviewing members of the Deaf community required considerable thought. I even debated what to wear so as to promote a positive interaction.

I also reviewed artifacts of my and my family's history concerning the period of time covered: photos, school records (both mine and Devon's), artwork done by Devon, and the diaries I had her write during her summer vacations.

This research contained an extraordinary amount of data. At times it seemed as if I were staring at a jigsaw puzzle with an infinite number of pieces. I, like all children tasked with the challenge of a jigsaw puzzle, started by putting the pieces right side up, then searched for patterns. Some were easy to spot, like how, in the progression of family photos, the children get taller as I get fatter and grayer. Other patterns were difficult to discern.

The data in autoethnographic research is primarily that of interpretation. The researcher must seek cultural meanings which go beyond simple data analysis (Chang, 2008). I could analyze the diaries I had Devon keep by content and even go so far as to count the number of words written per day and so on. However, I could also choose to interpret their very existence as a manifestation of culture.

In the end, I deemed the artifacts useful in the writing of the autobiographical portion of this research but not in and of themselves worthy of inclusion either in the body of this work or the appendices. While they often stirred memories, they did not serve to directly corroborate any information contained in the autobiography portion of this research.

Autoethnography as method has been described as a balancing act (Chang, 2008; Jones, 2005). A great many decisions are made as to its form, some of which are dictated to the researcher during the process of research. However, the preliminary step in autoethnography, and indeed the lion's share of the research, is in storytelling.

Autobiography/Memoir

Occasionally, I have been asked to serve as a photographer for a golf tournament to raise money for charity. It involved my taking mostly what I call "Fish Pictures," that is, pictures

wherein people pose as if they are standing next to the prize fish they'd just caught i.e.: posed, sterile, full of counterfeit smiles.

Between taking Fish Pictures, I would take random pictures of the participants in action, most of which I took without them knowing they were being photographed. That is, they knew I was there with a camera and that there was a possibility they would be photographed as they participated in the tournament, but their attentions were elsewhere. I quickly found that I preferred my semi-hidden snapshots to the Fish Pictures. I felt they were more real, more authentic. I often found emotion in them which no Fish Picture could ever provide.

There are several concerns researchers have when it comes to utilizing autobiography/memoir or, as it is often referred to, life-writing, as method. The most prominent concern is authenticity and by extension, validity. Is the author giving us a Fish Picture or a real depiction of all which has occurred? Does what we have been given conform to the truth?

The reader is tasked with constantly measuring the distance between autobiography and fiction, an expanse many would argue is never quite zero (Anderson, 2001; Halse, 2006; Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, 2008; Tullis Owen, Mcrae, Adams, and Vitale, 2009). Halse (2006) states, "Autobiographical memory is more a reconstruction than a reproduction."(pg. 97)

As story teller, it is presumed, by the writer at least, that the story teller is correct, accurate, and conforming to truth. That is, the intention of the writer is to relate truth (Anderson, 2006; Tullis Owen et. al., 2009). However, one could argue that a story is in the story. What the writer chooses to include and exclude is telling in and of itself. The choices a writer makes are clues to the subconscious, like fingerprints left all over the crime scene. In that sense, every autobiography exceeds its own conclusions.

Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) argue that effective analysis of personal narrative, ". . . means not taking personal narrative evidence at face value but rather providing context and even alternative evidence as needed for interpreting its meaning and significance." (pg. 14)

The process of life writing has been compared to sculpting (King 2008). The shape it ultimately takes is a result of choices of story/narrative structure, writing, and culture (King, 2008; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). They are also tinged with temporal influences. Again, it is presumed that all rhetorical choices made with respect to narrative structure are made in the pursuit of truth.

Tullis Owen et al. (2009) argue that truth should not be considered when one is evaluating life writing. Truth is sacrificed to memory, the writing conventions of the genre

chosen by the author, and personal desire in order to fulfill the needs of the audience.

Gubrium and Holstien (2009) argue that stories should be analyzed through an extended framework which takes into consideration the context as it relates to its construction.

Truth

Truth can indeed be fluid. One day as I was preparing to teach a class in a maximum security penitentiary, there sat a gentleman in the back of the room off to the side working on some reading. He was not part of my class. He had simply grabbed a quiet corner in an empty classroom to do some work.

After a while, he and I began to chat.

"So . . . what are ya in for?" I asked.

"I'm in for bank robbery," he said, then quickly added, "but I'm not a bank robber."

Intrigued, I asked, "Well did you rob a bank?"

"Well, yeah, but I'm not a bank robber."

"I'm pretty sure it means you are," I said.

We expect truth to represent an independent reality. We expect the results of good research to correspond accurately to reality (Smith & Hodkinson, 2005). Yet, ideology, dogma, socio-economic status, power relationships, opinions, and, personal

desires can and often do influence what people choose to accept as truth.

Saint Augustine is often credited by scholars as the creator of the modern Western autobiography. In his book *Confessions* (c. CE 398-400), he cites God as the guarantor of the truthfulness of his work since it is to God he is confessing and one cannot lie to God (Anderson, 2001).

Regardless of whom one has as an editor, one is expected to provide an accurate history of the self (Anderson, 2001). The writer expects the reader to accept all unknown facts. Writer and reader begin their journey together in autoethnography with the belief that narrative structure which adheres to truth will lead to self-realization as well as an improved understanding of the culture under study.

However, the matter of truth brings with it several nagging questions, not the least of which is: Are there universal truths which can be related in irreducible terms? Postmodernist scholars tend to think not. It is their contention that qualitative observational research is heavily affected by context, i.e. the position and status of the observer (Angrosino 2005). The validity of said research ought to be gauged with the context of the observer taken into consideration.

Thus it is entirely possible for us to accept that a man in prison for bank robbery could consider himself to be in reality

a drug dealer who got caught when he dabbled in a line of crime separate from his preferred line. In the culture in which he lives, it is perhaps preferred that a man identify himself with the type of criminal behavior he engages in routinely. Also, one's identity may be crucial to creating beneficial relationships within the prison system, a harsh and sometimes deadly world. His truth may differ from our own on this account, however, it is no less real to him than ours is to us. The fact that he actually robbed a bank in no way affects his sense of self and identity.

The autoethnographer is tasked with providing truth as both the observer and the observed. He must examine his truths and their cultural origins. Then he must provide description which is based on interpretation with whatever abilities his mind possesses.

Ethnography

The method of studying other cultures by participant observation began in the late 19th century (Tedlock, 2007). Observers would spend time living within the culture being studied with the expectation that their experiences and observations would yield information which was accurate and conformed to reality, that is, without bias.

The ultimate goal for an ethnographer as participant observer was to learn about culture, goals which Malinowski (1922/1984) described as:

. . .to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world. We have to study man and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on him. (pp. 25)

While it is true the observers often produced personal memoirs of their experiences, it was their ethnographic observations which were deemed to be of higher value because those observations were considered to be objective. The subjective memoir was considered of lesser value.

The ethnographer was tasked with observing the culture of the natives without bias or subjectivity, a just-the-facts approach which reduces research to more or less an abstract journey in search of facts. However, expecting one to live within a culture, interact with the participants of that culture and not affect the participants nor be affected by them is a bit like asking one to take a bath and not get wet.

Autoethnography was developed largely as a means of reconciling the dualism of the ethnographer as observer and ethnographer as participant (Reed-Danahay, 2009). It provided a means of utilizing the perspectives of both positions to study culture.

Personal narrative as a method of ethnographic research runs counter to most types of social-scientific analysis. It does not provide data on large samples or indeed whole populations, nor does it provide statistical analysis concerning correlations and predictive validity. It does, however, provide subjective perceptions about social phenomena in context (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Muncey, 2005).

Personal narrative reaches those places in human interaction where statistics and other types of hardcore empirical research cannot take us. It bridges what Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, (2008) call the ". . . analytic gap between outside positionalities and interior worlds, between social and the individual." (pg. 16) What Malinowski (1922) termed more succinctly, "The imponderabilia of actual life." (p. 18)

Yet, current school reforms, primarily induced by the No Child Left Behind act, take little input from ethnography. Based on statistical analysis and a belief that higher expectations, i.e. standards, is the tide which will lift all boats, reformers almost completely ignore the interior worlds of minority populations (Adair, 2011; Brown, 2005).

Ethnography and Policy Decisions

Policy decision making as is presently practiced and the field of ethnography are not conducive. Policy making is, on the

whole, a fast process compared to ethnography. It relies on specific, preidentified issues which can be studied for the purpose of identifying which lever of power within the system which when manipulated, will provide a preferred outcome.

Reconciling the disparities between the process of education policy making and the process of ethnography will provide for more comprehensive policy as well as provide insight as to how policies are being implemented. Adair (2011) recommends the following with respect to utilizing ethnography to set education policy:

(1) Utilize ethnographic evidence that is based on the intentions, goal and contexts meaningful to parents, children, and teachers. (2) integrate research-based assessments that include ethnographic data as much as statistics and developmental milestones. (3) include the expertise of anthropologists who are informed by the perspectives of teachers, children, and families involved in early learning when developing policy guidance, designing program evaluation requirements and conducting needs-based assessments; and (4) encourage state-based programs and research units to include ethnographic data as part of program design and evaluation so that local policymakers can better understand what is important and motivating to children, teachers, and parents. (pp. 428)

These recommendations could be said to be at the opposite end of the spectrum as they relate to the current process of identifying educational issues in need of reform. Adaire's suggestions take a much broader view of the process of education as practiced than traditional policy process which tends towards narrow focus on discrete variables. She is also suggesting a viable means with which to monitor the effects of policy and how policies are being implemented.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of present education policy-making processes is that they largely ignore context (Brown, 2005; Sleeter, 2004). Why and how a policy works or doesn't work requires an assessment which goes beyond quantitative analysis and involves an examination of context. In short, it lacks nuance.

Education policy making which ignores cultural diversity, socioeconomical status, and the complex contexts which influence student learning fails to address the needs of students from marginalized groups (Brown, 2005). It is context blind and as such is incapable of properly serving local contexts and communities.

As the drive to quantify student achievement through standardized test scores gains in ascendance, the valuable benefits of ethnography and indeed autoethnography should not be

overlooked. They provide a viable and valuable method for determining which school policies work and why.

Research Design and Methods

This study combined my personal experiences with relevant literature, interviews with persons involved in my experiences, and reflection. Several vignettes from my experiences were presented with interviews of the participants. Review of the literature concerning issues which are present in the vignettes accompanied them in chapter three.

The analysis of the data in chapter three further shaped the research questions and prompted more in-depth interviews of the participants as well as the inclusion of two field experiences which consisted of interviews of members of Deaf culture. It also included a discussion of the literature on cultural research for the purpose of connecting the contents of the vignettes to broader theoretical terms.

My conclusions are presented in chapter six. The objective of the conclusions is to promote reliability, generalizability, and validity.

Data Collection/Analysis

Data Collection

Perhaps the most critical portion of autoethnography is data collection. Since the autoethnographer is, initially at least, choosing data from his own life, there is no shortage of primary source data. Combined with artifacts and field work, the researcher is presented with a dizzying amount of data.

The researcher must, according to Chang (2009), “. . . review, categorize, rearrange, probe, select, deselect, and sometimes simply gaze at collected data in order to comprehend how ideas, behaviors, material objects and experiences from the data interrelate and what they really mean to actors and their environments.” (pp. 126-127) This time-consuming aspect of autoethnography requires much of the researcher, however it is the essence of the research process.

There is no one set methodological approach to resolving the tension between which data to include and which to exclude (Holman, 2005; Chang, 2008, Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011). Moreover, the researcher is tasked with deciding how best to present the dataset. Indeed, one of the main considerations is how to present the data in narrative form so as to convey the thoughts and feelings of the actors as well as generate interest

in the reader (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

The primary data for this research initially came from my recollection of my experiences concerning the subject matter. Additional data was collected through interviews with family members as well as review of texts, journal articles, my prior written works, photographs, and written works by participants to provide context.

In this research I used autobiographical stories about my experiences in the D/deaf world which I used to understand larger social or cultural phenomena concerning the D/deaf. My personal narrative served as a representational strategy which in turn influenced field work and the analysis thereof.

In my approach to this research, I chose self-observational data which I feel illuminated my sociocultural roles at the time as well as reflected my perspectives. I also chose vignettes which fulfilled the story arc that I believed to be an accurate depiction of real events. Those vignettes chosen for inclusion were selected from a larger group of vignettes which I wrote with no particular preconceived storyline.

I decided that simple was best with respect to narrative prose. I did so primarily because I believed that the two biggest obstacles between me and the truth in writing about myself were ego and nostalgia. After all, there are few things

in heaven and earth as powerful as the ego and even fewer as seductive as nostalgia. I felt I could avoid the tarnish of these two elements if I avoided flowery writing and too much backstory. I also resolved, because the time period being scrutinized was so long, to include as much corroborating data as possible through interviews of persons connected with the narrative, artifacts, review of the literature, and field work.

The decisions made as to the construction of the research in autoethnography have as much to do with the individual doing the research as they do with accepted scientific practice. It is ultimately a combination of art and science for the purpose of producing a work of research which is rigorous and analytical.

Field Work

Very often autoethnographers will include external sources in their research as a means of providing contextual information which can then be used to validate and triangulate the memory-based, self reflective data presented by the researcher in the initial stages of the research (Chang 2008). This also serves to avoid what Chang (2008) describes as the pitfalls of placing too much focus on self and exclusive reliance on personal memory as a source of data.

In autoethnographic work the researcher, by virtue of studying himself in his environment, is a cultural insider.

Autoethnographies, however often focus on the researcher as he experiences a culture other than his own, as a cultural outsider. This research involved my exploration of my experiences as a parent of a deaf child and an educator of the deaf as a cultural insider, and my experiences with Deaf culture as a cultural outsider.

Given the bicultural nature of this research, two field experiences were included as a means of both avoiding the pitfalls outlined by Chang (2008) (see above) as well as providing feedback concerning conclusions drawn from self-reflective data. They were designed to gather data which could be used to make connections between my autobiographical data and sociocultural contexts. One of the considerations in choosing the sites for the field experiences was the inclusion of as wide a demographic as possible of the Deaf community.

I considered the data collected from interviews of my family and review of the artifacts in my possession to be sufficient to validate the self-reflected data. However, I was less confident concerning the data related to the Deaf. Much of the data collected concerning Deaf culture was based on events that occurred in the past which I experienced as a cultural outsider. Additionally, at the time I experienced Deaf culture, I was not doing so with an eye toward ethnography and as such I felt the data source was lacking. Therefore, two field

experiences were included in this research as a means of overcoming potential biases.

Both field experiences were set up so that I would be submerged in the Deaf world and gather data from deaf persons through individual interviews and group discussion. Only one hearing person was interviewed during the field experiences. However, that person (see French Interpreter chapter five) was connected to the Deaf community through her work.

Ellis (2004) contends that the interviewer should seek to not interfere with the responses of the interviewee even though the interviewer cannot help but be part of the narrative. The interview questions for the first field experience were chosen with the intent of my having as little influence over the responses as possible.

The first field experience took place at a gathering of deaf senior citizens in a church meeting room. The purpose of their gathering was to recreate by playing a group card game and having lunch together. I interviewed several of the attendees and two of the workers at the gathering.

The second field experience took place at Gallaudet University. Based on the results of the first field experience, I changed the interview method to a more conversational form which I felt would bring about a greater focus on the interviewee yet still relate to my thoughts and feelings. I

chose to initiate a discussion about the emergent themes from my research rather than work from a set of prepared questions.

I included my emotional responses to my accounts of both field experiences as a means of enhancing an understanding of the topic as well as context. I also included my view of the emotional dynamics of the interviews themselves.

Analysis and Interpretation

After all the data is collected, the autoethnographer must search for connections between that data and sociocultural contexts. This is necessary to gaining a comprehensive understanding of the autobiographical data collected in terms of culture.

Analysis of the data in this study, as is usual in autoethnographic research, was ongoing and did in part drive the decisions concerning further data collection through field work. The research makes use of the autoethnographic techniques of personal experience narrative, narrative ethnography, and insider research.

Analysis of the field work focuses on the ethnographic dialogue between me and the group being studied. This self-reflexive dialogic process was also an ongoing process wherein the data gathered influenced methods utilized for further data collection.

Taken as a whole, it is the responsibility of the researcher to balance the research between data analysis and interpretation in such a way as to achieve, as much as can be obtained, objectivity and a systematic approach. Chang (2008) suggests the following strategies:

(1) search for recurring topics, themes, and patterns; (2) look for cultural themes; (3) identify exceptional occurrences; (4) analyze inclusion and omission; (5) connect the present with the past; (7) compare yourself with other people's cases; (8) contextualize broadly; (9) compare with social science constructs and ideas; and (10) frame with theories. (pp131)

Chang (2008) also suggests a criteria by which to judge one's success utilizing the above strategies. She states that an autoethnographic work should be, ". . . less "what is" than "how is"and "why is." (pp. 139) Thus a well-developed cultural self-analysis, if it is to be confidently labeled as a legitimate form of research, must reach beyond a simple listing of 'what was' for the researcher as well as relate useful information regarding the inner workings of his culture.

Summary

This chapter briefly described the methodology of autoethnography. It also outlined the purpose of the study as

well as the data collection and analysis techniques to be used in this research.

Given that, in autoethnography, the researcher plays a dual role of observer and observed, he must choose the data set carefully. He must avoid being self-indulgent as well as avoid excluding data which may be personally painful or embarrassing. In addition, the researcher must choose his methods in the manner which best achieves validity.

Chapter 3

Introduction

This chapter contains several vignettes of my experiences as a parent of a deaf child and a review of the literature relating to those vignettes. Although the focus of this autoethnographic research is broad in terms of the time frame from which the data was selected, much of what was chosen for inclusion was influenced in part by a review of the literature.

The vignettes are provided in chronological order. Information gathered from interviews with my wife, my daughter Devon, and my daughter Abby are also included. Information from the interviews immediately follows the particular vignette discussed.

The vignettes begin with the discovery that my second daughter, Devon, was born profoundly deaf and conclude with her graduation from college 22 years later. The vignettes are written narratives from my perspective and are presented in novel form. The literature review portions of this chapter are written according to APA style.

Learning and Unlearning

"Bonzai!" I shouted at the not quite six month old baby girl. She just looked at me uncomprehendingly. "Bonzai!" I shouted again. Still nothing.

I was trying to teach her a shtick I had developed some years earlier with her older half-sister Laura. When it was time to change her clothes, I would yell "Bonzai" like the Japanese sailors I had watched in the numerous World War II movies on television when I was a child. Each time a Son of Nippon would take off of an aircraft carrier, the men lining the deck would yell "Bonzai" and shove their arms straight up in the air.

My yelling "Bonzai" was the cue to raise arms straight in the air for shirt removal. Then I would repeat the process to put a new clean shirt on. My problem here was that Devon seemed incapable of learning this simple process. When I raised my arms, she would raise hers, but she never seemed to get that she was supposed to raise her arms when I shouted "Bonzai!" I figured either she was too young to learn this particular brand of dressing, or, she was not a fast learner.

I didn't give the matter much thought on the whole. After all, there are a great many things to occupy ourselves within day-to-day living. Then one day when I went into her room to

get her out of her crib, something occurred which caused me to rethink the matter.

She was seven months old. When I got to her door I could see that she was awake in the crib playing with her feet. She was faced away from me. I started to hum as I walked to the crib so that she would know I was there and not be startled. I thought it was stupid to hum and perhaps not loud enough to do justice to my cause so I switched to whistling. I reached her crib and she turned to me and started. That was the exact opposite of what I wanted to happen. I looked at her, smiled, and said in that sing-songy voice used by parents everywhere, "You didn't hear me coming? You'd have to be deaf not to hear me coming. What are you, some sort of deaf baby?"

That was a light bulb moment. The thought rocketed up from my subconscious and hung suspended, disconnected from everything else in my mind. She might be *deaf*. That would explain her being shocked at my presence and not getting the Bonzai maneuver and a few other oddities which we thought were just a result of her individuality.

I explained my theory to Devon's mother that night and we discussed the matter at length. The following day Devon was in her crib, again faced away from the door and playing with her feet. Her mother snuck up behind her with a large wooden spoon and a pot. She drummed the pot with the spoon, working it with

all her strength. Nothing, the kid did not react at all. Then she looked up at her mother and started.

Having reached the determination that Devon was deaf and most probably was born that way, her mother and I were faced with several big decisions. The biggest of course was which mode of communication to use. As with any issue, there are fervent believers on all sides. Devon's mother and I didn't really have firm beliefs other than, like most parents, we wanted the best for our daughter.

The primary decision we faced at that point was whether or not to use sign language. The sign language course I had attended with her mother just two years prior to her birth, I believe informed my decision, rather than biased it, as one might suppose.

I met Devon's mother when I was working in a hospital. She was a delivery room nurse and I was a shiftless housekeeper working the night shift. After several years we began dating. While dating, she suggested we take a course in sign language given at the Cleary School for the Deaf. I agreed.

My understanding of sign language at the point we learned of Devon's hearing loss was, unfortunately, and through no fault of the good people in that school, still incredibly insufficient. However, during that experience, I was exposed to that language and to several real deaf people.

Nine out of every ten deaf children are born to hearing parents. Out of all the hearing parents who are faced with making this most difficult decision, I would say few had the benefit of actually taking a course in sign language before their child was born. But luck, in my experience, is always a matter of degree.

Devon's mother and I decided to teach her sign language. We started to work with her using signs even before our suspicions about her being deaf were confirmed by the medical establishment. We reasoned that if we were wrong and she was hearing, learning sign language wouldn't hurt her. However, if we were correct and she was, in fact deaf, then use of sign language would only help her in that it would provide her with a ready means of communication.

We started using signs in front of Devon but as often as not forgot to sign. Moreover, we didn't know nearly enough sign language to converse in it fluently. Our efforts were clumsy but headed in the right direction.

My formal efforts to teach Devon to communicate began almost immediately. I sat her down, a la Bonzai style and began to lecture her. She looked one way, then another, and then crawled away. I grabbed her up, brought her back to the designated place of learning (the floor by the changing table in the living room), and started the lecture anew. This series of

events repeated themselves with exceptional fidelity to precedent three more times. It was then I realized that perhaps lecture was not an adequate method of instruction for a seven month old child. It also occurred to me that perhaps Devon was not aware that the medium I was using was for communication.

Over the next several months, her mother and I would point to things and make the sign for them. We signed in front of her sporadically. And we thought we were doing all the right things, but Devon didn't seem to pick any of it up. She didn't sign a thing.

I began to ponder the problem when I made a connection in my mind between two thoughts: babies, and Robinson Crusoe. Human baby behavior to me always seemed akin to animal behaviors. I was considering the various methods used to train animals when I remembered that Robinson Crusoe tamed animals by not feeding them. Once they were worn down with hunger, they were more disposed to behaving the way he wanted them to behave.

I had no intention of starving Devon and there is no way her mother would have permitted it if I had, but I did hypothesize that the way to get her attention would be through food. So I devised a method and explained it to her mother.

When it was time to eat, I put Devon in her highchair and prepared some food. I placed the food on the table just out of her reach. I would sign, "Are you hungry?"; "You want to eat

now, you?" I would repeat the questions two or three times then slide the food over. Next I would repeat the process with her drink. I or her mother did this Robinson Crusoe thing for every meal.

I told her mother that the logical result of this would be that eventually Devon will connect the act of signing with something useful like getting food. Sooner or later Devon would use signs to get some food. I explained that no matter what time of day or night it was, if Devon used sign to ask for food, we should give it to her.

Then one day it happened while I was at work. Devon toddled up to her mother and made the sign for "eat." My wife was knocked off her feet but had the presence of mind to sign, "You want eat now, you?" Devon's face lit up with excitement. She was absolutely thrilled to have communicated something to another human being in a mode other than crying.

I remember Devon standing there in her little denim overalls smiling as she watched her mother tell me what had happened when I came home from work that night. Of course I milked it by signing, "You signed to mommy for food?"; "Good girl you!"; "I am so happy!" I signed it over and over.

I learned quickly, mostly from my lecturing efforts, that if sign language was the currency, attention is the gold that backs it up. I also learned that there was no one, guaranteed

way to get the attention of a deaf child. Doing so takes thought, creativity, titanic diligence, and the patience of a thumbless watchmaker.

I bifurcated all signs into two camps: "stuff" and "concepts." Stuff consisted of objects with names. Concepts were bits of knowledge built on an abstract idea or ideas. I found that stuff was relatively easy to teach but concepts were a bitch.

Devon, a child with an exceptional memory, only needed to be told stuff once and it was committed to memory, but concepts had to be taught. The only problem with stuff was that her mother and I often didn't know the signs for stuff. We would frequently grab one of our several sign books and look up a sign on the spot. This caused me to often wonder what Devon made of this practice.

Teaching the concepts required strategic planning and, as I found, experiential learning. I didn't attempt to explain concepts but rather came up with ways to *do* the concept.

One day I decided I wanted to show her the concepts of "stop" and "go." Here, too, I had to be very careful which sign I chose for "go" since the common sign (often also used as "go to") looked very much like I was pointing to something in the distance and made Devon turn to look at what I was presumably

pointing at. I decided to use a sign for "go," which was older, not as often used but still valid.

I got out my riding mower and sat Devon on my lap. I started it up and with my hands out in front of her I signed "go." I slipped my foot off the brake so that it snap released and the mower hopped into motion. Devon squealed with delight. I let the mower go for a bit, signed "stop," then I hit the brake hard and brought the mower to a slamming halt. Again, Devon squealed at the novelty of it all. I repeated the process two more times before I had her signing it. I bounced around the yard for some time, secure in the knowledge that I had just conquered a concept.

Some concepts I really had to work on, such as "follow," and others I decided needed no direct instruction since I reasoned that we learn some things superficially and later come to a fuller understanding of them. This process, I later came to know, was described by Vygotsky as internalization.

I placed the concept of love in the category of "Not Needing Direct Instruction." I figured that people hear "I love you" many, many times from their parents and come to understand it gradually and according to their own version of reality. I taught Devon the "I love you" sign, famous for having been put on nearly every form of bric-a-brac known to man, and her mother

and I simply signed it in all the places one would say it to a hearing child.

My plan worked well until one day when we took Devon with us to vote. She had begun to return the "I love you," sign but in the manner of all small children, she signed it as she saw it, resulting in her returning the sign backwards. She also signed it with one further twist, without her thumb extended, so the sign looked identical to the hex/devil horns sign many rock-n-rollers sport to seem badass.

I did not correct Devon in this manual malapropism because it was my policy to teach her signs through modeling rather than the stultifying corrective feedback, which is somewhat negative and would waste valuable attention time. However, I didn't know that it would be a problem.

The polling place near our house was at that time in the basement of a church when the old lever machines with the curtains were still in use. A line of folding chairs set out for waiting voters led up to the machines. I was chatting with Devon's mother about the ballot and lost track of Devon for a moment. I knew she was near but I was not directly observing her. I looked down to see Devon giving the hex/devil's horns sign to a horrified young couple sitting across from us. Apparently, while I was conversing with her mother, she had

wandered over to them and decided to say hello via her version of the "I love you," sign.

Most of the time hearing people would see Devon signing with me and then begin talking to her expecting her to hear. They assumed she was hearing and thus did not recognize what she was doing. They simply didn't see any sign language. This couple however, had most definitely recognized that Devon was flashing them a sign.

I picked up Devon and put her in her mother's lap, then turned to the couple and said, "She's deaf and she was signing 'I love you' to you."

The couple simultaneously let out a long breath which almost made me laugh. Obviously the thought of such a cute little girl being raised in devil worship profoundly disturbed them.

I returned to Devon and her mother and told Devon that she didn't know those people so she couldn't love them. I said, "You love mommy and me and grandma and grandpa."

There were some things that were beyond my ability to explain, such as, "Blow your nose." One day when I decided I wanted to teach Devon how to swing on the swing set in a local park, I tried every means I could think of to explain it. And to her credit, she patiently watched as I signed, mimed, and demonstrated till my eyes nearly bled. She still didn't get it.

Finally, I sat on the swing with her on my lap and put her long thick pony tail between my teeth. I rocked forward and backward gently tugging her back with me. She got it almost instantly.

MOTHER

I discussed this period in Devon's life with her mother. Besides myself, there was no one else. The only other persons in Devon's life at that time were her maternal grandparents who have since passed on.

It took some time for the diagnosis of deafness to be made. Referring to the day we got confirmation that Devon was indeed deaf her mother said, "I came home and started to cry because she was never going to hear music. And I would never hear her say 'I love you mom.' After about fifteen minutes I said to myself, 'Okay, let's get down to business, enough of the self-pity shit. Time to get to work.'"

"As to the music, it was some years later when Devon was about age three. I was in the kitchen and heard the television explode in sound. I ran into the living room to see Devon with her hands on the speaker and shaking her behind in a sort of half dance. She saw me and signed, 'I feel that.'"

My wife remembers that my reasoning for using sign language was to establish communication with Devon quickly. She said, "I remember you saying, 'We have to get language into her as fast

as possible and it doesn't matter how we do it. We can teach her to talk later, but we need to do it now.' I, like most things, went along with what you said."

I asked my wife if she recalled the concept of the life curriculum. She said, "No, I don't remember any 'life curriculum.' You said something about school and how most parents expect the school to teach them everything but your feeling was that the school was to supplement what the child learns at home. That's what we had to do. I agreed with it at the time."

"I always wanted to learn sign language and God provided a way."

We cannot recall how we became connected to the John Tracy Clinic in those pre-internet days. However, my wife got their curriculum materials to work with Devon. She found that Devon was too deaf to use the materials as directed so she had to adapt them via sign language. Since the Tracy clinic at that time was essentially an oral program, I told my wife that to do so was a bit like adapting a baloney sandwich by removing the baloney. It just ain't the same once you're done "adapting."

My wife recalls the first sign Devon ever signed. She was lying on the couch in the living room when Devon came up to her and tugged on her sleeve. When she opened her eyes, there was Devon signing "eat."

She also recalled our initial attempts to sign 'up' and 'down.' She would hold Devon while I would stand facing them and make the sign for 'up,' and she would lift Devon up. Then I would make the sign for 'down.' And down Devon would go.

The signs for 'up' and 'down' came before Devon recognized what signing was, so our efforts on this lasted only as long as it took us to figure out that it wasn't working.

Interestingly, Devon's mother recalls Devon learning initial signs quickly such as 'mother,' 'father,' 'please,' and 'thank you.' However, I recall it took me some time to get Devon to understand her name sign (we quickly agreed on a 'D' over the heart because we love our Devon) and it took her some time to get that I was Daddy.

As to sign language acquisition, her mother said, "I remember Devon learning about six signs a week, then it quickly became five and six signs a day. Then one day when she was eight, I heard Devon call her sister, Abby, "Abba." I said, 'Who's that?' and Devon said "Dad'da.'" Then she pointed to myself and Devon said, 'muhm.'" Then Devon said, 'I ova ouu muhm.'" I started to cry."

Devon's speech therapy came almost entirely from her schooling. I doubt that I spent so much as fifteen minutes teaching her to speak. Nevertheless, we always encouraged her by acknowledging we heard her when she did speak. Her mother

worked with her on her practice as given to us by the pre-school teachers sent by the county to our house to work with Devon.

Despite her voice training and aural rehabilitation, Devon rarely communicated by voice. She would use her voice to get someone's attention and then proceed to sign.

Neither her mother nor I ever pushed her to develop her oral skills. When I asked her mother about this, she said, "Devon was so deaf that it didn't seem she was ever going to speak like a hearing person and she didn't seem to have any problems communicating with hearing people. She either wrote things down or used facial expressions."

For my part, I was far more concerned with Devon's overall education and considered her speech a small matter as compared to the enormous amount of concepts and stuff she needed to learn by the time she left us for college.

Sign Language

Historically, the primary debate concerning the issue of linguistic needs, with respect to education of the deaf, has focused mainly on whether the Oral or Manual method was best. This battle, long fought, has been further complicated by the development of sign systems.

In 1880, the Milan Decree was passed by the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf (ICED) which stated that the Oral method, i.e. teaching without the use of sign language, was superior (Moores, 1987; Moores, 2001; Cook & Schirmer, 2006). I was introduced to the matter one hundred and eleven years later. Unfortunately, neither the decree of 1880 nor all that was to pass between that date and the time Devon's mother and I had to decide which method to choose for Devon seemed to point to a best practice. It seemed to me at the time the superior method depended mostly upon whom one was talking to rather than hard and fast data.

The two main research journals on the subject of mode of communication until 1995 (five years after Devon's mother and I had decided to use sign) were *The Volta Review* published by the *Alexander Graham Bell Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*, oral advocates, and the *American Annals of the Deaf*, published by the Council of American Instructors for the Deaf, manual advocates (Cook & Schirmer, 2006). Each journal reported research which more or less supported its bias.

In the end I reasoned, and Devon's mother agreed, that the most important thing to do would be to open the lines of communication as quickly as possible, and from there we could teach Devon whatever we chose. Sign language seemed the best method to quickly establish a basis for further learning.

Having made our decision, I retrieved from the attic our copy of *The Joy of Signing*, which we purchased when we took the sign language course prior to getting married. I also went to the library and the book store in search of more information. Almost immediately, I came across a book on Signing Exact English.

In the late 1960s, just prior to the enactment of PL 94-142, the philosophy of total communication was introduced (Fischgrund, 1995; Stewart, 2006). Total Communication (T.C.), sometimes referred to as Simultaneous Communication (SimmComm), or Sign Supported Speech (SSS), quickly became the most widely used method of communication in educating the deaf in the United States (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004; Fischgrund, 1995).

Total Communication is a sign system in which educators talk and sign simultaneously using English grammar and syntax (Denton, 1976; Marshark, Peterson, & Winston, 2005). This differs from American Sign Language (ASL) in that ASL is a bona fide language with its own grammar, syntax, and semantics (Costello, 1994; Andrews, Leigh, and Weiner, 2004).

The concept of representing an oral language manually was invented in 18th century France by Charles-Michel de l'Epee (Tabak, 2006). I thought it brilliant and even better suited to our needs since I wouldn't have to take the time to learn the strange inner workings of ASL grammar and syntax. I was unaware

of the difference between the various sign systems and the language that was and is ASL. Moreover, I didn't know that signed English was no more of a representation of English than Semaphore, or Morse code. Nor was it any more successful in educating the deaf than previously-used methods, and in some ways it was less so (Cook & Shirmer, 2006; Moores & Martin, 2006; Tabak, 2006).

Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) argued that ASL should be the principal mode of communication in the education of the deaf. Their argument, which effectively changed the main debate from oral vs. manual to sign language vs. sign system, was based on the poor results of programs which used total communication. Johnson et al. (1989) stated that total communication, in its various forms, was impossible to do correctly because it was psychologically and physically overwhelming. Eventually, one or both parts of the signal deteriorated.

They were not, however, the first to declare total communication an unworkable sign system. In 1978, Jensema and Trybus analyzed the results of a national questionnaire, which was sent out to the variety of educational settings for the Deaf, and concluded that children, teachers, and parents do not use both speech and sign at the same time. They found that as the use of speech is increased, there is a concomitant decrease in the use of sign.

Despite a well-documented body of evidence outlining the shortcomings of the total communication method, it is widely used throughout the U.S. Its widespread use is due in part to the support it receives from deaf adults who perceive it as oppositional to oralism (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004; Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989).

One distinct advantage of Total Communication is that it is easier to learn than ASL. Nearly all deaf children are born to hearing parents who, as with my case, have little if any experience with deafness and sign language. Hearing parents and hearing professionals find the sign systems easier to learn and so support its use in the classroom (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004).

It is a given that hearing children will learn their primary language from their parents. Deaf children, however, will acquire any of several modes of communication and their parents may not be the primary source for language acquisition (Quigley & Paul, 1984).

We had chosen to use sign language as the mode of communication with our daughter and in doing so chose it as the language of instruction. Add to that, we chose to make use of a sign system which was used in the self-contained deaf and hard of hearing classrooms she attended in a nearby public school

district. We did, however, make sure our daughter was exposed to deaf adults who signed fluent ASL.

Like most deaf children, by the time Devon arrived for her first day of kindergarten, she was a student who communicated via several methods. She code switched between English, ASL, and Signed English.

The matter of deaf children as a group having disparate modes of communication due to forming their communication skills through exposure to language at home and early education programs gave rise to the Instructional and Practical Communication (IPC) method of instruction (Stewart, 2006). In IPC the teacher decides, ". . . when to use ASL and when to use English in its print, speech and sign modalities" (Stewart, pg. 207, 2006). In turn, students are permitted to use whatever means they choose to communicate so long as understanding is achieved.

I had, in effect, been employing IPC from early on since it didn't take me long to find out that not everyone saw signed English as favorably as I had initially. Over time I came to appreciate the efficiency and robustness of ASL, and I also came to believe through my experiences as a teacher of the deaf that how one signs a thought or concept doesn't matter so long as the recipient understands the message as it was intended.

Consequently, I tended to use signed English when I was teaching reading or writing, and used ASL for everything else. I did not force Devon to use ASL, as she preferred to speak in what was mostly signed English. I correctly predicted that she would eventually use ASL almost exclusively by the time she left college.

Oralism

My other choice, the one I was questioned about many times, the one I was lectured about by its advocates more times than a snowball has flakes, was oralism. Since I chose manualism, one might suppose I rejected oralism out of hand. I did not.

I explored the matter a great deal in my mind and did no small amount of research on the subject. The problem, as I saw it then and tend to see it now, was twofold. First is attainability, i.e. can it work? And the other: What does that say to the deaf child concerning who and what they are? Concerns, which to my thinking then as now, are no small matter.

The oral method is monolingual. Whether or not a prelingually deaf child will indeed profit from such a method is dependent on many factors. Deaf students instructed via such a system will require a great deal of speech and auditory therapy. Moreover, the student will need to rely on speech-reading to acquire instruction a method, which has proven difficult even

for deaf adults who know English (Andrews, Leigh, and Weiner, 2004).

As an administrator tasked with overseeing a Deaf and Hard of Hearing program, I have often dealt with students who were initially taught via oralism but failed to thrive. There occurs a leveling off of progress which prompts a reevaluation of the student's mode of instruction.

Still, I questioned our decision to not go with the oral approach with our daughter many, many times over the years. Moores (2006) wrote on the following on the subject:

I have taught using oral-only, Rochester Method, Simultaneous Communication (SimCom), and voice-off sign instruction, both English based and ASL based. I believe that children have achieved success, in my classrooms and in general, under all different approaches, but that the number of successes through oral-only instruction has been too small, even with developments in digital hearing aids and cochlear implants, to support its exclusive use in fostering print literacy skills in deaf children. (pp. 47-48)

Moores' opinion of oralism matches my observations. If a deaf child does not have whatever skills one needs to master communication in an oral language without the ability to hear,

they miss much in their formative years. Indeed, such children of hearing parents are language deprived and all the knowledge which ordinarily flows from early language acquisition suffers as a result (Isham & Kamin, 2004; Moores, 2006).

Testing Lady

"So how'd it go?" I asked the government person who had come to our house to test Devon. I had just caught her loading her car as I arrived home from work.

"Okay," she said with a half-smile.

"Oh yeah?" I said, instinctively raising my eyebrows.

"Well, she doesn't know the alphabet. And she didn't know the sign for sock."

"Actually, she does know the alphabet, and she fingerspells some words. And, there isn't a sign for sock."

An uncomfortable look quickly crossed her face.

"The sign for socks is this," I said, showing her the sign. "If you signed one-socks or socks-one, she would have understood you. But the sign really means socks so she was thinking of two. She knows socks. And, she knows the alphabet. I taught it to her myself."

"Oh," she said, not sure if she should believe me.

This was the first of many encounters I would have over the years regarding people who work with the deaf and know nothing about them. This woman was testing Devon's abilities and had completely missed the mark because she didn't have any understanding of how the deaf communicate.

About a year and a half later, the local intermediate unit contacted me about having Devon attend Head Start, but they weren't going to provide an interpreter for her. Worse than that, they seemed genuinely perplexed when I told them that she needed an interpreter. They could not understand why an interpreter would be necessary. They also seemed annoyed that I would insist on one.

The truth is, I didn't much care. I told them that if they couldn't provide us with an interpreter, Devon would stay home. I told them that it simply made no sense to send a child to a class wherein she couldn't communicate with anyone. At most, I'd be teaching her that school is a place you go to and get ignored for a few hours each day.

A woman from the local intermediate unit, whom I would come to know well over the years, called my wife and let her know that they had secured an interpreter for Devon. Not long after that, Devon was bounding up the steps to the interior of the short, square Head Start bus. She took her seat, smiling and waving to her mother and me. My wife cried like Devon was going

off to the gulag. I stood there alternately smiling, waving, and assuring Devon's mother that Devon would be all right.

I went to the Head Start classroom later that morning to check on Devon and the facilities. I informed the teachers that should they encounter any problems, they need only to contact me, but under no circumstances were they to use corporal punishment, which was still legal in the state of Pennsylvania at the time.

MOTHER

When I mentioned the testing lady to Devon's mother, she instantly recalled the episode.

"She came from the Northumberland County Child Development Center that takes care of children 0-3, then the CSIU (Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit) takes over. They insisted on Devon taking an I.Q. test during what was normally her nap time. The woman held up pictures and Devon was to give her the sign. One of the pictures was of a sock. The woman asked if it was one or two, and I explained the sign is the same if it is one sock or two. I asked Devon, 'How many?'"

"The woman said, 'You're giving her the answers.'"

"Devon stopped cooperating and started signing, 'sleep,' 'sleep.'"

"I said, 'We are done.'"

"The woman said, 'Let's keep trying.'"

"I said, 'I am telling you, she is done.'"

"She left and about a week later they called up to say she had an IQ of 79."

"I said, 'That's not possible. Did you give her the IQ test for deaf children?'"

"They said, 'We don't have a test for deaf children.'"

"I said, 'You will *not* put down that IQ score. If you put that down the teachers won't push her and she needs to be pushed.'"

"They insisted, and I said, 'No you will not, if I have to go through her file every year I will and I'll take it to court if I have to.' They said that they wouldn't put it in her file."

"About two weeks later two women came from the Northumberland County Child Development Center. They said, 'We want to test her for colors.'"

"I turned to Devon and said, 'Go get my sewing thread.' Devon knew all of the eight colors plus grey, tan, and pink, and shades. Light blue was blue and dark green was green."

"Then they said, 'We're going to teach her, her letters.' I signed to Devon, 'Go get your letters.' Devon went and got the letters. I held up the letters in no particular order and

Devon got them all right. I gave her random numbers and had her count them out in pennies. She counted up to 17 but could write numbers one through twenty."

"The women then said, 'We're going to teach her to write her name.' I told Devon to write her name. Devon scrawled out her name."

"Then they asked, 'How old is she?'"

"I said, 'Two and a half.'"

"The woman said, 'Well, we can teach her socialization.'"

"I said, 'That you can do.'"

Not long after this conversation with Devon's mother, I mentioned the IQ portion to a school psychologist with whom I worked and he laughed out loud. He said that it's not uncommon for children at Devon's age then to have wild fluctuations in their scores from day to day. He also added that giving a deaf child an I.Q. test not specifically designed for her was ridiculous.

Testing and Inclusion/Mainstreaming

As a nation, we see inclusion as an essential component to educating our children. Federal law mandates that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are to be

educated with children who are not disabled (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

In the past quarter century, the U.S. Congress has clearly shown their support for children with disabilities' rights to a free and appropriate education. In 1972 *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* produced a judgment in a class-action litigation stating that children with mental or physical disabilities had a right to a suitable and free public education and lack of funds was not a defense for exclusion.

A few years later, 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) became a landmark in education legislation. Since that time, amendments and modifications have been made to further the cause and move toward a more inclusive setting. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act update in 2004 (also known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act), requires:

- (41) That to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled; and (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in

regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [20 USC 1412 Section 612 (a) (5), and its implementing regulation found at 34 C.F.R. §300.114(a)]

This movement towards inclusion had a profound effect on the education of the deaf. Prior to the move to inclusion, the deaf were mostly educated in residential schools wherein they had complete communication access with their teachers and peers. The schools also provided a concentration of expertise. This centralized delivery model was converted through the inclusion process to a dispersed local delivery model (Innes, 2008; Reed, Anita, & Kreimeyer, 2008).

While it is true that the attendance at residential schools for the deaf began to decline following World War II, the inclusion movement, begun in 1975 with what is now referred to as The Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA), is responsible for a dramatic realignment of school placement for the deaf. The IDEA established that each student has the right to free, appropriate, public education (FAPE) regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities.

Today, IDEA provides the basis for federal and state regulations and local policies which govern delivery of special education services in public schools.

Its six basic principles are as follows:

- 1) Zero reject which holds that no student can be denied access to education based upon a disability
- 2) Nondiscriminatory evaluations to assure appropriate assessment practices are used when determining students' eligibility for special education and their progress in meeting their educational goals
- 3) FAPE and the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which set the standards for what constitutes appropriate education for a particular student
- 4) Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) which holds that delivery of special education services should occur in the general education classroom to the maximum extent appropriate
- 5) Parent and Student Participation which requires that parents partner with schools in the processes related to special education
- 6) The Right of Students and Parents to Due Process which provides a grievance procedure when parents and schools disagree about services (Laprairie, Johnson, Rice, Adams, & Higgins, 2010, Pg. 25-26)

The difficulty insofar as the education of the deaf is concerned is the proper definition of the least restrictive environment. Original proponents of IDEA felt that placing deaf children in regular education classes with hearing peers

provided the least restrictive environment. In other words, inclusion equals least restrictive environment.

The Basic Education Curricular 22 Pa. Code § 14.102 (a) (2) (xxiv) from October, 1, 2006 (formerly BEC 22 Pa. Code §342.42(c)) regarding the policy of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) on least restrictive environment and educational placement for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) was reviewed January 30, 2009. This policy is consistent with IDEA 2004, the Third Circuit decision in *Oberti v. Board of Education* (1992), and the *Gaskin v. Pennsylvania Settlement Agreement* (2005).

The Pennsylvania Department of Education holds that inclusion occurs when students with disabilities are taught in the general education classroom with non-disabled peers or when they participate in extracurricular or non-academic activities with students without disabilities. This supports the IDEA principal that students receive an education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

General education and special education teachers must work collaboratively to deliver special education services to students with disabilities. All staff are responsible for implementing the IEP and providing necessary accommodations and supplementary supports. General education teachers supported by administrators, special education teachers, case management, and

related services and other personnel who have knowledge of the child (psychologists, guidance counselors, speech therapists, nurses, social workers), as well as parents, are all stakeholders considered part of the IEP team who deliver special education services. (Laprairie, Johnson, Rice, Adams, & Higgins, 2010).

Of concern to the education stakeholders is the generally reported belief that regular education teachers are not familiar with all of the adaptive techniques that should be available to children with disabilities, and that they should at least know the important principles of instruction and where to find these adaptations and strategies when needed. (Laprairie et al, 2010).

There has been a sharp increase in students identified. Currently, 12.1% of all students in the United States are Special. Only 30% of students with IEPs performed at a level considered proficient in both reading and mathematics (National Center on Educational Outcomes [NCEO], 2010). This is an alarming figure that indicates students with disabilities are not attaining grade level expectations. As students fall farther behind in their education, it becomes more difficult to minimize the achievement gap.

In Pennsylvania, in the 2009-2010 school year, 15% of students were identified as students with an IEP. In 2010, 75% of students overall in the state scored proficient or advanced

on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) while only 45% of students with an IEP scored proficient or advanced in the area of mathematics. The goal for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is 56% for mathematics; the above mentioned score for students in the disaggregated group of students with an IEP is an 11% shortfall (Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Achievement Report: 2009-2010, 2011).

In 2010, 72% of students in the state scored proficient or advanced on the PSSA while only 35% of students with an IEP scored proficient or advanced in the area of reading. The PSSA goal for reading in 2010 was 63%. The 28% gap indicates that students with an IEP are not meeting state grade level standards and also infers that there is a broader gap in the curricular area of reading compared to mathematics (Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Achievement Report: 2009-2010, 2011).

Students are not performing at the rate necessary for adequate yearly progress purposes as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is no wonder that the identified students are becoming discouraged and fail to graduate. Only 84% of students with an individualized education plan (IEP) graduated High School compared to 90% across the state in 2010 (Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Achievement Report: 2009-2010, 2011).

Many factors can be attributed to why students with an IEP are failing. A clearly articulated standards-aligned curriculum may be missing. Lower expectations may be set for IEP students simply because they have an IEP. Or perhaps, as has been argued concerning the deaf, the least restrictive environment was not implemented properly. Simply placing students in an inclusion setting without regard to their unique communication and other needs did not in itself provide the least restrictive environment.

An additional concern that is evident throughout the United States and within Pennsylvania is teacher preparedness. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics cites a projected rise of 17% for special education teachers until 2018. Special education teachers held a total of about 473,000 jobs in 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). With this sharp increase in novice teachers, special attention to the teacher development in pre-service programs, and, more importantly teacher professional development for teachers that are currently in the profession and affecting students on a daily basis, is essential.

Teachers historically have not had to include special education classes into their pre-teaching course work to attain a teaching certificate. In Pennsylvania, as a teacher progresses from an instructional I to an instructional II certificate,

there are 24 continuing professional education (CPE) credits required. The previous requirements for the novice teacher had little mandated special education training. Unless individually motivated to include such courses in their CPE course work, such work simply wasn't a part of the typical novice teacher's training experience. However, beginning in September 2011, all teachers in Pennsylvania who earn an Instructional I teaching certificate after September 22, 2007 must complete 6 specific credit hours as part of the 24 credit hour post-baccalaureate requirement. These six credits must be in the area of inclusive classrooms and/or standards aligned systems (SAS) (Pennsylvania State Education Association, 2011).

Pennsylvania recognizes the significant achievement gap of special education students. Student achievement coupled with recent increased clarification into the mandates for least restrictive environment through the Gaskin Settlement Agreement has put pressure on the certification requirements. The Gaskin Settlement states, "Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs ONLY if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (Pennsylvania Department of Education Gaskin v Pennsylvania Settlement Agreement, 2006, p. 1)

The Gaskin Settlement has had direct implications in the classroom and necessitated the certification change so teachers are more prepared. Strides have been made to rectify the achievement gap by mandating inclusion practices and limiting the amount of time students are pulled out of the classroom.

It can easily be argued that while it is commendable education officials seem to be addressing the apparent shortfalls of inclusion through professional development plans, such efforts fall short of the needs of deaf students since they fail to address the issue of assessment. How do we know if the deaf student's needs are being met if we cannot reliably determine if the curriculum is being mastered?

The inclusion movement has decentralized education services for the deaf student while the means of assessment have grown more centralized, i.e. state and national testing. However, virtually no accommodations for those tests have been made with respect to the needs of the deaf. Add to that, the movement to standardized tests since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) is now transitioning into high stakes testing.

The IDEA has maintained the power of the IEP team to determine how the student gains access to the curriculum, however it has also moved toward the student's inclusion in state and district wide tests (Raimondo, 2008). Yet, there is

little if any accommodations made for deaf students with regard to testing.

Adapting standardized tests which were constructed without any consideration for the deaf student is quite difficult. Indeed, the diversity within the group with respect to communication modality, among other things, makes validity all but impossible.

It would seem that having court cases as the driving force for education policy creates a one-size-fits-all mindset which is not amenable to the complex needs of deaf students. Or perhaps, the fear of becoming a court case causes stakeholders to take conveniently unsophisticated views as to what constitutes LRE and FAPE for deaf students.

Life Curriculum

Insofar as Devon's education was concerned, I determined that I would not worry so much about when Devon learned things, rather I would build on her skills at a pace which best suited them. So long as she learned what I dubbed the "life curriculum" her mother and I had devised, by the time she left us, I would be satisfied. My tactics would be formed and altered to feed my long term strategic goal of winning the war and no time would be spent on lamenting a lost battle or two.

I reasoned that I had learned a great deal from my parents through absorption because, although they almost never stopped talking, they actually said very little to me directly. I realized that such a method was not available to Devon and that I would have to create instances/situations wherein what I later learned is termed "incidental learning" occurred. Moreover, I would have to put it all in a pleasing venue through which to generate interest.

My faith in this method was tested from time to time. Having spent my education according to strictly-structured curriculum guidelines, it was difficult to step back from that dogma. I also knew that regardless of my philosophy, the education world would continue to operate according to its own physics, which would from time to time necessitate moving a skill or subject to the forefront of things to cover.

Some of my less generous biographers will no doubt someday deem my confidence concerning the life curriculum as more cocksure than correct. And some may choose to apply the word arrogant. While it is true I was fairly certain I had formulated a worthy plan, there were times when my confidence was shaken.

One calm winter's day, just after a snowfall, when Devon was about five years old, I walked with her to the back of our property. We came across fresh rabbit tracks in the snow and we

started to follow them. We had gone some distance when Devon stopped and turned to me.

"We shouldn't go here. We could get in trouble," she said very solemnly.

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Because we don't have permission to go on this land."

"We're not going to be in trouble. I own this land," I said and smiled, even though I was a bit stunned to learn that she had no idea what constituted her own backyard. Granted, it was larger than most backyards but it was where she'd lived all her life.

"Really?" she said with a look of incredulity.

"Yes."

"All this land?" she said, perfectly showing me with her hands the parameter of her question.

"Yes," I said.

"And the trees too?" she asked, her eyes widening.

As with so many moments with her, my perspective did a back flip. In that instant, the idea of owning trees seemed an absurdity.

"The trees own themselves. They do what they want, but I do own all this land so it's okay to keep following the rabbit tracks."

She gave the landscape another sweep with her eyes and I had a profound wish I could see past them to the inner workings of her exceptional mind to watch how she made sense of it all. For the rest of our sojourn I did no small amount of soul searching to figure out how I could have so stupidly failed to include such an obvious bit of knowledge in the life curriculum.

Still, she had learned it and I consoled myself by repeating my long-term strategic plan to myself. After all, what did it matter when she learned about her back yard so long as she had? And, by the end of our walk, she had.

I was to have my confidence in the comprehensiveness of my life curriculum shaken again when Devon was about ten years old and she came to me to ask what ethnicity we were. I was so dumbfounded at the question that I asked her to fingerspell ethnicity again because I was almost certain I had misunderstood. I had not.

Perhaps my lax attitudes towards race, ethnicity, and religion had something to do with my overlooking something so basic. Still, it jarred me to think that I had.

There are times in our lives when we recall learning things and then there are so many more learnings that go unrecorded in our memories. I came to believe that some, if not the majority of what we learn as youngsters, is absorbed. The information permeates our lives like background radiation.

As a deaf child, Devon couldn't overhear her mother and I discussing anything. Even if we had communicated in sign language most of the time, which we did not, Devon would only have been able to "overhear" us if the conversation was in line of sight. Although we always signed when Devon was participating in any given discussion, it was common for us to converse orally otherwise.

I felt some solace on this matter when Devon took a sociology course in college which required her to ask me specific questions about my background. I answered the questions fully of course, however, many of the questions concerned facts, and much of my personal history, I was certain I had mentioned at some point or another. It happens that children, even those with a titanic memory like Devon, very often forget what you tell them.

MOTHER

Devon's mother didn't recall my walk in the backyard with Devon. She did however, remember me yammering on about a life curriculum shortly after we discovered that Devon was deaf.

She said, "I didn't know exactly what you were talking about, but I trusted that you knew what you were doing."

When we discussed the matter, I said that there were, from time to time, some startling gaps in the life curriculum.

Devon's mother laughed and said, "Yeah!"

Devon's mother didn't recall the ethnicity story. Nor did she recall ever having that conversation with Devon.

God Signs

When Devon was about seven years old, we were talking and she said, "When I'm hearing--"

My mind snapped to attention instantly. "*When I'm hearing?*"

"What do you mean, when you're hearing?" I asked.

"When I go to heaven."

"I don't understand," I said, even though I'd already guessed where this was coming from and was hoping I was wrong.

"When you go to heaven the lame will walk, the blind will see, and the deaf will hear," she recited.

I was right. My blood pressure shot up so fast and so furiously at the realization my suspicions were correct that, had I been hooked up to sphygmometer, it would have exploded.

I had guessed that someone had taken it upon himself to school my daughter in religion and chose a most unfortunate passage from the bible with which to do so.

What this good Samaritan was telling my daughter was straight out of the worst the audist perspective has to offer, i.e. you are too defective to dwell in the presence of the Lord, therefore you must be fixed before you may do so. It is a not-so-subtle message, but then for a child of Devon's intellect it didn't have to be obvious. She, as I believe is the case with most deaf children, is fully capable of understanding subtlety.

Against the rage hammering at my brain, I smiled slowly and said, "I don't believe that."

"But the bible says . . ."

"The bible says a lot of things. Don't you think God signs?"

She thought about it and said, "Yes."

"So then why would God make you hearing?"

"Yeah, he wouldn't need to."

"It's very possible that God only signs, in which case God would make the hearing people sign. Maybe make them deaf like Him."

I called the school and told them not to address the issue of religion with our daughter. I also wrote a letter to the head of the Deaf Ed. Program at the local intermediate unit telling her the same thing. I left out the part about it being wildly unethical and technically illegal since she attended a

public school. I didn't feel the need to persuade them of my position. I was telling, not asking.

The curious thing here was that Devon approached her mother on the same subject. The fact that she would do so was indicative of how deep the matter went with her.

When I questioned her mother about this incident, it had been some years since we'd last discussed it. She said, "She was in sixth grade and she was talking to her interpreter. She came home all upset. She asked me if she was broken."

"What do you mean, are you broken?" her mother asked.

"Am I broken?"

"No you're not broken, who told you that?"

"No, when I get to heaven I'm gonna be fixed."

"Her interpreter told her that when she gets to heaven she'd be made to hear. I said, 'No, you are not broken, you don't need to be fixed. You're perfect the way you are.'"

"She started to cry and then asked, 'How will God know what I'm saying?' I said, 'God knows all languages. He knows sign language, he knows Braille, Chinese, Polish, English.'"

"She signed 'Okay,' and stopped crying."

Devon's mother called the teacher and told her the situation. The teacher said "WHAT?!"

Her mother said, "You never, ever, bring religion into the classroom with my kid."

The teacher said, "I will take care of this situation and it will not happen again."

But there is another element to this experience which angered me. From the time Devon was diagnosed, I knew the moment she realized she was different from most people was coming. It was my intention to delay its arrival for as long as possible, not because I thought that being deaf was bad but because I felt the revelation that she was different from most people could cause hurt and long-term consequences if it negatively affected her self-esteem.

Devon's mother and I didn't want her to feel bad about being deaf. Some children can overcome any obstacle; however, most cannot. Being alienated because of a personal characteristic can cause problems with one's development. Consequently, I expended no small amount of effort making sure Devon had a seamless existence surrounded by people who could sign.

Devon didn't know she was deaf until she was nearly five years old. I was in the kitchen going through our morning routine when, as I was tying my shoe, the toast popped up. Devon began tapping me on the shoulder and I signed without looking up, "I know the toast popped up."

When I looked up, Devon, wide eyed, asked, "How did you know the toast popped up?"

I smiled and said, "Because I heard it."

I explained that the toast popping up caused vibrations which traveled to my ears and caused me to hear. I told her that she couldn't hear because she was deaf. She was awed at my ability to hear and treated it as if I had just revealed a superpower. From time to time she would ask me if I could hear things and I could see she was trying to figure out just how far my hearing abilities went.

Deaf Identity

Deafness in and of itself does not create a specific identity. There are deaf persons who do not have a deaf identity but a hearing identity and there are still others who have a bicultural identity (Cerney, 2007).

The diversity of the deaf itself defies the possibility of a uniform identity for the deaf. Yet, if one was forced to define deaf identity, one might respond with three possibilities: culturally deaf, culturally hearing, and bicultural (Bat-Chava, 2000).

The culturally deaf are those who use sign language and participate in the deaf community. The Deaf community (always written with a capital "d") communicates manually and interacts with each other. This group sees deafness as something to be

celebrated rather than as a pathological condition which needs to be fixed (Bat-Chava, 2000).

The culturally hearing are those deaf persons who do not sign. They are sometimes referred to as Oral Deaf since voice is the principal mode with which they communicate. They typically have little if any interaction with other deaf people (Bat-Chava, 2000).

Prior to the diaspora from residential schools throughout the second half of the twentieth century, deaf children spent their formative years very much in the company of other deaf people. Indeed, they learned a great many things which children usually learn from their parents from people outside their immediate families.

That close interaction of deaf children in the various residential school communities throughout America gave rise to a common language and a cultural identity. Deaf identity is heavily dependent upon the amount of time one spends around deaf people and exposed to deaf culture (Andrews, Leigh, and Weiner, 2004; Cerney, 2007).

We all are composed of multiple identities, some which greatly influence us and some with very little or mild influence. Identity is largely dependent upon social constructs and setting (Storbeck & Magongwa, 2006).

The question then becomes: where does a given identity begin and where does it end? I was very concerned about this issue with Devon. I did not want her identity as a deaf person to cause her to have low self-esteem.

Neil Glickman (1993) created a Deaf Identity Scale (DIDS) to measure Deaf cultural identity. This research was designed to determine how one develops a culturally deaf identity. Glickman theorized that there are essentially four stages of cultural identity development: culturally hearing which are those who hold the dominant culture's attitudes concerning the deaf, culturally marginal are those who are confused as to whether they are culturally Deaf or culturally hearing, immersion identity are those who take a radical or militant position regarding being culturally Deaf, and, bicultural are those who are comfortable existing in both the Deaf world and the hearing world.

Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh, and Allen (1998) modified Glickman's Deaf Identity Development Scale to include hearing people. Interestingly, they found that deaf and hard of hearing adults who had hearing parents tend to be more marginalized and tend to have more hearing values than hearing people.

Ethnicity, degree of hearing loss, and early school experiences all play a role in the development of identity for

deaf children (Bat-Chava, 2000; Storbeck & Magongwa, 2006). It is a matter of diverse complexity which deserves more attention.

Suppose

"Suppose I could give you pill that would make you a hearing person like me," I asked Devon after a short lull in our conversation. "Would you take it?"

It was an early summer night and we were standing at the pool, looking over the clear water at a soft, yellow sunset. I was nursing a beer, watching the slow demise of the day when Devon walked up and began chatting with me. She was nine years old and tall enough to lean on the pool rail with me to watch the show.

She reflected on my question for a quiet moment then said, "No, I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"I'm a deaf person, that's who I am."

"Okay, then what if I had a pill that could make me deaf like you, would you want me to take it?"

Again she paused to give the matter thought. "No, I wouldn't want you to do that."

"Why not" I asked, now ignoring the beer and the sunset altogether.

"Because you are hearing, that's who you are."

I was very shocked to get such a sophisticated answer from a child of nine.

Then she added, "Besides, as a hearing person you can interpret for me."

I smiled widely and said, "Man, you are becoming more and more like your mother every day."

Our conversation skipped to other things but my mind stuck with her answers to my questions. I had hit on a very important subject, one much discussed in deaf studies: the matter of deaf identity. The purpose of my questions was to provoke conversation. I had not counted on Devon giving me such well-founded, thought-provoking answers.

I cannot recall anything else we discussed that night. However, I have returned to those answers many, many times over the years. Clearly, she was comfortable with the matter of her deafness. But how did that come about?

The matter of deaf identity was not unknown to me at that time. In fact, it wasn't long after we discovered Devon's deafness that we began to receive advice on the matter from all sides. Strangers would approach us to offer advice in public if they happened to notice that Devon was signing rather than talking.

Perhaps the most surreal interaction regarding this subject occurred when Devon was three years old. A teacher sent by the

county to work with Devon was standing in my kitchen just after the lesson and asked, "What college are you going to send her to?"

My mind did a back flip. I never expected to be asked that question. "I don't know," I replied. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Well, just don't send her to Gallaudet!"

I started to ask, "Why not?" but she was not taking any chances that I might change the subject or in any way not get the message as she intended it. She cut me off blurting, "She'll become one of those deaf culture fanatics!"

I smiled slowly. I was more amused at her assertion than offended by her bigotry. You can't control what your children will come to believe any more than you can stop them from growing up. This became apparent to me when I was quite young. One of my earliest memories is my oldest brother Frances arguing rather forcefully with my father about a place called Vietnam.

My parents' ability to value the mundane was a gift from the unrelenting poverty of their childhood. They shared a remarkable number of similarities in their histories considering they were from a city which sported so much diversity.

Our mother's family had an almost identical history to our father's, except that her family came to America to escape persecution for being Jewish, rather than to avoid military

service as his had. The members of her family all married Germans until her grandfather married an Irish woman and refused to discuss his religion with anyone. After that turn of events, the record of her family history with respect to religion is harder to read than a newspaper left out in a week of heavy rain. All my mother would say on the topic was, "I'm a Roman Catholic like your father." However, if the question was asked too directly, she would say, "I'm a Roman Catholic like your father. Now leave me the hell alone!"

The only other evidence I had of my mother's religious status was a remark by my Aunt Barbara, my mother's only sibling, made to Francis, the first born of my parents' ten children. Although the circumstances of the conversation were never made clear to me, apparently she said, "I'm a German Jew." On that point Francis is certain.

Both my parents were Republicans. My father died before I asked such questions however, I did ask my mother once why she was a Republican. She said, "Because your father was a Republican! Now leave me the hell alone, you!"

Yet, my father's ten children all grew up to be Democrats. And despite my parent's attempts to inculcate religion in us through large doses of Catholic school, only two attend church weekly and one of the two is now a protestant.

I doubt my father would approve of his children's political and religious beliefs. His version of God and country was a bit on the extreme side of the political spectrum. Once when I asked Francis if our father was a conservative who would have supported Reagan he said, "I think he would have supported any government with a big military."

I didn't inform Devon's teacher of the aforementioned however. I simply said that I didn't believe I could control Devon's opinions but that I would do my best to make sure she had the basic skills one needs to form a value system. She looked at me as if I had just told her I believed Godzilla was real and he was partial to Japanese cities because of all the high-fiber buildings.

She took another stab at it by saying, "You do not want your child to become one of those deaf culture fanatics!"

"Actually," I said slowly, "my main concern is that she never involves herself in a war or warlike action. After that, she needs to work out her own philosophy."

The teacher let the matter drop after that. My new-age, neo-flowerchild attitude was too much for her to contemplate. However, I thought of it a great deal after my conversation with Devon at the pool. What was wrong with a minority caring for their civil rights and identity? And when did one become a "fanatic"?

In the following years I would spend a good deal of time on Gallaudet campus for various reasons and would never encounter what would seem to be a deaf fanatic; nor would I endure so much as one negative comment from anyone about being a hearing person.

Ironically, it was the deaf community which seemed the most open and least angry concerning deaf identity. I also found them to be very diverse in their opinions, so much so that at times I felt it hard to consider them as a homogenous group.

In the end, Devon chose to be herself. She looked at various colleges including Gallaudet but picked my alma mater, Bloomsburg University. This pleased her mother more than I because of its close proximity to our home (Gallaudet is much farther away). She never much liked the idea of Devon being too far away.

While sitting at Christmas dinner during Devon's senior year the conversation turned to the matter of deaf identity. Not far into the conversation Devon remarked, with no prompting from me, that she felt some of the students in the Deaf community at her college were hard-core deaf fanatics but were not as fanatical as the kids at Gallaudet. I laughed and told her that I never encountered such behavior in my time at Gallaudet. I then said, "Let me tell you a story about a guy, a three year old deaf kid, and a teacher."

Teachers and Inclusion/Mainstreaming

Much of the literature about the deaf makes use of the term mainstreaming. It is often used interchangeably with the term inclusion even though, technically, they are not the same thing. In mainstreaming, the student is selectively placed in one or more classrooms depending on his ability to keep up with his peers. While inclusion also places students with special needs in "regular" classrooms, it provides for the students' needs to be taken care of in the classroom itself (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004).

Essentially, mainstreaming removes the student from class to go to the services and inclusion brings the services to the student in the classroom. Despite their distinctly different theoretical approaches to the issue of placing deaf students in hearing classrooms, one is likely to find either, or a combination of the two, in any given school.

Many studies done on including deaf children in regular education classrooms concluded that instructing teachers and administrators on various teaching techniques for the deaf and how to use an interpreter was a factor in students' success (Cerney, 2007; Connor, 1978; Easterbrooks, 1997; Heron, 1978; Holcomb, 1992; Johnson et al. 1989; Ramsey, 1997). Moreover, familiarizing them with the dynamics of the deaf, i.e. hearing

parents, job prospects, and legal status, helped teachers and administrators develop more positive attitudes toward the deaf student.

Holcomb (1992) examined the status of mainstreamed students and developed what he described as a system to support mainstream instruction. He based it on the four "P's" of mainstreaming—people, place, purpose, and process. Holcomb (1992) maintained that the four "P's" are essential to building a supportive program for integrating deaf students into hearing classrooms. These communication guidelines were published for teachers who have deaf students in their classroom. The guidelines are as follows:

- a. Maintain visual lines of communication.
- b. Attend to the speaker (not the interpreter).
- c. Use pauses to let the interpreter catch up.
- d. Recognize speakers.
- e. Foster a relaxed atmosphere (pp. 17-19).

These guidelines are helpful but are by no means comprehensive. However, they do demonstrate a strong belief that the hearing teacher may be confused by simple day to day interactions with the deaf, i.e. the proper etiquette for passing between the deaf student and the interpreter and how to properly get a deaf student's attention.

Luckner and Denzin (1998) also maintained that there is a need to provide specific adaptations to the inclusion classroom for deaf children. They also offered adaptations for social-behavioral evaluation, as well as grading. The latter is not often addressed in the literature.

A pilot program for teacher support on-line was begun in 1997 in Saskatchewan, Canada. Consultation services were made available via the World Wide Web for administrators and teachers responsible for a profoundly deaf student in a rural school. This relatively inexpensive method of supporting the inclusion student was deemed successful by evaluators (Weber, 1997). This innovative approach also had the added benefit of providing continuous help.

Clair (1995) conducted a case-study of English as Second Language (ESL) students, wherein she concluded that ongoing teacher study groups were superior to one-shot workshops. Clair (1995) was not specifically addressing deaf children, however they could be and are considered by many, to be ESL students. Clair also concluded, as many researchers of deaf students have, that teachers are insufficiently prepared to offer the instruction needed to help ESL students integrate into the regular classroom (1995).

Wilson (1997) interviewed 23 deaf teenagers. Her report concluded that students preferred a mixed placement because they

felt it gave them a well-rounded education. The students also felt that mixed placement provided them with information about both the hearing and Deaf worlds.

Wilson's study (1997) seems to indicate that deaf students prefer integration in regular education classes as long as it is not too integrated. Or, perhaps, the preference of the students in Wilson's study (1997) is a mainstream setting with just enough residential type time to counterbalance the hearing environment of the regular education school.

This desire of deaf students to have some instruction in a deaf placement may be an attempt to mitigate some of the harsher aspects of inclusion. The attitudes toward the deaf by teachers, administrators, and hearing peers play a crucial role in the quality of the inclusion experience for a deaf child. They heavily influence the daily experiences of the deaf student (Cerney, 2007; Luckner, 2006).

Kyle (1991) posited that many deaf students are perennial outsiders because of teachers' poor attitudes about deafness. Kyle also felt that the lack of interaction between deaf and hearing students contributed to alienation of deaf students. However, the attitudes of the persons most responsible for the success of the inclusion placement, the teachers, are most critical.

Ramsey (1997) takes a stand similar to Kyle with respect to inclusion. She spent an entire school year observing three deaf students included as part of an inter-district cooperative deaf education program. The children received some instruction in a resource room but were inclusion for most of the day.

After her year of observation, Ramsey (1997) concluded, "The mere placement of deaf and hearing children in the same room is a waste of deaf children's developmental time and a thoughtless burden to place on them." (pg. 113)

Ramsey (1997) felt that the deaf children in the regular classrooms were treated as mascots and the hearing children behaved as if it were their responsibility to be caretakers of the deaf students. Ramsey argued, "Unless a school principal and teaching staff can make a commitment to preparing themselves to communicate with and understand the educational needs of deaf children, simply scheduling periods of integration is a fruitless exercise in logistics." (p. 113)

Liu (1995) also questions the efficacy of inclusion. He argues that a quality education for the purpose of integrating into society is not possible through inclusion. He contends that equal access to education does not ensure equal access to knowledge.

Liu (1995) argues for a more flexible system than that of least restrictive environment. Interestingly, Liu supports his

arguments by associating Deaf culture with deaf education. He maintains that education is a cultural endeavor as well as academic. Students learn moral, political and social attitudes and beliefs in the normal course of education.

Liu (1995) cites the use of signed English systems instead of ASL, the lack of instruction in Deaf Culture, and placement in regular education classrooms which do not address the Deaf perspective as evidence of the dominate culture essentially assimilating a minority culture. The needs of the deaf student are ignored in deference to majority culture.

The overall purpose of Mainstreaming/Inclusion is to place the student in the least restrictive environment as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, what constitutes the least restrictive environment as concerns the deaf student is not easily determined. In short, physical placement in classrooms with their nondisabled peers does not provide for the least restrictive environment as pertains to deaf students. Many researchers now argue that for the deaf student, the least restrictive environment is that which provides the greatest access to language and social learning (Cerney, 2007; Liu 1995; Ramsey, 1997).

Better than Nothing

"Well, you're better than nothing!" she said.

I couldn't argue with her logic but I had had better job offers. Her offer also took the pressure off. Taking the responsibility for being a student's interpreter when you really didn't know what you were doing can and will provoke anxiety in anyone with even a hint of moral rectitude.

"Okay," I said.

"Great, when can you meet with the superintendent?"

We set up a meeting and just after I hung up, my anxiety came flooding back. I had interpreted a few classes during my student teaching assignment for my master's degree, but it was for a social studies class, a subject I was certified to teach and well versed in. Now I'd have to do them all, and every day, all day. Big difference.

I met with the superintendent and the woman from the local intermediate unit (IU) who so accurately appraised my worth as an interpreter as being better than nothing. She was the Supervisor of her Intermediate Unit's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program, a position I would later hold, albeit at a different IU. Neither of them signed and I was asked no questions concerning sign language or interpreting. I accepted the position as offered and quickly learned that the job of an

educational interpreter is as difficult to do as it is to define.

I was made familiar with the Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf's (RID) code of ethics for interpreters while in college. It didn't take me long however to realize that the code was not as applicable to educational interpreting as it was to regular interpreting. It reminded me of the Prime Directive of the Star Trek Series of the 1960s. The Prime Directive was the rule/law that the crew of the Starship Enterprise could not break at any cost but wound up breaking in the first five minutes of nearly every episode.

I found myself doing a great many informal duties which were not part of the code. I would have to, from time to time, go off message to teach or reteach concepts. I did favors for the teachers and administration so long as it didn't interfere with coverage. I would at times edit the message for length or content. I would interpret as much of the classroom conversation as I could. I also encouraged the students to participate in the class when I thought it necessary to do so.

It didn't take me long to realize that there are only so many signs a student will absorb in the course of a day. I dubbed this the "S" factor. Every student's S-factor is different but once that limit is reached, no more learning will occur. Consequently, I learned to husband my signs.

I did not sign everything the teacher said as would be in keeping with the RID code. A teacher may tell a class five times that they must bring in their signed permission slips for the field trip next Friday but I would only sign the message until I was satisfied the student got the message. I also kept fingerspelling to a minimum by asking the teachers what was coming up and researching signs for that content.

Monitoring the S-factor was also related to another aspect of educational interpreting: I was responsible for keeping the student's attention. If I were to just sign without taking responsibility for keeping the student's attention, they would most certainly fail. I took a direct approach. Each time I would start to work with a student, I would say, "I'll make a deal with you. You don't waste my time and I won't waste yours. I won't sign any more than I need to but when I sign, you pay attention."

I found that I was not only responsible for transmitting the message but also for whether or not that message was understood. I had to check for understanding often and maintain an ear for what the teacher was saying while I stopped interpreting to explain a concept or point of information. I would then catch up to the conversation.

I think I learned fast and was satisfied that overall I did a fine job as an interpreter; however, I cannot help but think

that my education came at the expense of the deaf students who were subject to having an interpreter that may have been not much better than nothing. Indeed, I came to believe that the demands of educational interpreting are such that one's signing skills must be of the highest quality for one to be effective.

My time as an interpreter intersected with Devon's life when she transitioned into junior high school. I was told that Devon was getting a new interpreter. The problem was, the interpreter was a better-than-nothing interpreter. I let my feelings be known on the subject and was told by the same supervisor who had gotten me my first job as an interpreter years before that there was nothing to be done.

I discussed this matter with Devon's mother and we decided that we would find a worthy interpreter for Devon ourselves. The next day Devon's mother called the interpreter who had worked with Devon when she went to Head Start. She was available and was enthusiastic to work with Devon again.

I contacted the IU and explained the situation and, to my amazement, they said that they could not hire the interpreter we found for them. I was not given a reason but was told that there was nothing they could do.

I attempted to contact the superintendent of our home district in an effort to discuss the possibility of the district hiring an interpreter directly rather than going through the

intermediate unit, which is in most cases cheaper for the district. It didn't take me long to realize that the superintendent was ducking my calls. I called the school board member for my ward whom I had met out in front of the polls on Election Day. I explained my plight and she said she would take care of it. The superintendent called me just under thirty minutes later.

After exchanging pleasantries I got to the point by saying, "I want you to consider hiring an interpreter for my daughter directly. I'm not satisfied that the interpreter the IU is offering is up to the task and they don't feel they can do any better."

"I can't do that because we have a contract with the IU," he said in a tone which conveyed finality.

I expected more. I didn't expect that he would jump to the defense of a student with special needs. In my experience with superintendents, the only time I ever observed them get motivated to solve an issue was when it involved the sports program. Still, I thought he would at least try to schmooze a bit, perhaps convince me that he'd put his best person on it, or even give me an I'll-look-into-it before giving me a no. Clearly, he wasn't going to devote any of his time to help me with this.

"I didn't sign any contract," I said. "However, let me put it in plain terms so that you understand me. I will get what I want. You can either help me get what I want or you can give me a hard time but in the end, I will get what I want."

There was a pause then he said, "I'll speak with the IU and get back to you."

I thanked him for his time then hung up. He never called me again. I received a call the following day from the IU. They said they couldn't hire my candidate outright but would consider my candidate with others and asked if I would serve on the hiring committee. I said I would serve.

I prepared a hiring rubric with a Lykert scale to assess the candidates. The other persons on the hiring committee had no such device and when they saw mine, they asked if they could have copies of mine to use. I said sure and got one of the secretaries in the IU to make some copies.

In the end, the committee went with my candidate. She was by far the best. I chose not to gloat and thanked them all for their help.

The interpreter did a fine job but called us about three months later to say that she was diagnosed with cancer and could no longer work with Devon. I figured I had to go back through the whole process again but before I could get started, I

received a call from the IU informing me that they had a highly qualified interpreter for Devon.

I met with her and found her to be a quality candidate. She worked well with Devon and liked her so much that she postponed her plans for graduate school so she could stay with Devon through to graduation, which she missed by two months to have her first child.

MOTHER

Devon's mother recalled few details concerning the difficulties we had with the interpreter when Devon went to junior high school. She did recall an interpreter incident which occurred when Devon was in grade school.

Devon's mother said, "Devon came home and said, '. . . my note taker ...' I asked her, 'What do you mean your note-taker?' Then she said her interpreter has been out for three days now because her daughter had surgery. It turns out the note-taker was deaf. I called up the teacher and said [that] them getting a deaf person to take notes is like getting a blind person to teach someone to drive."

"I called the supervisor and told her about the situation. She said she didn't have enough interpreters. I reminded her how you offered to train interpreters for free for the IU and

they laughed in your face. She said, 'I don't know what to tell you, we just don't have interpreters.'"

"I called the teacher back and asked her to rearrange the schedule so that Devon could have an interpreter. The teacher said she had other students to think about. I told her that I didn't care about the other students. I said Devon is a straight A student. She needs an interpreter, not to be put in a corner and given busy work."

It is true that I offered to train interpreters for the IU gratis. It is also true that they refused my offer. However, they did so via letter; they did not actually laugh in my face. The letter was professional and plain.

I made the offer to train interpreters shortly after Devon was left without an interpreter for three days. I did so because I wanted to ensure that such a thing would never happen again. I also wanted to make sure that there would be interpreters aplenty when Devon got to high school.

I asked Devon what she thought of the interpreter services she had received throughout her school years. She elected to provide me with a written response to my question (see Appendix C).

Devon's thoughts on her interpreters cover several issues regarding the role and expectation of interpreters. Professionalism, discipline, the effect of the interpreter on

social status, and dependency upon the interpreter for communication are all issues with which deaf students, interpreters, teachers, parents, and administrators must contend.

Devon identifies the matter of student discipline quite early in her thoughts on the subject of interpreters. It is a very important issue and one I never fail to ask about when interviewing a prospective interpreter for hire. It is something I have found to play a part in the success of the student.

The professionalism of the interpreter is critical to serving the needs of the deaf student. Showing up late, not transmitting the message properly, not preparing, etc. all serve to disempower the deaf student. It puts them at a disadvantage.

Interestingly, Devon mentions a seldom-broached topic but one I have had to deal with as an administrator: the issue of social status as relates to the interpreter. Students, mostly in the upper grades, will be embarrassed by interpreters who are slovenly looking, dress poorly, and/or act in socially awkward ways. The interpreter is an extension of their social selves.

Educational Interpreters

Comparatively little research has been done concerning educational interpreters since the passage of P1 94-142. This is surprising considering the widely held belief that the educational interpreter plays a pivotal role in the education of the inclusion deaf student.

Kluwin and Stewart maintain that there is no "clear definition" of good interpreting. Indeed, a great deal of the research focuses on either the elements or factors of interpreting or the role of the interpreter (Cokely, 1986; Schein, 1990; Seal, 1998).

There is a belief among some researchers that interpreting itself is flawed and should be considered so when designing a program for the deaf. Ramsey (2001) asserts that interpreting cannot be considered a "perfect conduit" for teaching. She states, "Deaf students deserve access to genuine opportunities for learning, and it is not yet clear that these opportunities can be brought about through educational interpreters" (2001, p. 24). Winston (2001) maintains that complete access, no matter the competence of the interpreter, is impossible.

Ramsey (2001) and Winston (2001) primarily refer to the issue of fidelity between the teacher's intended message and the interpreted message, which Kluwin and Stewart (2001) define as,

". . . the degree of accurateness between the original and the interpreted message." (p. 16)

There is evidence to suggest that the fidelity of interpreting is affected by yet another factor, and that is, student signing competence. However, research conducted separately over a span of several years concluded that sign mode was unrelated to comprehension of message (Caccamise & Blaisdell, 1977; Cokely, 1990; Hatfield & Caccamise, 1978). It is also interesting to note that Schien and Mallory (1991) found that the older the student was, the more complete the message received would be.

One area in which researchers seem to agree with respect to educational interpreting is the issue of interpreter training. Whereas there seemed to be no consensus as to what would constitute an appropriate interpreter training program, nearly all the researchers felt that interpreter training is critical and that presently, interpreters, on the whole, are not properly trained (Andrews, Leigh, & Weiner, 2004; Cerney, 2006; Dahl & Wilcox, 1990; Jones, Clark, & Stoltz 1997; Kluwin & Stuart, 2001; Schick, Williams, & Bolster, 1999; Schick, Williams, & Kupermintz, 2006; Stedt, 1992; Kluwin, 1994; Ramsey, 2001; Yarger, 2001).

In 1994, Kluwin conducted a survey of interpreters in which he interviewed forty interpreters from 13 different programs

across the United States. He concluded that there was a great variation in the quality and experience of interpreters in general.

From his survey Kluwin (1994) offers a comprehensive categorization of the composition of educational interpreters. He determined that there are essentially four types of interpreters: professional interpreters, educational interpreters, communication aides, and aides who interpret. He also found that the hiring practices for interpreters were far from uniform and that there was substantial variability in the evaluation methods used to determine competence.

Schick, Williams, and Bolster (1999) conducted a study in which they evaluated the skill levels of educational interpreters. They found that most of the interpreters who took part in the study could not perform minimally competent interpreting.

One method of evaluation of interpreters' skill currently coming into widespread use is the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). The EIPA attempts to recreate a classroom situation through video tape(s) which the prospective interpreter watches and interprets. The prospective interpreter is in turn videotaped taking the test. The finished tapes are sent to trained evaluators who then evaluate them. The test taker is rated on grammar, prosody, sign vocabulary,

fingerspelling, and other behaviors related to competent interpreting (Schick & Williams, 1999).

A study by Schick et al. (2006) found that approximately 60% of the 2100 interpreters given the Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment (EIPA) nationwide were deemed to have inadequate skills to provide full access for their students. It should also be noted that while many states are adopting tests such as the EIPA as a method of qualifying interpreters many others are not. Consequently, there are interpreters who, as was the case with me, are not subjected to any formal test before being hired.

Stewart, Shein, and Cartwright (1998) suggest that the following questions need to be addressed by administrators tasked with obtaining an interpreter for deaf students:

- a. What is the status of interpreters in the school hierarchy?
- b. What qualifications should educational interpreters have?
- c. Should an educational interpreter's responsibilities include duties unrelated to communication support for deaf students?
- d. Who supervises interpreters?
- e. Who evaluates them?

- f. Should interpreters discipline students? Interact with them in other ways?
- g. Do students have a right to select their interpreters and to decide how they should function?
- h. What are the interpreters' rights? (p. 215)

The preponderance of research on educational interpreters indicates that there is little, if any, quality control concerning educational interpreters. Although it is generally agreed that the interpreter is integral to the education of the deaf student, little effort has been expended in researching the position. Principals, Supervisors of Special Education, and all those tasked with hiring and ultimately overseeing educational interpreters must do so with little information available concerning the position.

As an administrator charged with supervising a relatively large Deaf and Hard of Hearing program, I have expended no small amount of labor attempting to avoid the better-than-nothing scenario. Yet, despite my efforts and luck in this regard, I have faced it on more than a few occasions. Clearly the deaf students who rely on interpreters as a part of their education pay a heavy price for the systemic neglect which gives rise to the better-than-nothing scenario.

Deaf Club

I had watched them for a while, trying to discern who the leader was. It was tough to tell because they signed to each other at the speed of light and they used a ton of signs I'd never seen before, many of which I was fairly certain were not in any of my books.

After about 20 minutes I decided that the short, stout woman with the short, dark, curly hair was in some way directing the group. She stopped at the score table to log her score after a throw and I decided that it was time to approach her.

I walked over and waved hello. She waved back and I signed, "I'm not crazy but I want to watch you all bowl."

"Why?" she asked.

All of the other bowlers who were signing away when I approached had stopped and were watching us, which started to give me a self-conscious feeling.

"Because," I fingerspelled slowly, not knowing the sign for the word, "I want to learn sign language."

"Why do you want to learn sign language?"

I could see that she was signing differently to me than she had with her group. Earlier, with them, she signed in short choppy motions. She had an economy of movement that made me think each sign was worth about five words. But now her hands

moved noticeably slower and seemed to use more space. I could also see that our conversation now had the entire group's attention.

"Because I have a daughter that is deaf," I said, using the sign for "is" (a Signed English sign). If they hadn't already figured out that I didn't know what I was doing, they did at this point.

As soon as I finished my last statement, the entire group began signing at once. I didn't understand a word of it, but I gathered they were asking about the daughter. And, from their smiles, I gathered that they were very happy for me that I had a deaf child.

The short lady was indeed their leader. That is, she was the president of their deaf club. Her name was Aurora and she would prove to be a huge help in the coming years. She was also the mother of two deaf boys who were in college.

Devon was about four years old at the time. She was progressing nicely in her learning. However, I surmised that her knowledge of sign, as well as my own, was a limiting factor in what I could teach her. I also thought that the formal classes I was taking at the university, all taught by hearing people, were somehow falling short.

I got the idea that if I watched deaf people signing, I could pick up how to sign conversationally. A deaf woman we had

briefly hired to be a babysitter for Devon (in another failed attempt to get her to sign) had told me there was a group of deaf people who bowled at a in a nearby bowling alley every Friday night.

Aurora quickly brought all the moving hands to a halt and began to question me for them. I had Devon with me and when I brought her over, all the hands started moving again. The deaf people all seemed overjoyed to see a deaf child signing so well.

Aurora told me that it would be fine if I watched them, so each week I'd take Devon and her younger sister Abby to the bowling alley for some deaf people watching.

I quickly realized, however, that watching people sign was of nominal value. The best way for me to learn was to mix with them and ask questions. I felt extremely nervous talking to these people despite their unflinching kindness. I knew that my signing was terrible and was aware that such halting conversations can be annoying to those who are fluent and are out for an enjoyable time with friends.

I figured I would keep the conversations light and ask no more than three questions about sign language per week. Usually I hit Aurora with all three questions, but gradually I started to hit up the others.

My three questions per week started to yield some revelations about the deaf, which in turn became revelations

about myself. The first time a deaf person told me that they didn't know the sign for something, I almost blurted out, "What do mean you don't know!?" Clearly, my television-induced version of the deaf had me ignoring the fact that, like hearing people, there are varying degrees to which any individual acquires vocabulary. It should also be noted that there are many words in English which do not have a specific corresponding sign.

Later, much later, when I got more proficient in signing, I had deeper conversations with the deaf and I was able to make observations of a more subtle nature. Once, when I asked an older woman why her husband signed a particular concept differently than she, she responded dismissively, "Oh, he's PSD! I'm SSSD!"

She was telling me that he attended the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and she had attended Scranton State School for the Deaf. Once upon a time, the deaf were largely educated in residential schools (now sometimes referred to as center schools). Those schools became more like family to them than their real families with whom they spent surprisingly little time. The formulation of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 and other legislation instigated a change in the education of the deaf which shifted a large number of deaf students away from residential schools to public schools.

The sign language used by the deaf today owes nearly all of its development to those residential schools of yesterday. Each school developed its own style, more akin to accent, I'd say, than dialect. And, in my observation, while each school represented family, the interactions between members of differing schools were more akin to being fans of differing sports teams rather than warring parties like the Hatfields and the McCoys.

I also discovered that sign language is so much more than signing. My focus on the signs while attempting to communicate with the deaf was very much like a child who stares at his feet pumping the pedals, ignoring all else, when first learning to ride a bike.

I had been told that facial expression and body positioning (kinesthetics) were important while signing. It wasn't until later that I understood those to be elements of the overall message. Initially, like most hearing people, I focused nearly my entire attention on using the right sign, occasionally remembering to attach a facial expression with it, i.e. making a sad face when signing "sad."

One day when I was talking with Aurora and another woman during a Christmas Party, Aurora turned to me and said, "You didn't understand that."

I said that I understood what the woman had said and repeated the signs she had made. Aurora then told me what the woman had actually said which, to my surprise, turned out to be a double entendre regarding penis size.

I realized at that moment that the deaf had been telling me more than just what the signs indicated, only I had not been getting the whole message. I suppose I could plead innocence as this was new ground for me, however I cannot help but wonder if I would have so easily overlooked prosodies had I been learning an auditory language such as French. While I believed ASL was a language in its own right, I hadn't approached it that way.

I had reduced a fully functioning language to little more than Morse code. Yet, Devon and Abby didn't seem to have any difficulties at all and liked it when we went to the bowling alley.

After a few weeks, however, Aurora approached me and said, "You know, you don't have to come here with all this smelly cigarette smoke. We have a Deaf club. You're welcome to come. It's every Saturday night."

I sometimes thought that Aurora was a mind reader but later came to understand that she, like nearly all deaf people who rely on sign language to communicate, read facial expression as easily as one reads the headlines of a newspaper. I was annoyed

with the cigarette smoke but had never mentioned it. But then, with her, I didn't have to. She read it in my face.

The weekend following her generous offer I started taking Devon and Abby to Deaf club. Devon's mother attended sporadically since she often worked weekends.

The deaf club met in the basement of a church which was owned by the club and rented to a Protestant group. I was filled with anxiety every time I went there because they were all deaf and there were no translators present. I would have to rely solely on my ability to sign in a room full of pros. It was like trying out for the Yankees with a 38 mile-an-hour fastball. You figure it's only a matter of time before they show you the door.

But the people in the club never mentioned it, nor did they treat me with anything other than kindness. The only person who refused to speak with me was Aurora's husband, who disliked hearing people in general and, I gathered, didn't much like to converse with people who weren't fluent in his language. Still, he was always cordial to me.

The first mention of signing ability by the Deaf people in the club was, to my immense surprise, not about me but about Devon. They told me that I had to tell her to slow down, that she signed too fast. I told them that to me, they all signed too fast, but that I would talk to Devon.

Devon did sign quickly but I thought little of it because I could always read her. Then again, I had spent more time talking with her. I was used to her signing. It never occurred to me that anyone could sign too fast for the deaf.

Years later, while at Gallaudet University, one of the interpreters told me that M.J. Bienvenu came to lecture at the university and was asked by the interpreters to slow down. I told her to just wait till Devon got there.

The only other snag in those early days was that Abby would often try to talk to the deaf and I'd have to gently remind her to sign. Here, too, the club members surprised me in that they thought it was funny when the little hearing kid thought they were hearing as well.

Deaf Culture

Many deaf people view deafness as a culture. They see themselves as a linguistic minority. Members are bound by attitudinal deafness (Andrews, Leigh & Weiner, 2004; Luetke-Stalman & Luckner, 1991; Moores, 1987). People identify themselves as members without regard to degree of hearing loss. The Deaf Community considers itself to be a cultural group with a common history, concerns, and language (White, 1994).

Deaf Culture is different from most subcultures in that most subcultures are based on ethnicity. The Deaf Community is comprised of many different ethnicities. As previously stated, most deaf children are born to hearing parents (Moore, 1987). Consequently, deaf children acquire their cultural identity from their peers instead of from their parents (Dolnick, 1993).

It has also been contended that there is no such thing as Deaf Culture (Seamans, 1996). Gilliam and Easterbrooks (1997) argue that Deaf Culture is indeed real and state the following:

If a culture is defined as heritage, language, and a set of customs and values shared by its members and transmitted from one generation to the next then the Deaf community truly is a culture. Members of the Deaf Culture are a group of individuals who have a common heritage (historical events, famous figures, art, literature, and scholarly organizations), a common language (American Sign Language), and a set of customs and values (cherishing deaf children, expecting participation in cultural events, valuing the visual world, protecting one another). This heritage is passed on from one generation to the next via the residential school, where they learn such things as Deaf folklore (jokes, legends, games, riddles, etc.) from other children, deaf teachers, and deaf houseparents. (p. 3)

Seamans (1996) refutes the concept of Deaf Culture. He argues that the models on which the claim to Deaf culture are based are flawed. Seamans considers ASL to be a sort of gestural short hand utilized by the deaf because they never mastered the English language. He also maintains that folk tales and other vestiges of culture developed by the Deaf were created as a result of the exclusion of the Deaf from hearing society rather than proof of the existence of a separate and distinct culture.

Members of the Deaf Community believe deafness is not a condition which needs to be "cured." Medical breakthroughs are not seen as progress. Cochlear implants are seen as offensive. The editors of the magazine *Deaf Life* wrote:

An implant is the ultimate invasion of the ear, the ultimate denial of deafness, the ultimate refusal to let deaf children be Deaf. . . Parents who choose to have their children implanted, are in effect saying 'I certainly don't want my child to be part of it. I want him/her to be part of the hearing world, not the Deaf World.' (Dolnick, 1993, p. 43)

Inclusion of deaf students into hearing schools is also seen as a threat to Deaf Culture. Traditionally residential schools were the place deaf children acquired Deaf Culture. Many members of Deaf Culture maintain that inclusion will only

serve to isolate the deaf student. The deaf students will be unable to communicate effectively with their peers.

That scenario may be playing itself out. Mitchell and Karchmer (2006) found that the distribution of inclusion deaf students is becoming broader. They estimate 80% of schools serving the deaf and hard of hearing have three or fewer students who are deaf or hard of hearing. More than half of the schools (53%) serving the deaf and hard of hearing population have only one student (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006).

The larger issue is whether or not Deaf Culture in itself enhances the academic experience of the included deaf student. Does Deaf Culture affect student achievement? Does including Deaf Culture in the curriculum help? There is no consensus as to whether or not a Deaf Culture based curriculum would improve achievement. However, it has been long established that deaf children of deaf parents acquire a higher competency in English and overall academic skills than deaf children born to hearing parents (Johnson et al, 1989). This may be due to children being exposed to a fully developed language in their formative years rather than exposure to Deaf Culture (Case, 2008).

A relatively recent attempt to include Deaf Culture in the education of the deaf is the Bicultural/Bilingual (Bi Bi) approach. This approach was grounded in the case advanced by Liu (1995) concerning the majority culture dominating the minority

culture of the deaf and the dissatisfaction of many over the fact that literacy among deaf children remained essentially unchanged by the late 1980s despite the use of Total Communication sign systems. The Bi Bi approach, like virtually all areas in deaf education, has become controversial.

There is no appreciable consensus as to what Bi Bi is and how it should be implemented. There is a conventional definition which characterizes Bi Bi as utilizing ASL exclusively to communicate with deaf children and to teach English as a second language. The use of ASL as the dominant language (L1) for instruction is at the heart of the conventional Bi Bi approach (Moore, 2001).

Until the work of Stokoe in the early 1960's, ASL was not considered a language per se. Many educators now see ASL as the natural language of the deaf. Eagan (1987) stated that deaf children acquire ASL linguistic structures or structures resembling ASL faster than English structures. This acceptance of ASL as a language gave impetus to the development of the Bi Bi approach.

Advocates of Bi Bi believe ASL is the native language of the deaf. Moreover, ASL is an integral part of Deaf Culture. Deaf Culture and ASL have shaped each other and cannot be separated. Proponents of this approach contend that teaching ASL is, in effect, teaching Deaf Culture (Duffy, 1987).

Duffy (1987) cites research which has shown that deaf students who have not had exposure to ASL still develop ASL-like habits as proof that ASL is the natural language of the deaf. Duffy further maintains that simultaneous communication does not deliver exact English in the classroom and thereby prevents deaf children from experiencing language naturally (Duffy, 1987).

The Bi Bi approach is in no way utilized uniformly by educators of the deaf. Indeed, many versions of this approach have been developed and used. These homespun Bi Bi programs are described as transitional and maintenance by McAnally and Susan (1994).

The Bi Bi approach has come under harsh criticism from some educators of the deaf. As stated previously, the foundation of the conventional Bi Bi approach is ASL as a first language for the deaf child. Many educators of the deaf contend this ignores the fact that only approximately 10% of all deaf children are born to deaf parents (Moore, 1987). The remaining 90% are born to hearing parents who are not proficient in ASL, or who choose to use a sign system, or who choose not to use sign language at all (Stuckless, 1991).

Opponents of Bi Bi also assert that the small number of deaf children who actually have ASL as a first language and the small number of educators of the Deaf who are proficient in ASL render Bi Bi impractical. It would be difficult for schools to

acquire qualified personnel.

The Instructional and Practical Communication (IPC) approach to teaching deaf children was born of this argument. In IPC, both languages are used but in a less structured and dogmatic way. In this approach, teachers are expected to meet instructional and communication objectives through use of sound judgment (Stewart, 2006).

Instructional and Practical Communication is meant to be used in all subjects at all grade levels. By tailoring the use of ASL, English, SimmComm etc., the teacher will better meet the needs of the variety of language skills typically inherent in any group of deaf students. Moreover, the teacher will be teaching language as well as subject matter (Stewart, 2006).

DeLana, Gentry, and Andrews (2007) maintain that this use of a dual language methodology, while not new in deaf education, may owe its re-emergence to the demands of the No Child Left Behind legislation. They believe it signals the beginning of a change in focus from the condition of deafness as a deficiency which needs to be overcome to the method of instruction as being a deficiency which needs to be overcome.

The bicultural aspect of Bi Bi has also come under attack. Stuckless (1991) states:

A driving force behind the present movement is empowerment and the quest for full enfranchisement and self-

determination for deaf people. This is a sociopolitical goal. Whereas sociopolitical and educational goals may each be worthy and defensible in their own rights, they are not always compatible, particularly within the context of public education (pp. 270-272).

Given the slow pace of change within the education of the deaf, it is most probable that, regardless of the outcome of research with respect to Bi Bi, the principal mode of teaching the deaf for the foreseeable future will be some form of inclusion. Research designed to determine the appropriateness of inclusion in and of itself has given way to research designed to determine the most efficient and efficacious ways for its implementation (Stewart, 2006; DeLana, Gentry, & Andrews; 2007).

Incorporating Deaf Culture as a component of deaf education for students included in regular education is indeed complicated. Local Education Agents (LEA's) must consider the implications of whether or not to include Deaf Culture in preparing an individualized education plan. They must weigh the issue against cost, parental consent, and the needs of the individual. Moreover, they would be advocating something whose value is as yet an unknown quantity.

Soccer Team

"Yeah, your daughter can't be on the team because she's deaf."

It had been a long day. But then, they were all long days at that time. Devon was in 9th grade and I was working as an Assistant Principal at an inner city school about an hour and a half drive from home. I was calling the soccer coach during my daily gasoline fix because Devon's mother had called me earlier to say that there was a problem with Devon getting on the team.

I wanted to scream at him. I wanted to scream curses at him, long strings of metaphors, orders, and terse statements comprised of mostly four letter words. I wanted to reach through the phone and choke the stupid right out him, but I didn't.

The fact that he would say something so utterly impossible in so matter-of-fact way told me that the ways of modern school law were unknown to him. There was no legal way he could prevent Devon from being on the team but he didn't seem to know it. I might have pitied him if it wasn't the end of a long day and if I hadn't spent said long day dealing with the same sort of stupidity in a different school entity.

"Okay," I said amiably, "I understand your situation, it's just that I've been through this before and what typically

happens is that initially people feel that having a deaf kid around is going to be a problem, but after a while they get used to the process of working through the interpreter, and I guarantee she will always have an interpreter with her. Then you pick up some signs, and the other kids on the team will learn some signs. Deaf kids are real good at communicating with hearing people and you'll think you can sign like a pro."

"Yeah?"

"Oh yeah. Then you'll really love having the deaf student on your team."

I paused to let him ponder what I had said. I also wanted him to say something so I could read just how successful my argument was.

"Humph," was all he said.

I decided to wrap this up with a classic maneuver. It was one of the oldest tricks in the school administrator bag of tricks. I said, "Why not give it a try? If I'm wrong you can always remove her from the team and if she's no good at soccer, you don't have to play her."

"Okay," he said with little enthusiasm.

"Great! Thanks, I really appreciate this. I'll let her know and have her mom take care of getting her the physical and whatnot."

I thanked him one more time then hung up. I got her on the team without using a sledge hammer but I wasn't proud of myself, just tired.

This wasn't the first time I'd encountered this sort of behavior and at least with this coach, I was dealing with an amateur. I'd been given the business by professional educators too.

Towards the end of the summer, just before Devon was to start in high school, she anxiously awaited the freshman orientation which was to take place at night a few days prior to the start of the new school year.

I knew she was looking forward to it because she took the time to remind me of it frequently in the weeks leading up to it. As one who had both attended and produced, numerous orientations, I was not really looking on it as a good time but was enjoying the fact that Devon was looking forward to it.

I put on my black pinstripe suit, quickly buffed my best pair of black wing-tip shoes, and found Devon already waiting by the car when I got to it. She talked animatedly all during the ride, which told me that she was excited.

When I pulled up to the high school, I instinctively started searching for a parking spot in the parking lots which had just come into view. I was surprised to find nearly all of them empty.

Something wasn't right. I checked my watch. We were five minutes early. There was no way there'd be that many spots open just five minutes before the show. I picked a spot up front and began to wonder if I had the right night.

"What's wrong?" Devon asked.

"I was wondering if we have the right night."

"It's the right night," she assured me.

We entered the building and followed the signs to the orientation. They led us not to the auditorium, or the gymnasium, or the cafeteria as I expected but, to a mid-sized octagonal room with a small stage and about ten long tables scattered about haphazardly.

There were about a dozen students with their parents being "orientated" individually. Half of the students were in wheel chairs. These were the students, who like my daughter, were not invited to the freshman orientation with the other students. That orientation had taken place twenty-four hours earlier.

It reminded me of the scene in the movie "Animal House" wherein the two pledges go to a mixer at the Omega house and are repeatedly brought to an area set aside for the pledges who have no chance of getting in.

Devon was crestfallen. Her disappointment was absolute. She had never seen the movie "Animal House," but I could read in her face that she knew exactly what was going on.

I let the principal know what I thought of the situation. He swore obsequiously that there was no ill intent behind what had happened. I told him that I wasn't buying it. I told him that as a school administrator myself I was appalled at what he had done.

Devon didn't say a word the whole way home. I spent the ride home trying to think of what I was going to say to her when we got home. In the end, I decided to go with honesty.

I told Devon that she was probably going to experience more such nastiness in the future. I told her that people are often ignorant and mean to each other. I told her that I was hoping that she wouldn't learn this life lesson until she was older but perhaps it was just as well to learn it now.

She nodded, but I couldn't tell if my words had any impact. I was very angry with the principal for what he'd done but I was also a bit angry at myself for not checking ahead of time. I know it seems farfetched, but I somehow felt that it was partly my fault for not watching out for it.

The orientation debacle occurred several years before my conversation with the soccer coach. Devon did play well and my predictions about her being on the team proved accurate. The coach really took a liking to Devon and played her according to her talent at soccer, which I deemed to be slightly above average.

I didn't tell Devon about the coach's reluctance to have her on the team for obvious reasons and the only source of negativity for her in the whole experience was my videotaping her at the games. She hated it.

I told her that someday she was going to grow up and leave me and the videos would be all I'd have to remember her when she was young. Then I added that someday her children might want to see their mom when she was in high school playing soccer.

Devon wasn't buying it. She told me that I was embarrassing her and that she was never going to have children.

I told her that I said the same thing when I was her age and here she was. Besides which, since it was I who gave her life, she owed me.

Devon did not appreciate my humor and did as she had done since she was a small child: she went to her mother. I stood firm however. I videotaped at every opportunity.

MOTHER

I asked Devon's mother if she recalled the incident with the soccer coach. Immediately recalling it, she said, "Oh yeah."

"Devon wanted to join the soccer team. We signed her up. Then the coach called and said he was not sure if we can put her

on the team. He said that PIAA regulations might not allow it because she didn't reside in the district."

Devon went to a neighboring district when she first went to school because that was the only one in the area which had classes specifically set up to work with the deaf. The original plan was for her to return to our district when she matured and could handle school with just her and an interpreter. However, when she came of age, I decided to let her make the decision herself since she'd never gotten anything but straight A's. She chose to stay in the neighboring district because that was where her friends were.

"The coach said he'd look it up. I said, 'Are you sure it doesn't have anything to do with her being deaf?' He said, 'Oh no no, that doesn't have anything to do with it.'"

"His wife called the next day and said they apologize for the confusion about the rules and would love to have her on the team."

The PIAA, The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, governs school sports in Pennsylvania. On my first day as a school administrator I was given a binder-book listing all the PIAA rules. It was about a foot thick. I was told to "get to know it." I did not consult PIAA rules in this instance.

I knew that the law was on my side and it would only take a few well-placed calls to have the coach come to know it too. However, I chose not to do so if I didn't have to because I felt that forcing the coach to accept Devon on the team would have negative repercussions. At the least, he would see Devon as a punishment, which would only make him angry every time he encountered her. If it were his decision, he would more likely support it.

The reason the coach didn't know anything about school law was because he was not a professional educator. He was a local hired by the district when they couldn't get a teacher to take the position. I think he was genuinely saddened when Devon's time on the team was over.

Voting and Time

"Hi," I said, "I need you to sign this."

I slid the voter registration form across my desk to the edge where Devon was standing. It was the only cleared space, albeit a small one, on the large desk top.

She picked it up and looked it over. She furrowed her brow then looked at me and said, "I'll sign it later."

I said nothing in response, already knowing what was wrong. I smiled and nodded slightly as a means of saying 'Okay' and watched her turn and leave.

I knew what the problem was. I also knew that I needed to let her consider the matter and then formulate her complaint even though I already knew what it was going to be.

Devon was upset that, in the section on party affiliation, I had checked the box for the Democratic Party. Her objection to my doing so had nothing to do with national politics, however. Her objection was more personal, proving once again the old adage, 'All politics is local.'

My choosing a political party for her was loathsome. She was a senior in high school and her parents, whom she always considered too strict and at times overbearing, were now telling her what party to join. It didn't matter that it was the party she wanted to join anyway.

I totally understood her point of view. I also anticipated that she may be upset about my doing the choosing for her. I took the chance that she would be okay with me doing what I did for no other reason than it was most convenient for me to do so. I had a great deal of work I was dealing with at the time and I wanted to take care of the voter registration quickly.

I never liked my children growing up and I have had to struggle with giving them more and more freedom. I have always

known that one of the principal responsibilities of a parent is to teach the child how to make decisions. At first we make all of the decisions for them. Gradually, we give them more and more onus over making the decisions in their lives.

Theoretically, we release the decisions to their control at the precise time we should, according to the child's development. Most of the time however, the process in practice is not so smooth.

It usually becomes a running battle with the children pushing for more and more autonomy while the parents try to hold them back. Indeed, Devon and I had had this oldest of tug-of-wars numerous times throughout her childhood.

After Devon left the room, I sat and thought about how I'd filled out the voter registration form for her. I wondered how much of the decision to do it was based on a bureaucrat's desire to complete paperwork, complete just another task quickly, and how much of it was a parent's need to protect his child. Mostly I was asking myself the big question: Did I do it because she was deaf?

Devon's mother and I resolved not long after we discovered she was deaf that we would only treat her differently from hearing children when it was necessary. Other than that, we would have the same expectations for her. A good rule of thumb, which I would find easier to agree upon than to live by.

I asked myself the deaf question many, many times throughout Devon's childhood. Certainly, some decisions were easily made and not much thought about, such as no jumping on the couch. But others, like the voter registration, were not so easy to define.

I've never rowed a row boat across an ocean, but I would imagine that if I did, I would be very excited at first and the prospect of getting to the other side would be very real to me. Gradually, eventually, the rhythm of the rowing would occupy my thoughts, all land would slip out of sight, and the other side would become an abstraction. Then one day, the abstraction, long sequestered in the rarely visited portions of my consciousness, would come front and center as I glimpsed the thin ribbon of beach in the distance. Then I'd hear the scraping noise as the bow of the boat hit the opposite shore and know the journey was over.

Raising Devon was much that way and the distant shore, the dividing line in my mind, was her graduation from college. It was my goal from the moment she was born. Yet, getting there took so much time and rowing that I came to believe it would never come to pass.

The graduation ceremony was a somewhat comical affair. There were several hundred students graduating. I was seated about a football field away from the stage. I was able to video

tape much of the ceremony by slipping through the crowd to several strategic spots up near the action. When Devon exited the stage I lost sight of her but anticipated she would be returning in the line stage left. Somehow she got in the line exiting stage right. Consequently, I had the camera pointed in the opposite direction when she returned to her seat a newly minted graduate.

The only down moment was when Devon went up on the stage to collect her diploma, neither one of the two interpreters there for the students got up to go with her. As she was handed her diploma by the university president, he said something to her. She nodded and smiled. He returned her smile and she walked off stage.

Later, when we were posing for pictures, I mentioned it to Devon. She just smiled and shrugged. I told her that she was a big phony and she laughed.

I looked to my right at the milling crowd of happy graduates and their families and then turned back towards Devon. She, too, was observing the crowd, and for an instant, I saw her as someone else might see her, a young woman. She looked like an adult. It was surreal.

I was there when she was born. I witnessed the very instant she came into the world. I remember her rolling towards the Christmas tree to get at the shiny ornaments when she was

just ten months old. I remember teaching her to fingerspell. I remember her standing in the kitchen at age four showing me with her hands a leaf falling from a tree.

Time plays tricks on me. It abuses my body and mind. I underestimated its steady, unrelenting, uncaring pace and it stole my children. It replaced them with adults of whom I see less and less.

I still live on the small farm where the children were raised. Sometimes I drink red wine and wander the property hoping to catch a memory or two. I walk where we followed the rabbit tracks in the snow. I stand where the pool used to be and look out at the field where we played badminton, had water gun fights, and played a million other games.

One memory that I revisit often comes from when Devon was about five years old. It was a day in early September. A chilling wind came down from the north, chasing away the last of the late summer heat. The sky was filled with puffy, bright white clouds cruising slowly.

I cannot recall exactly what I was doing when I realized that Devon was no longer playing in the side yard by the driveway. I immediately began to look for her. I headed for the front of the house. As I rounded the corner I saw Devon standing on the porch.

She was standing on the very edge of the side which faces north. She was faced away from me so she did not see me edging up on her at an oblique angle.

She stood there with her arms outstretched in front of her with her palms tilted upward. The wind was blowing her long hair straight back. In that pose, she looked like a pagan statue, a goddess of the winds calling upon them to bring on autumn.

In my mind's eye I can still see her standing there smiling, the sun sparkling off the auburn highlights in her hair tossed by the gusting wind. She closed her eyes and tilted her head back ever so slightly, taking in the pure joy of the moment. She pulled her arms in to her body and crossed them on her chest as if she were hugging the wind itself, then shuddered, her smile widening.

That most beautiful moment ended and Devon turned to see me standing on the lawn watching her. She waved and then ran to me.

That was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen or would ever see. Game Over.

Later that night I related what I'd seen to Devon's mother. I told her that if I ever wrote a story about raising Devon, I would title it "Embracing the Wind."

Summary

This chapter included several vignettes of my experiences as a parent of a deaf child as well as a review of the literature concerning the topics covered in the vignettes.

The review of the literature revealed that inclusion for deaf students as well as the supports for inclusion such as interpreting and regular education teacher knowledge of deaf education are problematic and suffer from deficiencies. Moreover, efforts to provide deaf students with the least restrictive environment has led to divisions among educators as to what constitutes the least restrictive environment for students with the unique communication needs of the deaf.

The main function of the education of the deaf is to provide access to the curriculum. Yet, there is little consensus as to the proper means of delivering that access. Educators still debate oral versus manual mode of communication as the language of instruction, centralized versus decentralized service delivery models, the proper method of assessment, and whether or not to include Deaf culture in the curriculum.

Chapter 4

Cards

Introduction

This chapter focuses on my first of two field experiences. The content and methods used in this field experience were determined after careful scrutiny of the information contained in chapter two. For this field experience, I prepared a series of seven questions which focused mainly on communication and identity (see appendix A).

This field experience was included in this research as a means of providing feedback concerning conclusions drawn from self reflected data. It was also intended as a means of making connections between my autobiographical data wherein I describe my experiences with the Deaf as a cultural outsider and sociocultural contexts.

The information presented herein is not a word-for-word account of my interactions with those present. Rather, it is a presentation of those conversations, impressions, and descriptions I felt were of most value to this work. It should also be noted that since nearly all the conversations took place in sign language, I have translated the dialogues presented from sign language to English.

The data is formatted as a novel for the ease of the reader. Certain details of a personal nature were omitted and names were changed to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

First Field Experience

After I was introduced to each member of the group of about 13 elderly deaf nursing home residents, I then retreated to neutral territory, an empty table among four others at the outer edge of the group, to arrange my paperwork and prepare to interview the participants as opportunity presented.

We were in a rather large room inside a building attached to a church. The church arranged to have these deaf nursing home residents gather there once a month to have lunch and play cards.

The residents were informed, at my introduction, that I would be coming around to each table to speak with those who wished to do so. Yet, I wasn't at my table long when I looked up and saw him approaching.

"Hi! I'm George," he voiced as he pulled out a chair. He was old and stooped but somehow his step seemed lively. He sat down and pulled a cochlear implant from his pocket and proceeded to put it on.

"I'll need this to talk to you."

He had an engaging smile and immediately began telling me his entire backstory. He had lost the hearing in his left ear and eighty percent of the hearing in his right ear when he was seven years old. He was sent to a school for the deaf.

I guessed he was sent to an oral school but asked him if he preferred me to voice or sign our conversation. He told me that he was okay with conversing auditorily and showed this was so by pointing to his cochlear implant. Then he hedged by stating he still needed to read lips, then he hedged again by saying, "I prefer to sign if I can. With the cochlear implant, I have to concentrate."

I told him I would sign. He, however, used his voice. He spoke with exceptional clarity and diction.

They did send him to an oral school where he got his first taste of sign language. The deaf kids signed with each other whenever the teachers weren't looking. He received his first hearing aid just after the end of World War II and was returned to a regular education school.

The hearing aid was large, came in several parts, and was of nominal use. He spent most of his time speech-reading and the rest of the time speculating on what was being said when the teachers would turn away from him while speaking. He managed to get decent grades despite the awful arrangement of his education. They told him he could go to college if he made up

some deficiencies with a tutor. He was not in a college track and as such, was never put into the classes he needed in order to qualify for college.

"The tutor had bad breath. She was a little thing about this high," he said, putting his hand considerably below shoulder height. "She had terrible breath but I had to keep up close so I could see her lips. What could I do?"

He went to college, graduated with a degree in Chemical Engineering, and got a job with a chemical company in Delaware. He'd spent his whole career there until he was forced into an early retirement with a bunch of other employees during cutbacks. He said that he felt they treated him okay but he had been held back because of his hearing loss.

Once you get over the auditory wall, you have to deal with the auditory ceiling, I thought, but didn't interrupt to say. I could see a cloud of bitterness cross his otherwise upbeat demeanor at the mention of his mistreatment by his former employers and I had no wish to prolong it.

After early retirement, he went to work for the state and did so for another ten years. He and his wife were just arranging to move into a retirement home when she passed away. He decided to get a cochlear implant the year following her death.

Ironically, he didn't really learn to sign or have much to do with the deaf community until later in his life when he and his wife, a hearing woman, took sign lessons from a church pastor.

His answers to my questions indicated that he considered himself to be a hearing person with a hearing loss. He also answered my questions concerning language with a bias toward English.

"The Deaf will not agree with me but I think they should offer them [deaf children] the cochlear implant. They will learn to communicate. Of course if they also want to learn sign, it should be encouraged."

"Do you consider yourself to be bilingual?"

"If you consider ASL a language, I suppose I am."

"Do you consider ASL a language?"

"Oh sure! Anything you can say in English, you can say with your hands, facial expressions and all that. I know you can communicate with concepts. You don't need English."

"What is communication?"

"Understanding a person . . . connecting emotionally and completely . . . maybe even feeling . . . someone talks and I

cry. That's communication," he said then broke into a wide smile.

I couldn't help but notice that in answer to my last question, he began to sign the answer as well as voice it.

Towards the end of the conversation, my fascination with his claim that he was not promoted because of his hearing loss overcame my reluctance to cause him the discomfort of the subject and I asked him about it again. This was the first time I had heard such a claim.

"You think those people at your job didn't promote you because of your deafness?"

"Oh yeah. They were decent to me but they weren't going to promote me. They kept me where I was but moved others guys up. They kept me there till they forced me into early retirement. It wasn't just me though, they forced a whole bunch of us out at that time. I got a job with the state and worked there for another ten years until retirement."

"Did anyone ever say that's why they wouldn't promote you?"

"Oh no. They wouldn't say that but I knew what it was."

I had always speculated about this issue but had never encountered anyone with such a claim. Of course, I had no way of checking his claim; however, it was hard to believe anyone with this man's personality and the raw brainpower it would take to get a chemical engineering degree under such adverse

conditions could be real far off base. I filed it away in my mind for future consideration.

He asked me a few questions about my background which I answered.

"Do they sign at the retirement home?" I asked, continuing my line of questioning.

"No," he said in a way which left no doubt that he was not happy about it.

"Do any of the people there try to learn any signs?"

"No, and they don't have any curiosity either!"

I told him that I was sorry to hear it and that I was very appreciative of his time and effort. He said it was no problem and that he would be around if I had any further questions.

George went off to get some food and I moved to the table to my right. It had four people sitting there, two men and two women. One of the two men was sleeping in his chair. I approached the woman nearest to where George and I had been sitting. She was slim with short, thick white hair and I noticed that she didn't wear glasses, neither for distance nor reading.

"Can I speak with you?" I asked.

"Sure!" she said brightly.

I pulled over a chair from an empty table adjacent to us and sat down. Before I could ask any questions, she began to

give me her entire backstory. I was beginning to think I wasn't the first researcher to speak with them.

Her name was Tessie. She signed and spoke at the same time, though both were done somewhat poorly at times. Tessie was ninety years old and had been deaf since birth. She said she had learned sign language in deaf class. I took that to mean she had attended a residential school for the deaf wherein they signed. I asked her which school and she told me. She said she loved the school.

She was married, but her husband passed away about twelve years ago. Now all she had were her daughter and granddaughter. She was very proud of both and now her granddaughter was going to nursing school.

I pictured her young granddaughter in nursing school, then caught myself. "Wait, if you're ninety years old, wouldn't your granddaughter be about forty?"

She laughed and said that her granddaughter was thirty-three years old and had been in business for many years, but turned to her mother's vocation after being laid off.

"Are your daughter and granddaughter hearing?" I asked.

"Yes, they are both hearing."

"Do you sign with them?"

"Oh yes. Do you sign with your children?"

"Yes, I do. One of my daughters is deaf and she only communicates by sign language."

At that, she smiled and nodded, making a sign which in sign language roughly means 'oh I see or very nice.'

"What do you consider yourself, deaf, or hard of hearing?" I asked, even though I was almost certain I knew the answer.

"Oh,deaf," she said with pride.

"Which form of communication do you prefer, signing or voicing?"

"English if a person can't sign but if they can sign, I prefer to sign."

"What is communication?"

"People communicate to help each other."

"Do you consider yourself Deaf Culture?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I'm deaf!" she said and laughed.

I laughed too and said, "I understand."

Then, as if to answer a question I did not ask, she said, "I think people should help people. I don't think people help people like they used to. People should help. That's what I think."

I didn't want to end our conversation, but the buffet of hamburgers and various salads had just opened and I didn't want

to keep her from her meal even though I was fairly sure Tessie would have sat with me and patiently answered my questions till the end of time if I asked her to. I thanked her for her time and help and she said I could talk with her anytime and to come back if I had any more questions.

Two Young Men

There were two young men working the card game for the group. I asked them if I could speak with them individually when and if they had some time. They both seemed enthusiastic to speak with me.

The first young man sat down and answered my questions quickly and without elaboration. His name was Rick. He was short and gaunt to the point that anyone looking at him for any length of time would feel the need to offer him something to eat. His red hair was short but seemed to be arranged with every possible direction given due consideration.

His answers to my initial questions were curiously middle of the road. For example, when I asked him if he considered himself deaf, hearing, or hard of hearing, he said, "I'm both but when I take my hearing aid off I'm deaf."

I sensed that the dynamic was the problem. Me, sitting asking questions as one would for a job interview or perhaps a

government agency, so I put my pen down and I told him a little of my history and then asked him about his parents.

He seemed to relax a bit, then gave me a morsel of his history. His mother and sisters were all hearing and none of them signed. He didn't learn sign until he went to school. I asked him where he went to high school and he told me the school and the name of his teacher. He said that he liked her and added, "But she retired."

I made no mention of the fact that I knew his teacher; nor did I tell him that she did not retire. She was fired for incompetence. I was the administrator who fired her.

He was raised oral until he entered school, yet he was signing with me. I was interested to get his take on the issue of language and deaf education.

"You did both oral and sign, which do you think is best for teaching deaf kids?"

"Sign language," he said without hesitation.

"Why?"

"So they can learn how to do sign language."

We talked for a bit more. I found out that he worked two low paying jobs and volunteered to work here at the church for the retired deaf who came once a month. I told him that I thought it quite generous of him to offer his time for the deaf.

"Yeah," Was all he said.

I thanked him for his time and he asked me for my phone number in case he thought of anything more to tell me. The card game concluded just as I gave it to him.

"Thanks again," I said. "Now's a good time for you to switch with your friend."

He said "Yep" as he got up and headed for the table with the set of giant playing cards strewn over its surface.

The other young man who was working the card games looked somewhat like the traditional version of Jesus Christ, except that his hair and beard were jet. His name was Joe. He came over and sat down as his counterpart took over his card game responsibilities.

"Thanks for sitting with me, I appreciate it," I said.

"No problem," he voiced. "I can speak."

"Oh," I said, "No problem."

I waited to see if he was going to provide me with his backstory like the others had, but he didn't say anything. After a while, I asked, "So, do you have any children?" A reasonable question, I thought, since he looked to be about thirty years old.

He had two daughters and he talked about them and his job at a local hospital. I told him I had daughters too and that one of them was born deaf. He told me I should send her to a deaf school and then began to inform me as to how to go about

doing so. I interrupted to say that the time for that had passed and that she was graduated from college.

He smiled and said, "Oh."

"Do you consider yourself deaf or hard of hearing?" I asked.

"Hard of hearing," he said without hesitation.

I thought that an interesting answer, considering his speech skills and his support of deaf schools. I have, after many years of working with the deaf, developed a sense of a person's hearing loss from their speech abilities. This is not a scientifically valid way of determining hearing loss. It is the equivalent of judging one's speed in an automobile by watching how fast objects appear to pass the vehicle. You're much better off checking your speedometer or, in the case of hearing loss, the audiogram. Still, in the absence of a known quantity, we humans rely on such gut instinct, and mine was telling me here that this young man had a considerable hearing loss.

"What is your preferred mode of communication?" I asked.

"I sign to deaf people but I talk to hearing people."

I was not sure how to take this answer, so I followed up with "Yes, but which form of communication do you prefer to use?"

"I sign to deaf people but hearing people, I talk to them."

I decided to take another tack and asked, "What do you think communication is?"

"If people can't hear, communication is in sign."

I believe Joe was being sincere and I think his agreeing to speak with me was out of kindness since it seemed his main concern was with the card game and his guests. I noticed he kept checking over his shoulder to monitor the game's progress. However, this was beginning to take on the feel of a TV. cop show interrogation, with me as the cop trying to get information and he as the suspect trying to give me neutral answers to avoid incriminating himself.

"Some people say that deafness is a disability and others say that it is a culture. What do you think? Is deafness a disability?"

"I don't know," he said, shrugging his shoulders lightly.

Even though he'd only given me few dots to connect, I felt I knew Joe's backstory. He was born deaf and given a great deal of oral instruction. Yes, he had identified with his aggressors (captors?) enough to survive and find his place in the world but he was wary of them.

My comparing our discussion to a TV cop show was perhaps more accurate than I intended. The people who forced him to be a hearing child were authority figures. Like any kid from a tough neighborhood, he knows you don't talk freely around cops.

I didn't want to push him on the subject. After all, this wasn't therapy for him and, given his obviously strong sense of responsibility towards his duties, his agreeing to speak with me was more than generous.

I thanked him for his time and let him get back to his game. Before he left, he wished me well with my research.

Reflections

I found it interesting that the answers to my questions seemed to follow both sides of the oral/manual divide. The deaf seemed to give me their hearing credentials along with their deaf bona fides, or was it the other way around? They were hardcore neutral, if one insist I put a label on them as a whole.

Their backstories and their answers to my questions to contained a certain amount of oppression insofar as oralism was concerned, even if they themselves were reluctant to label it as such.

The main activity was cards and I couldn't help but think of the combination of their game and my questions. Our conversations were, in essence, about the hand they had been dealt, metaphorically speaking, and how they played it.

However, it seemed to me that they were products of a system which often ignored their needs. Granted, their individual histories covered a great deal of time. George and Tessie started school prior to World War II and I estimated Joe as having started school sometime in the late nineteen eighties. Rick, the youngest, I gauged as having started school in the early nineties. However, Tessie, was the only one to have been given instruction using sign language in its purest form. She also seemed to be the only one who was educated in an environment in which deafness was a norm.

The responses given by the participants did seem contradictory and tautological at times but I sensed no intent to deceive me. I felt the participants were making a conscious effort to be as helpful as possible by rendering the most honest answers. Perhaps what I was seeing was the results of a dominant culture ignoring the needs of a minority culture in the interest of creating the phenomenon of the melting pot.

It is a process with which even now, in the very last years of their lives, they had to contend. I was surprised when George told me they all lived in a nursing home with no access to interpreters. His response, "No, and they don't have any curiosity either!" was, I felt, very descriptive of the problem.

Participants

I wanted to speak with the two young men. Were it not for them, I would have been the youngest person in the room by far. Much like a photographer looking for a good juxtaposition as part of a quality composition, I sat and talked with them expecting their responses to clash with that of the older participants. Yet, their actions and answers were shockingly similar to those of the older deaf people. I had assumed that generational differences alone would have provided for varied responses, but no.

The only real difference between the older people I interacted with and the two young men was that the young men seemed reluctant to provide me with information concerning their respective histories or declare themselves to be Deaf culture.

Joe seemed to be very much Deaf culture, yet he was reluctant to say so. His concern for the education of my daughter is very much in keeping with my observation of Deaf culture. Nearly every time I have mentioned that I had a deaf daughter to the Deaf, the matter of her education was discussed.

When I asked Tessie about her identity she had responded, "Because I'm deaf!" For her, the possibility of someone being deaf but not Deaf Culture was an absurdity. But then, she was raised in a residential school, way back when the deaf were, for

the most part, not permitted to attend regular education schools.

I left not sure if these people were, using Glickman's Deaf Identity Scale (1993), culturally marginal or bicultural. The distinction may lie with how comfortable they feel with their identity. As to that, I sensed no discomfort with the questions I asked; nor with the answers they provided. They answered quickly, seemingly without reservation, and always with the intention of being helpful.

I couldn't help but be touched by their willingness to spend their time talking with me about their lives and answering my questions. I wasn't surprised by this since, in my experience, the Deaf community has always helped me with my questions. When it was time to go, as expected, I got plenty of smiles, waves, and well wishes.

Chapter 5

41 Hours at Gallaudet University

Introduction

This chapter focuses on my second of two field experiences. This field experience was included in this research as a means of providing feedback concerning conclusions drawn from self reflected data. It was also intended as a means of making connections between my autobiographical data wherein I describe my experiences with the Deaf as a cultural outsider and sociocultural contexts.

The content and methods used in this field experience were determined after careful scrutiny of the information contained in chapter two as well as reflection of my first field experience (see chapter 4).

My interviews and discussion in this field experience focus on the two issues most prominent in my analysis of the research up to this point in the autoethnographic process: empowerment and ignorance.

The information presented herein is not a word-for-word account of my interactions with all those present. Rather, it is a presentation of those conversations, impressions, and descriptions I felt were of most value to this work. It should also be noted that since nearly all the conversations took place

in sign language, I have translated the dialogues presented from sign language to English.

The data is formatted like a novel for the ease of the reader. Certain details relating to a personal nature were omitted and names were changed to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

Second Field Experience

It was the first time I had ever visited it even though I had been to Gallaudet numerous times over the years. I stand at the entrance of the History Center taking a long look at the carnival of shapes, colors, and fonts. It has huge displays of Gallaudet's history stretching across three walls and about a hundred and fifty years.

Every school for the deaf I've ever visited has a section devoted to its history. This one was more colorful than most. On one end, the walls contain tidbits and minor factoids. A very complex history reduced to various points in time deemed to be of note. About midway through the oval shaped exhibit is a sculpture in the center of the floor and a technology display along the back wall. At the far end is a rather large wall mounted television with several benches spread before it. Presumably this was setup to show some sort of film of Gallaudet history but the TV. is set to CNN and the benches are empty.

I wander over to the technology display. It says, "Technology Today," in large letters above a paragraph of smaller lettering. Below that is a glass case which contains technological gadgets used by the deaf once upon a time. I spy among the ancient and semi-ancient technology a TTY which appears to be almost the very same TTY the Lion's club donated to me when Devon was about four years old. In that instant, it hits me that deaf history, part of it at least, is my history.

French Interpreter

I sat with a Sign Language Interpreter from France and waited for my first group of interviewees. She was about thirty years old, well dressed, and spoke English fluently with only a trace of an accent.

We were seated outside the Kellogg Conference Center on Gallaudet Campus and the weather was unseasonably mild. Even so, we both sat on the shaded side of the wrought iron table with our backs to the building.

I explained my work and my purpose for being at Gallaudet. She explained that she was in America as part of an international study concerning the early education of the deaf, and as such was working with the three persons for whom we were now waiting.

I asked her about the education of the deaf in France and she related to me that she felt it suffered as a result of their agreement to abide by the Milan conference of 1880 and was only now becoming amenable to sign language as the language of instruction.

I told her that it was interesting to me since it was the French who were the first to make efforts to include deaf children in public schools and they invented sign systems to help the deaf.

She said, "Yes, but that was only to teach them religion."

She also said that many French deaf people feel that to speech read and voice with hearing people ultimately works against them since the hearing people assume they have no problem communicating and thus assume no accommodations need to be made. Hearing people then turn away while talking, do not provide closed captioning, and so on. The deaf in France feel that empowerment comes from using sign language and interpreters when necessary.

She said, "Many deaf people have stopped voicing. They are tired of making an effort because people assume they can hear."

I asked her several questions about how interpreting services are provided in France and I wasn't sure if I was surprised that in almost no time, our conversation arrived at the better-than-nothing scenario.

According to her, the French government requires interpreters to obtain a master's degree before they can be licensed to interpret. However, there is a shortage of interpreters and the government started a program which she said roughly translates to "Interface." The Interface program often makes use of less-than-qualified interpreters to help the deaf have access to all those things people interact with in society such as banking services, town hall meetings, etc.

"This is an attempt to empower the deaf, but due to their poor abilities, and their ignorance, they hold them back."

The three interviewees the French Interpreter and I were waiting for arrived with waves of hello and wide smiles. The group consisted of two men and a woman, all around age thirty. They introduced themselves. Their names were Ted, Sonia, and Mike.

Ted asked if I had ever been to Gallaudet and would I like to be taken on a tour. I said that I had been to Gallaudet many times and thanked him for his offer. He then asked if I would like some lunch. I said yes and we all walked into the hotel and headed for the restaurant.

Ted picked a large round table in the corner of the hotel restaurant and convinced the waitress to remove the reserved sign and seat us there. I grabbed a chair next to Mike who had Sonia seated to his right. Ted and the French interpreter sat

opposite us. I put down my stuff and we headed to the salad bar.

I was the last to make it back to the table. I caught onto the conversation in progress as I was slowly placing my coffee on the table.

"Yeah!" Mike declared. "It's true! The pool had to be cleaned and scrubbed after the boys used it because they were afraid the women would get pregnant when it was their turn to use it."

Sonia put down her fork and said, "What did they think the boys were ejaculating in the pool?"

"I guess so," Mike said.

I remarked, "It would have been more efficient to have the women go first, then the pool would presumably be clean by the next day after its been filtered."

Ted and Mike chuckled at my remark, and the French interpreter seemed confused. I explained my work on deaf education and how it had led me to the conflicting issues concerning ignorance and empowerment. I said that I was interested in what they had to say on the subject. Each gave me a short answer without much comment.

I related to them what the French Interpreter and I were discussing when they arrived, i.e. the better-than-nothing scenario. I described a recent incident wherein a teacher of

the deaf who worked for me objected to cover a class as an interpreter to for a deaf student. I used this story as an example of a poor teacher.

All three of the young Ph.D. candidates became more animated and their comments became lengthier.

"How can you do that? Ted asked. "The ADA clearly states that every deaf student is entitled to a certified interpreter."

"Why would you send a deaf child to a class without a certified interpreter?" Sonia asked. "It makes no sense."

Before I could respond, Ted said, "The ADA was put into law so that deaf students could have access to education. Those students have a right to an interpreter. You hurt their education when you put them with someone who isn't certified to interpret."

"Yes, I agree that it is best to have a certified interpreter and in this instance, the teacher had been an interpreter prior to becoming a teacher of the deaf. But what if the choice is between a half-decent interpreter and no interpreter? It happens."

"Then you refuse to do it. You say, 'I won't do it' and force them to get the interpreter."

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I'd have gotten fired for that," I said.

"Then you tell the parents to get a lawyer and sue," he said.

"If there's one thing I've learned in education it's that once lawyers get involved, nobody learns anything," I replied. "And every dollar spent on lawyers is one less spent on students. You learn early as an administrator to avoid lawyers."

Ted shrugged and said, "Every time you go around the ADA you diminish the system. You make it worse. That doesn't help deaf students."

Sonia and Mike nodded in agreement.

I was somewhat taken aback by our exchange over the better-than-nothing scenario. I had never liked it but, always assuming I was on the side of the angels, I held my nose and made it work. Sometimes I was even proud of myself for my ingenuity. But here these young deaf people saw it in a completely different light. To them, I was merely perpetuating an almost sinister practice which ultimately robs the deaf student of opportunity and diminishes the system in the bargain.

Wishing to explore the matter further, I said, "I was a procedural administrator. That's here," I said, placing my hands shoulder height. "The ADA is here," I said, placing my hands above my head. "The law gets a bit grayer the closer it gets to the classroom."

I didn't want to debate the law; I wanted to get their input on the matter, so I said, "I have to provide someone to interpret for a student and if I get no one, the deaf student has to sit in a classroom without an interpreter. Isn't it better I have an even halfway good interpreter?"

"No." said Ted and Sonia without hesitation and at almost the same time.

"No," said Mike. "Having a bad interpreter is as bad as not having an interpreter. What if the interpreter gives the student the wrong information? Besides, you could avoid the issue if the students go to a deaf school. If the deaf school is far away then, the parents should move to the school."

"I chose not to move to a deaf school because the deaf people in my deaf club told me that deaf schools weren't that good."

He laughed and said, "Well, that was twenty years ago."

I wanted to explore this line of reasoning with him by mentioning that some of the students themselves wanted to go to hearing schools and many of the parents I dealt with had neither the money nor the inclination to move away from close relatives and their jobs, but it was time for them to go to a meeting.

Ted picked up the check and we said our goodbyes. I thanked them all then watched them leave. I sat down next to the French interpreter since she and I still had some time

before our meeting with two professors. She hadn't said much during our discussion. I was curious about what she thought.

"What do you think of what we were talking about?" I asked.

"CODA's affect better-than-nothing," she said.

"Because they know sign but not much else?" I asked.

"Yes, they get involved in interpreting but they do not know what the boundaries are and often do and say things which are not professional."

"Yeah, I know what you're talking about. I once had a Spanish interpreter who would give parents advice during IEP meetings. I had to tell him to stop concerning himself with the education stuff and stick to interpreting."

She laughed and then asked me what an IEP was. I explained and told her that France has a similar process for special needs children.

"Yes, we do have that in France. But it is not as involved as what you have."

"They have a version of the IEP in pretty much every European nation," I said.

Returning to our discussion on better-than-nothing, she said, "You know, sometimes you can fight when you need to fight. Sometimes you need to say no."

"It's a fine line to be sure," I said.

"The hearing parents push for their kids. But forcing the children to speak a different language is difficult for them. In Alsace, the children speak a language different from French."

"Yeah, because that chunk of land changes hands every other war or so," I said. "But they're not allowed to speak Alsatian at all?" I asked, thinking of how deaf children were barred from signing at all in oral schools.

She nodded then said, "Can you imagine what it is like for those kids when they have to do something as simple as order food in French?"

I laughed and said, "Actually I do because it was in this very room I had to order food in sign language for the first time and it was anxiety provoking."

"Yeah?"

"Oh yeah, I was sitting right there about twenty years ago," I said, pointing to a spot about ten feet from us. "As an American, I was used to being around people who knew my language. And even though I knew sign language, there was something about having to use sign for a specific purpose in a social situation that shook me up. I wasn't exactly traumatized but after my first time at Gallaudet, I developed a respect for deaf kids and what they go through in hearing schools."

"Exactly. At some point, you have to say it's not better than nothing. And you know, you need to remember, the

interpreter is not there for the deaf student, but for the hearing people who do not speak sign language."

It was time for the French interpreter and I to leave for our meeting with two professors. As we headed across campus, I asked her what the French words were for various items but my mind was still back at the hotel restaurant.

Professor Zed

I arrived at Dr. Zed's office door about ten minutes late for our appointment. I started to sign who I was then stalled completely because I thought I heard a dog growl at me, a sound I did not expect to hear while in a university professor's office. I picked up some movement coming from under the right side of her desk. I saw a dog's head pop out as it stood up. Dr. Zed stood up from behind her desk, moved around to where the dog could see her, and signed to the dog to sit down.

The dog turned slowly and disappeared back under the desk. I began my introduction again. I apologized for being late, as the people from the university had directed me to another office whose occupant had a similar name. She asked me where the professor was who was to accompany me to the meeting. I explained that he couldn't make it but that he was hoping we could all meet for dinner after she and I talked.

I talked briefly with Dr. Zed about my work and began to give her some background on the better-than-nothing scenario so that I could ask her directly about the matter. When I mentioned that my research kept bringing me back to the two issues of ignorance and empowerment, she interrupted me.

"Wait, stop!" she said earnestly.

I stopped and she related a story which took place during her childhood. She spoke for fifteen minutes without pause while I listened.

The story was both moving and disturbing. The lone deaf child in a large, poor family, she was sent to a hearing school. When she got to junior high, she was put into a regular math class but was given busy work separate from the classwork which was based on the assumption that, as a deaf child, she could not learn math. She found this situation intolerable.

She found a hearing friend who tutored her on the side and went to the local library and worked on geometry on the weekend, secretly improving her skills. She brought her case to the assistant principal, who was rude and dismissive to her while in a meeting with the math teacher. The math teacher was certain a deaf student did not possess the mental capacity necessary to learn geometry.

She became angry with the assistant principal and began to scream at him, which brought the principal into the room when he

heard the commotion. The principal decided to settle the matter with a test. She aced the test. The math teacher concluded that her high score proved only that she was adept at cheating since a deaf child couldn't do geometry. She was made to take another test which she also aced. It was at that point she was given some respect.

I had heard and read similar stories about deaf people at the hands of unknowing hearing educators and I told her so. I said that I was sorry for her suffering and that I dislike it when I hear of deaf students being mistreated, however, I was gratified to know that she advocated for herself and in the process, taught a valuable lesson to her educators.

I had received a text while she was talking inviting us to dinner. I asked if she wanted to go and she said yes.

Sensing that our time was running out, I decided to attempt to approach the better-than-nothing scenario again and asked her what she thought of it.

"Better than nothing doesn't cut it for me. If you have a teacher who is not doing a good enough job then you should fire them."

"It's not easy to fire teachers . . ."

"Yes, you can do it! I was a principal for years I know!" she interrupted me to say. "I had a teacher who was bad and I wrote out what she needed to improve and told her that if she

didn't improve then she would be fired. If you have a teacher who is not doing a good job, then fire them."

"I understand, but that is an involved long-term process which . . ."

"It doesn't matter. Better than nothing is not acceptable. We have suffered enough educationally."

At that, she stood to leave. The dog, who had been nearly motionless throughout our nearly forty minute interview, stood up as soon as she did. It was time to catch the university shuttle bus to the restaurant at Union Station.

While we walked to the bus, Dr. Zed related another story. This one was from her college years. It seems she had a professor who disliked having a deaf person in class and did much to give her a hard time gaining access to the curriculum. The endgame came when the professor decided that the grade for the class would be largely determined by oral quizzes.

"Did you contact any university officials?" I asked, hoping for a good ending to the story.

"Yes, but they wouldn't help me. I passed the class but with a low grade because I failed the oral quizzes. I did fine on everything else."

There was a moment of silence while the memory washed over her. It wasn't pleasant.

As if to cap the conversation we had earlier, she said, "Better than nothing is just setting yourself and the deaf kids up for failure."

Allen

Pretty near total exhaustion with my mind spinning from the events of the day, I headed across the hotel lobby. I saw a hotel employee I had met two years before when I was there for a conference. Just after checking in at the hotel on Friday night, I went to the hotel bar for dinner and he had recognized me.

His name was Allen and he was seated at a Guest computer terminal in the snack shop area. He waved me over and I changed direction and headed for him.

As I crossed the deserted lobby, my mind went back to Friday night just after I'd checked into the hotel. Allen was behind the bar and I was the only person in the restaurant working on a tough iteration of the New York Times crossword when a man and what I assumed was his 13 year old son walked into the restaurant. He was bone thin and the kid was obese. They looked at me and I nodded hello.

I turned back to my crossword dinner and about a minute later I heard the dad say, "What do you have . . .DO . .YOU . . HAVE . . THIS?"

I looked up to see him leaning across the bar pointing at a menu. The boy was wandering around the other side of the restaurant surveying the walls and ceiling as if it were a museum.

It was obvious the dad didn't know sign language so I hopped up and went over to interpret. It was a fortunate thing I was there to help them because the dad made a very specific order for him and his son. I rather doubt he could have pointed his way through the menu. On the other hand, I suppose he could have written it out for Allen, but it would have taken some time since the dad was the sort of restaurant patron who ordered his food by starting with a series of preliminary questions as if he were in a murder investigation on the Orient Express rather than a small bistro type restaurant with a menu sporting eight items.

After all the ordering was done, I turned back to the crossword puzzle leaving the dad and his son to their meals. The next clue was a tough one so I let my mind wander a bit and it occurred to me that nearly the same series of events occurred two years before. It seemed odd to me that people would go to Gallaudet but not know how to sign.

Allen came over and refilled my wine glass and thanked me for my help. I told him it was no problem.

"You were here before?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "About two years ago. I was here for a conference."

"Yeah, I remember you."

He asked me what I did for a living, why I was at the university, and where I was from. He told me that he was going to college now in pursuit of a degree. I wished him luck with his studies and we returned to our respective occupations.

I interpreted for him two more times before I left for the night and felt nothing about it, but now, after all the discussions earlier in the day about the better-than-nothing scenario, I wasn't so sure I'd acted rightly the night before. And the feeling I should apologize to Allen was creeping up on me the closer I got to him on my journey across what now seemed to me to be an excessively large lobby.

We exchanged greetings and I asked, "What's up?"

"I'm working on a paper for college. Do you know anything about how to find information on that?" he said, pointing to a paper lying at the bottom of the computer monitor.

"Well, I didn't actually ever do any research on that particular topic, but I can show you how to find information."

Even though I was very tired, and I didn't want to help him, I did. I worked with him for about forty minutes, then left, wondering how all this related to the better-than-nothing scenario. It occurred to me just as I was stepping into the

elevator that perhaps the better-than-nothing has one saving grace: it is born of a desire to help the deaf. I have known quite a few persons in deaf education who didn't seem to care much for the task of education in general or the success of the deaf student in particular.

Certainly, I had helped Allen, in this instance anyway.

Long ride home

I left Gallaudet the next morning after sitting in on a meeting concerning international research on the early education of deaf children. I had much on my mind.

As I pulled out of the parking garage, I was reminded of a bit of teaching I used when I taught narrative writing in English class. I would begin by asking the students if Darth Vader from the Star Wars movies was a good guy or a bad guy. Invariably, someone would say he was a bad guy and I would most seriously argue with them that he was, in fact, a good guy. Ultimately, I would settle the discussion on this point: You may see Darth Vader as a bad guy, but *he* thinks he's a good guy.

Now I was inching my way through heavy Washington D.C. traffic, wondering if I was becoming a manifestation of my own dimwitted humor. Was I the bad guy serving the emperor without question when I arranged/participated in better-than-nothing?

But it was more than just humor. I had often used the Darth Vader analogy in English class as a means of teaching the students about character development. As with the legions of English teachers who came before me, I told the students that their characters would seem more real if they wrote their words and deeds from the character's perspective.

Now I was wondering if I had bought into the better-than-nothing scenario, albeit reluctantly, because I had failed to see the matter from the perspective of those who were most affected by it. I expected, if not a hero's welcome, at least a pat on the back. Instead I got more unlearning.

I hardly noticed the five hour drive home. One minute I was pulling out of the Gallaudet University campus and the next I was pulling into my driveway, still deep in thought.

Reflections

The issue of the better-than-nothing scenario has as much to do with my experience as a mechanic as it does with my experience in education. My approach to the better-than-nothing scenario, and indeed its conception, is really a matter of systems analysis rather than cultural interpretation. My experience as a mechanic taught me to identify which part or parts were malfunctioning and to ameliorate the problem.

However, I did not, as a matter of course, look into motivations, norms, or beliefs- in short, the habitus of the driver.

The question, 'What's wrong with deaf education?' is a question which automatically reduces our ability to create fundamental change because it limits the discussion to causality, which is rooted in pattern, and ignores the larger structure. And yet, I would not suggest we wholly abandon our scrutiny of the better-than-nothing scenario in our search for meaning. After all, the condition of a car can, and often does, provide information as to the driving habits of the owner.

Prior to this experience, I had definite opinions on the better-than-nothing scenario, but then, so did Ted, Mike, Sonia, and Dr. Zed. They were angry about the issue. They were not irrational hot heads. Theirs was a perspective born of experience and hardship. They were also people who had spent a considerable amount of time studying the subject in academia.

It was coincidental but also ironic that this field experience more or less started while I was doing a crossword puzzle. Very often the clues provided in crossword puzzles can apply to more than one valid answer. The answer one finds, be it correct or not, largely depends on which assumption(s) one chooses about the clue. (For example, the clue may be 'something a caddy holds,' the answer depends on which form of 'caddy' the

creator chooses for that particular game item. It may be 'tee' or 'tea.').

The way we deal with any given culture depends primarily on the assumptions we make about it and its participants. I had assumed that Allen wanted my interpreter services more than he wanted to do his job in the manner he does it on all the other nights I am not there to interpret for him. Similarly, I had assumed that the Deaf would welcome my efforts concerning the better-than-nothing scenario.

Clearly, the path to meaningful change in deaf education lies along the cultural divide.

Chapter 6

Introduction

In a way, I've been writing this chapter since the moment I learned that Devon was deaf. I suspect I will continue to do so long after the ink has dried on this work. It is a never-ending journey which, while enlightening overall, has been more or less a coral reef of conclusions. Each new generation of conclusions sits atop all previous generations.

However, the task of this chapter, this endeavor, puts me in mind of a small prank I once pulled while working as a school administrator which was done for fun but became surprisingly revelatory.

I had been assigned a new office. It was a small room formerly occupied by three persons, so the walls had marks on them from the various furniture and cubicle partitions screwed and nailed to them over the years. The room was an odd shape, which seemed to anyone looking at it long enough to be not quite square and not quite rectangular.

To me, it was merely a place to conduct business and I would have done nothing more than put my name on the nameplate outside the door except that I was aware I had to decorate it in some fashion. At the very least, I had to find a way to cover the wounds on the walls from the previous occupants. I gave the

matter some thought at the end of the first day after I had fully moved in.

As I sat there staring at the empty, abused walls, I was taking stock of what I could do and what others typically do: family photos, landscape paintings, awards and testimonials to accomplishments. This last one, I thought, while not totally unacceptable, was on the lame side. Then I thought: What if I decorated an entire wall with things I never did, accomplishments I never accomplished? This idea seemed so funny to me that I resolved to bring it to reality.

I gathered up some of the numerous certified accomplishments of Devon and Abby which I copied onto card stock. I then took a magic marker and put a big "X" through the first name, then wrote "Phil" over the "X". I also had Abby take a picture of me wearing a Yankee hat and a blue seersucker sport coat with a bath towel as a cape. I struck a pose as if I were delivering some emotional speech and put the picture on a fake playbill. I titled the play *The Bus to Crazytown* and added a cast of ridiculous characters as well as several silly, obviously fake, review blurbs from the New York Times and the New York Post. And as if that weren't enough, I put it in a nice frame and placed it in the center of the wall at eye level as one hoping to preserve a cherished memory would. I also made a trophy from an Incredible Hulk statue and a foam rubber school

bus. He stood grimacing with the bus held high over his head between his mighty, oversized fists. I painted the Hulk and his bus gold and had them mounted on a dark wood base with an engraved plate which said that I had received the award for being "Excellent in the Face of Excellence."

From any more than five feet away it seemed like any ego wall you've ever seen, but if you stepped closer and actually scrutinized what was there, it would reveal itself to be a silly collection of faux accomplishments. A damaged-ego-wall, if you will.

Here's the funny part, only about one in ten people who came into my office ever caught on to the truth of that wall. Most ignored it as typical office decorations. A surprising number of people would walk over to the wall, peer at it intently for a bit, and then compliment me on my accomplishments. Some would say, "Oh, I didn't know you were an actor." Others would say stuff like, "Wow, you've done a lot of things in your life." Two people remarked on my marksmanship even though the marksmanship award on the wall clearly had Devon's name crossed out and mine scribbled over it.

Usually, I would explain the joke and we'd have a good laugh, but the joke of the wall, which I thought quite funny initially, began to seem less funny as it became more of an

insight into our propensity to see that which we expect/wish to see.

Autoethnography, like all research, is necessarily grounded on subjective assumptions. Moreover, it depends heavily on the researcher's ability to accurately assess what he is seeing. He must make connections between disparate data. Unfortunately, one can never divorce one's self from one's past. And, since humans view the world through subjective prisms, one naturally fears that one will ultimately see what one expects to see.

This chapter contains my conclusions concerning this autoethnographic research. A discussion of the research questions and the limitations of this study are also included.

Conclusions

Valente (2011) states that ideology can be a limiting factor when analyzing people and their motivations. When Devon was born, I was not a young man in search of higher truths nor was I the adherent of any philosophy insofar as education was concerned. Yet, I took specific actions and acted, at times, with alacrity.

My intention was to empower my daughter and my efforts were sometimes aided by the fact that I had no preconceived notions about what deaf children could and could not do. Nevertheless,

my stupendous ignorance of deafness, Deaf culture, and education of the deaf greatly hindered my progress towards my goal.

Ignorance and empowerment are the Yin and Yang of deaf education. All our efforts to empower the deaf are dogged by ignorance, ignorance of the effective methods of educating the deaf, ignorance of the communication needs of the deaf, ignorance of the challenges modern society places on the deaf.

There are no economies of scale when it comes to deaf students. We live in an industrial age which fetishizes economies of scale, part and parcel of what Valente terms hypercapitalism (2011). Anything which stands in the way of that purpose or drive, if you will, is subject to ridicule, vitriol, or outright hostility. It is melting pot versus salad bowl insofar as people and their cultures are concerned.

My decision to utilize Signed English was very much in keeping with the cultural values I was raised with. It seemed a more efficient method to achieve communication with Devon and thus preferable. Speed, the hallmark of efficiency, made the method more attractive.

When I initially attempted to teach Devon, I had assumed a teaching style more suited to hearing students and in doing so, I completely misunderstood the principal mode of communication as well as the learning style of the deaf student. My error in this regard was very much a product of industrialized thinking,

i.e. there is a one-size-fits-all method which is superior and correct. Those who didn't achieve according to this style were, in a sense, defective.

When I was sitting in the bar/restaurant and I jumped up to interpret for Allen, I was in effect doing the same as I had when signing up Devon for a party affiliation. I had assumed what they both wanted and endeavored to provide it.

Upon reflection and investigation, it is usually discovered that tragedies such as the sinking of the Titanic are ultimately comprised of a multitude of small errors and misunderstandings holding hands. One can have a good knowledge of the facts, expertise, and the best of intentions and still manage to get the opposite of desired outcome.

Deaf students are increasingly being pushed into high stakes standardized tests which do not take their needs into consideration. They are also being placed in so-called "least restrictive environments" which also often fail to address their needs.

Of course, the tragedy of an oversized luxury liner crashing and sinking on its maiden voyage is a real headline grabber, not to mention quality food for celluloid. However, the slow and steady tragedy of deaf education, fueled by ignorance, remains below the radar and thus continues.

Administrators who are tasked with providing for the education of the deaf need to know more than the facts; they must have an understanding of the motivations of the participants and the aspects of culture which give rise to those motivations.

Finally, I would suggest that laws like PL 94-142, which are designed to ensure that the deaf do not suffer from De jure discrimination, are valuable and do much to prevent discrimination. However, regardless of merit, such laws do little if anything to prevent de facto discrimination. They don't correct for the numerous small errors and misunderstandings which can and do give rise to the tragedy of mistreatment.

Challenges Faced as the Parent of a Deaf Child

The first research question was: What challenges did I face upon becoming the parent of a deaf child? Certainly, the first and foremost challenge was overcoming my ignorance concerning the deaf and their needs. I had been exposed to sign language but had no understanding of Deaf culture, nor did I know anything about deaf education.

Perhaps the biggest challenge insofar as education is concerned was overcoming the many deficiencies of the school system's support for the education of the deaf. I was, and by

extension, so was Devon, the victim of bad advice, poorly trained employees, administrators who saw the deaf as a nuisance, and a system with boundless inertia.

I could not empower my daughter without overcoming my own ignorance and preconceptions and thus had to embark on a journey of learning and unlearning.

Priorities Concerning the Education of the Deaf

The second research question was: What factors influence the formation of priorities concerning the education of the deaf? Clearly, a priority concerning the education of the deaf is cost. Much of the efforts to improve the education of the deaf relate to somehow making the students as much like the regular education students as possible in an effort to reduce costs.

Deaf students are increasingly put into regular education programs away from their peers and forced to take tests which in no way address their needs. Accommodations made for the deaf to access the curriculum often fall short of adequate.

Clearly, there is a need to increase training for perspective educators and education administrators on the matter of special needs students in general and deaf students in particular. Their unique status and needs can only be served by

those who possess a better than passing understanding of those needs.

Knowledge of the deaf

The final research question was: How does knowledge of the deaf influence those challenged with raising and educating a deaf child? Knowledge of the deaf does much to foster communication and acceptance, two elements vital to any individual's acquisition of culture and identity formation.

If I developed agency, a prospect I have questioned many times throughout my life, I did it through a tremendous amount of communication with others. My development occurred with much input. Deaf children who cannot fully communicate with their parents, teachers, and peers, must develop agency and access their culture, for the most part, on their own. They are forced to try and make sense of their world with less input than their hearing peers receive.

Agency of the parents and all those who are tasked with educating a deaf student is also at issue. Agency is the result of how social actors come to perceive their options, and it is through a knowledge of cultural meanings, language, and self-interests that they negotiate their world.

The raising of a child where the principal mode of communication is sign language represents an interruption of

that base knowledge. As with the deaf child attempting to make sense of his world without language, parents must now achieve social agency via a language which is in a different modality. Their knowledge of communication, which has acted as a sort of armor when negotiating their social world, is stripped away.

The desire to raise and educate a deaf child in one's own language can influence one to make choices based on that which is most comfortable to him and not necessarily that which is in the best interest of the child.

Knowledge of sign language and the deaf/Deaf can help promote the acceptance of the deaf and all that condition requires. We must avoid seeing the deaf as those who are different and in doing so avoid the process of what Valente (2011) calls "deafing and dumbing" (pp.18).

Limitations of the study

The ancient Greeks stared at the star filled night sky and chose several select points of light to create pictures which represented icons of their religious beliefs. In doing so, they created some sense of order and meaning from the countless points of light which appeared each night. In a sense, I have engaged in similar behavior in this research. I have looked back over twenty years of data points and attempted to connect them in a way which brings meaning and understanding.

This research was, as one would imagine, driven by the need to lessen the unknown. To explore the lives of myself, my family, and others with the hope that in doing so, certain cultural understanding could be obtained.

I used a written narrative, interviews, and self-reflection to make sense of my profession and my past. Autoethnography is a long and difficult process I endorse. However, truth reveals itself reluctantly and no one method of research will encompass all of the subject matter. Indeed, no ethnographic study could reveal the totality of the complex social lives we all live.

Me

When I was a young man, I read a great deal of Vonnegut. He didn't believe in heroes and I liked that. His books were filled with ordinary people who aimlessly wander the line between sanity and insanity without ever really knowing which side they were on at any given moment.

Perhaps I liked Vonnegut because the worlds he created in his works were akin to my own. His work seemed more real to me and as such his themes and points were more poignant. I also believed that heroes, if they existed at all, were exceedingly rare and that no matter what, I'd never be one.

In this work, I had to appraise myself and my past in terms of being a literary character, relating my life in terms of the hero's journey. What was the arc of the character? Was he a hero, or a Vonnegutesque antihero, or some weird amalgam of both? Where was the real?

As I get older, I tend more toward stories with heroes in them. I like stories of people who accomplish great deeds. This may have as much to do with my years of working in education, wherein great deeds are rare, as it does with my proximity to the grave. It may be because my perception of heroes and great deeds has changed.

My view of heroes changed when I least expected it to. I was working as a school administrator and was three hours into the kind of day which was busy even by school administrator standards. By the end, you feel as if you've played an eight hour game of tennis with an opponent who is slightly better than you and all you can do is play defense for all your worth.

I was in an elementary school looking for an adult with whom I had something to discuss. I was told this person was in the cafeteria. When I got to the cafeteria, it was the height of the lunch cycle. The students were just finishing their food and getting to socializing.

I didn't see the students as a group of individuals in a room, rather I saw them more as one giant undulating organism

with thousands of eyes, arms and legs. I was looking past Kidzilla for my intended adult when something tugged at my attention. One of the students was heading directly for me. As the little girl closed, she became recognizable. She was a student in the self-contained class for the deaf which was one of the seven programs I supervised on a daily basis.

"Hello!" she signed, then gave me a hug.

I returned her hug and said, "Hello to you. How are you doing?"

"I'm fine thank you. How are you? We are eating lunch over there." She took my hand and led me to the table.

The group of seven students all waved and became very excited. I said, "Hello to you all." Then I did something none of them expected. I sat down at the table and spent some time with them. It was a blast for me. My Blackberry was vibrating with incoming calls and emails to the point that I thought it was going to jump off my belt. I ignored it.

They asked me what I was doing. They offered me portions of their lunches because I didn't have any food. They asked me about my wife and if I had any children. One even asked me where I got my tie.

The adults in the room were fixated on all of this. They could not understand any of the sign language, of course, but it was obvious to them the students were exceedingly happy with my

presence and we were having an enjoyable interaction. I could feel their envy and I am not ashamed to say it made me feel good.

At one point, the conversation broke up into several smaller conversations, as happens in such get-togethers. The little girl seated to my left said, "I saw you were meeting with Ms. X."

"Yeah," I said smiling. "I meet with lots of people. It's what I do."

"What is your job?"

I watched her chubby hands moving in front of her smiling eyes and I was brought back to when I first met her. I had received a call from an elementary school concerning a hard of hearing kindergarten student who was "acting out" and becoming "uncontrollable." Did I have any room for her in one of our deaf classes?

I was pretty sure I knew the scenario. I called her mother and, after a brief discussion which confirmed my suspicions, I invited her to visit with me and observe the classroom. She agreed and we met the next day in the classroom.

As I suspected, her daughter was deaf and had been raised as a hearing child. There was no signing at home or in school. Her daughter was an angel at home but lately had been getting into trouble in school.

Her mother was not opposed to sign language but was worried her daughter would be at a disadvantage in a class which used sign language. I told her that she would be surrounded by hearing people so that wouldn't be a problem and her daughter's exposure to sign language would be a plus. I told her that my hearing children learned sign language and it didn't have a negative effect on them. Then I said, "Look, you're not happy with the way things are now right?" and she nodded. "So why not give it a try? If it doesn't work out, you can always choose another placement."

She agreed to give the placement a try and over the succeeding months, I gave her regular updates on her daughter's progress and information as to where she, herself, could take some sign language instruction.

Now I was sitting with this little girl a year later having a conversation with her in sign language. She was happy and asking me what my job was. Her question was in itself a mark of progress. I have encountered deaf children older than her who were so communication deprived that they couldn't tell you the names of the people in their immediate family. They would refer to them as "the tall one" or "the one with yellow hair," and so on.

"I am a supervisor," I said.

"What's that?"

"I make sure your teachers have what they need to teach you."

"Oh, that's nice."

It was at that moment I connected their treating me like a hero when I had first arrived to the realization that maybe I was a hero. An actual hero.

I didn't have any superpowers, and I didn't wear a cape, although I always wanted to. I hadn't saved anyone from certain death, nor did I conceal my true identity behind a false name and a dark, brooding personality. However, my day-to-day work, the compilation of my education and experience led me to positively affect those students in my care. Certainly, I had changed the trajectory of this girl's life. Now, I felt she was in contention for the American dream, whereas before, her future was doubtful.

My journey, which had passed by as quick as a snap of the fingers, had come to this moment. This great moment. Great moments and heroes have a lot in common. They are both the result of hard work, ignorance, and unaccountable luck. And, they can both be unknown to all but themselves.

I saw the adults moving to the tables to start the cleanup phase of the lunch cycle and thought it best to take my leave. I let myself enjoy one more moment, then said my goodbyes to my lunch mates with the smiling hands. I spent the rest of the day

returning serves and volleying but I did it four feet off the ground, feeling like a hero.

Administration

This research brings together my professional life and my personal life. Upon reflection of the places where these two worlds have connected and overlapped it becomes clear that school administrators are woefully undertrained concerning the deaf. This research indicates a need for increased attention to the matter of deaf education in administrator training programs. Moreover, it shows a need for educational administration research to further probe the local based knowledge of schools for the purpose of improving education in general as well as improving education for marginalized populations.

Educational leadership programs exist to provide prospective administrators with the skills and knowledge to improve education. That mandate, however, has become more difficult as the powers of the school administrator are steadily diminished by top down government regulation of schools, activist, hostile school boards, unions, and education case law. Once upon a time, the school administrator practiced with little interference and much support from what is now commonly referred to as the "stakeholders" in education.

The political and social landscape of the United States has changed dramatically since the implementation of PL 94-142. Education has become the single most important determinant in achieving the American dream. Thus the role the administrator plays in the education of the deaf have become larger. He must know the complex world he steps into when tasked with educating the deaf.

Deaf education must be approached holistically. Policymakers, researchers, and school administrators need to understand that learning the culture, needs, wants, behaviors, and identities of the participants is an ongoing process which lies beyond numerical data. It cannot be served by studying, then acting to manipulate the system to alter discrete portions in the process of education.

The key to educating the deaf is flexibility. There are far too many persons working in deaf education who see deafness as a problem whose cure is a proscribed series of steps to make them hearing. In doing so, they work to effect a social death for the individuals with whom they work as well as impede their education.

Understanding culture- that is, people, what they do, why they do it, and when they do it- is an almost impossible endeavor. Nevertheless, such understanding is key to achieving meaningful systemic change.

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Appendices

Appendix A



Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Embracing the Wind: An Autoethnography

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DO NOT REMOVE OR MODIFY

IRB# Doc. #

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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to add to research and literature concerning administrator preparation and the education of the deaf.

2. **Procedures to be followed:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a discussion with the researcher wherein you will be asked several questions concerning your experiences with the condition of deafness.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

4. **Benefits:** You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. This information could help plan programs and improve services for deaf students.

5. **Duration:** Discussions could range in length from 15 minutes to one hour.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The survey does not ask for any information that would identify who the responses belong to. Penn State's Office for Research Protections, the Social Science Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Philip R. Mills at (570) 713-9621 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Penn State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Participation in this research implies that you have read the information in this form.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Please explain how you describe yourself: Hearing, Hard-of-Hearing, or Deaf?

2. What is your preferred mode of communication?

3. What is language?

4. What is bilingualism?

5. What is communication?

6. Some people consider deafness to be a disability, others a culture. Where do you stand on this issue? Why? Examples?

7. What form of communication do you think is best for deaf children? Why?

Appendix C

Devon

Elementary school - I remember I didn't have any official interpreter other than the teachers in the Hearing Support program. I guess they did well enough if I was able to progress at the same level as my hearing peers. I got along with the teachers most of the time, although they did use to scold me a lot over stupid incidents. I remember going through a phase where I just wasn't interested in paying attention to them, and I tended to forget a lot of things - they really didn't like that. Also, I disliked it when something happened, the teachers refused to believe me most of the time even though I tried my best to tell the truth. I got punished a few times for no reason because of that. That was the only negative experience I had in elementary school.

Middle school - I remember actually liking my school at the time and being quite unhappy with you when you discussed sending me to Warrior Run if we couldn't get a good interpreter. Being the immature 11 years old that I was, I didn't want someone to follow me around at the time or feel like a freak over it. I did like Mrs. Mack though. I never had any problems with her. Then I remember Janet as the temporary interpreter before Ms. Freed

came along. I actually complained to Mr. Case that I had a hard time paying attention to Janet because she had terrible facial expressions. We did have a discussion with her, and she did improve a little. Then Ms. Freed was a good interpreter. She knew what she was doing. I never had any problems with her, then again she did not last long before she accepted another job offer.

Then there's Tia Weil - now known as Tia Lang. I remember us interviewing her in 7th grade (after interviewing a few other interpreters that I did not feel comfortable with - I remember one of these interpreters was a man whose hands shook way too much). We got along great. She was the only one who actually stuck around for a long time, from 7th grade until my high school graduation. Most of the time I'd talk to her instead of other students because I tend to get along with older people better, although it was clear we were not "friends." Tia still maintained a professional boundary between the interpreter and the student. I addressed her by her last name formally and was only given permission to call her by her first name after graduation. That's just an example.

Tia knew what she was doing as well. She also tried her best to prepare for our classes so that she'd have an easier time conveying the materials to me. Another thing she did was

attempt to teach me new signs, since a new law was passed during my middle school years where deaf students were required to expand their vocabulary of signs in ASL. That didn't last very long though simply because we got sidetracked with other things.

The only thing I didn't like was that sometimes Tia would scold me over minor things when it was not her responsibility to enforce the school rules.

For example, I stopped reciting the Pledge in 8th grade. I still stood up each morning. No one complained or did anything about it. But one morning in 9th grade I decided not to bother standing up for the pledge, and Tia didn't like that. She threatened to send me to the office. The teacher in my morning class never said anything to me. I don't think she even noticed me sitting down at all. I didn't stand up that morning, but I did resume standing up each morning after that - albeit against my will - because I decided it wasn't worth the trouble even though I didn't think it was right for schools to force students to participate in the ritual. I just felt quite powerless as a minor.

The point of that story is that interpreters are only interpreters. As much as I respect interpreters, they are not teachers or other faculty with the authority to enforce rules.

They should just do their job and leave it at that. At least that's how I see it. I didn't like how Tia seemed to blur that line sometimes. I also remember another incident in which I got in trouble with Tia for texting Mom even though it was important and it could not wait. I cannot remember if Tia threatened to take my cellphone away or not though, I just know that she wasn't happy about me texting Mom. Tia did explain to me a couple of times that she just didn't want me to get in trouble with the teachers, that she cared, etc. But still, I don't think she acted entirely appropriate in these situations. Fortunately these incidents were few and far between. We still worked well together.

High School - Refer to the Middle School section for all the info on Tia. She stayed with me until a few weeks or a month before my graduation. She only took a break because she got pregnant early in the school year. Her son was born around the time of my graduation. However, I was lucky to have good sub interpreters.

Their names were Julie Franks and Sue Proust. I have them added on Facebook even though I don't talk to them much. So you could say I still have a way to keep in touch with them. I never had any problem with them. They did their jobs and interpreted well enough that I could tell I wasn't missing out on anything.

As for the interpreters in college, they were better than what I experienced in elementary/middle/high school. This time I was no longer a minor and so I was treated like an equal, an adult. Bloomsburg University has about 6 fulltime staff interpreters and a few sub interpreters. The fulltime staff are (sic): Toni (head of the interpreter's office by the way), Beth, Deb, Jody, Marilyn, and Mary. Other part time or sub interpreters I've had throughout my years were Casey, Melody, Zoe, Vera, a few others whose names I cannot recall right now. Most of the time they assign one interpreter to a class, unless it is longer (an hour and 15 minutes instead of the usual 50, or 3 hours).

All of the interpreters were very adept at interpreting and conveying the professors' materials, although their voicing skills left something to be desired. I'd frequently catch them saying a different phrase than what I wanted to convey. That's one of the problems with ASL - I often use phrases and English idioms that simply don't translate into signs very well. There are also similar signs or the same signs used for multiple words. I frequently encountered this problem in my computer classes while I didn't really have any problem with general education courses (as they are easier to interpret). The interpreters could easily sign or fingerspell technical terms

from my computing professors, however, if I tried to ask a question, they never understood what I was trying to ask. They often had this look on their face "Are you sure this is what you want to say?" and I would be like "Yes, I know what I'm trying to say, just voice it please." Thus I always preferred to email my professors or simply look things up on the internet after class if I had any question.

I also did admire the interpreters' ability to be professional yet friendly at times. Marilyn, Beth, Jody, Casey, etc. were my favorite interpreters most of the time - we got along great. I honestly never had any argument with an interpreter except once.

To reiterate, Toni is the head of the interpreting office. She's the one who deals with all the scheduling. All the students still pick their own courses and schedules while Toni just assigns certain interpreters to the classes. However, Toni changed my schedule one time in my 2nd semester. I wanted to schedule a Public Speaking course in the afternoon since I felt it worked the best for me. It was supposed to be around 5:45 pm or something like that. Toni decided to put me in another section of that course at 8:00 am. Needless to say I was extremely angry about it. I contacted her and told her I did not appreciate her changing my schedule without my permission nor

notifying me first. She told me that upperclassmen received upper priority and that she had the right to change the sections of our courses if she couldn't find an interpreter at the time, although she wouldn't ask us to change the course itself. She also told me that the interpreters typically are scheduled between 8 am to 4 pm. I really didn't like that because my belief is that the accommodative services office or interpreters should accommodate our schedules, not the other way around. Especially if I have to take out loans in my name in order to pay for tuition and for them indirectly. Call me selfish if you want but I do not care about the interpreters' personal lives. I care far more about my education. I know I learn the most during the times when I actually feel alert and okay - which is not in the morning. I also didn't think it was fair to apply the class hierarchy system when it came to the need for interpreters.

This was one of the major problems at Bloomsburg University. BU did not want to hire additional interpreters, especially not after 4 pm. Almost every deaf student I talked to had a lot of gripes about this, especially my best friend and the teaching major ones. The interpreters apparently gave them a hard time or complained a lot whenever they had no choice but to schedule nighttime classes (because morning ones were not offered). We also sometimes had a hard time getting an interpreter outside the normal hours, especially on weekends or

at nights. There were multiple times when a professor would inform us of an assignment or opportunities to earn extra credit by attending guest lectures at the last minute, and I had no interpreter for that kind of situation. I actually had to use a deaf friend once - she has cochlear implants; she could understand people really well. While I am still grateful to her for her help, it was not right.

This brings me up to another issue. Apparently there is a policy that interpreting majors are not allowed to help us out until they have graduated and passed their practicums or all the requirements. Something like that. They could actually get penalized for it. That did happen to one or two people I knew - they were only trying to help a fellow deaf student out since the staff interpreters refused to take on an assignment. If you want more details, I will need to ask my friend about it, as it was a long time ago and my memory is rather vague.

I do recall another example in which one deaf student, Erika, had to do a group assignment outside class, and the group could not meet until the evening. One of her teammates knew some signs and said she was willing to help out, since Jody (interpreter for that class) refused to help interpret. Jody apparently just wanted to be at home with her husband (who is in perfect health) and her daughter (who is old enough to be left alone). Jody actually got angry at that teammate and lectured

her about it. Jody also made a status on her Facebook about how she did not appreciate being told how to do her job and that there was a difference between signing and interpreting, and that knowing how to sign does not make you an interpreter. I still have Jody added on FB so I witnessed the status. I also remember asking Jody what happened and she told me about it. I merely nodded at her, but it angered me. I felt so bad for Erika. I know that I stated earlier that Jody was one of my favorite interpreters at BU - she still is, this was just one time I did not agree with Jody's attitude.

The main summary of these anecdotes is that sometimes the interpreters and even the professors in the deaf education/interpreting programs actually get upset when we are forced to ask our friends for help because they refuse to do their jobs. I cannot count how many times my interpreting major friends have told me, with sympathetic expressions, "I am so sorry, you know I would definitely help you if I could, I just don't want us to get in trouble."

Finally, there were also two interpreters who I was not so fond of, namely Mary and Zoe.

Zoe is a freelance interpreter with years worth of experience. She was one of the women who interpreted for me at my high school graduation, throughout college years, and an appointment at Geisinger. I think I may seen (sic) her once or

twice at work too. She is very professional; I do like the quality of her skills in interpreting and her ability to maintain confidentiality. But sometimes she is a little too professional - she tends to be stiff. It would be easier for me to hold a friendly conversation with a corpse than with her. I've heard many complaints about her stiff personality from other people as well. Still though I cannot complain too much if we are assigned to work together; she is a trustworthy interpreter.

If Zoe is too professional of an interpreter, Mary is the extreme opposite of her. Mary is in her 40s, maybe early 50s, and she has many years worth of interpreting. She has excellent signing/interpreting skills but poor voicing skills. I remember during my freshman or sophomore year, Mary was assigned to voice for a deaf professor at a lecture that we all had been invited to. I attended that lecture and witnessed the poor quality of Mary's voicing. She constantly interrupted that professor just to ask her to repeat what she was saying. The professor was extremely angry and a few deaf friends of mine witnessed Mary crying after getting chewed out by said professor.

Aside from learning not to trust Mary with voicing my presentations, Mary has a tendency to be unprofessional in multiple ways. For instance, she does not dress appropriately. I would estimate her height to be between 5 feet 10 inches to 6

feet tall. Mary is also morbidly obese. Mary has a tendency to wear jeans that stop at her ankles, making her pants look too short. During all these years at college, I have only seen Mary dress formally a few times. Her typical attire consist of 'old woman' sneakers, too short jeans, a shirt (not a T shirt, but still too casual for interpreting), and a few pieces of flashy jewelry (usually bracelets). Mary also never puts in effort with her hair or any makeup. To summarize it, Mary has a dumpy appearance that does not gain her any respect among the interpreters nor students, and can be distracting at times. Every interpreter has actually trashed her appearance to me at some point.

Mary also tends to be over friendly. I cannot tell you how many times Jesse (my best friend) has recanted whatever she told him about her health issues or personal life. She worked with him most of the time since she enjoys interpreting for theatre or acting courses/plays. He complained to me multiple times that he did not appreciate Mary giving him too much information or trying to act like a friend instead of a professional interpreter. Jesse also informed me of a couple of incidents when Mary actually complained to him about me sending her a long email and then filing a complaint with Dr. Brock against her. He told me once that Mary told him she did not appreciate that email from me. "I have been working here for many years and

Devon thinks she can tell me how to do my job? She's only a student!!" Something along these lines. I texted Jesse but he could not recall the exact words as it has been a while now.

I filed a complaint against Mary every time she was tardy to my class by a significant length of time, or when she failed to meet a few important expectations. Once she was late to my class by 17 minutes - she happened to be the solo interpreter for that class. Most of the time she was tardy by about 5 minutes. There was another incident when Mary sent an email and informed multiple deaf students that she would be absent and that we would not have any sub interpreters for our classes. You may recall me emailing you about that. We did end up having subs, with the interpreters scrambling to fill in all courses. Someone said that Toni apparently did not bother assigning subs despite Toni contacting her about her surgery a few weeks in advance, but Toni claimed that Mary did not contact her until the last minute. The entire situation was just screwed up. A few of us got together to file multiple complaints with Dr. Brock over that situation.

The thing is, Dr. Brock usually is not willing to do much except talk to Mary each time someone files a complaint against her. She usually lies low for a while then resumes her usual antics. Apparently Dr. Brock is not able to fire her since she is protected by something - a union perhaps? I would have to ask

one of the interpreters again. But yeah, it is one of the main gripes among the interpreters regarding Mary. They do not get along very well at all, to the point that Mary maintains a separate office in another building while all the other interpreters share a bigger office in the Accommodative services area.

I could probably go on for a while - I am sure I have more incidents that I just have not recalled yet. And if you needed more examples of what an interpreter should not do, I could easily get some more gems from my friends. Despite all the problems with Mary, one thing she did prove capable of doing was to remain friendly whenever interpreting, even if she knew that no one was fond of her, or if she had just been lectured by Dr. Brock prior to a class or meeting. She was able to put aside the differences temporarily and that is one of the few positive things I can say about her.

While typing all this, I just thought of another experience. It is not a problem I have had with the interpreters. As you know, technology is becoming popular, especially among the deaf and the interpreters. One of the interpreters at BU, Marilyn, got an iPad for work purposes. She downloaded copies of my professors' lectures since it was much easier for her to look back and forth between her iPad and me rather than turning around to look at the powerpoint

presentation on the big screen. Marilyn would also look up words, phrases, and signs quickly so that she could interpret more efficiently. Other interpreters got netbooks and iPads as well. So far I never had a problem with the interpreters playing on their devices rather than doing their jobs, and I am glad for that. I would say that technology is actually helping interpreters to do their jobs better in the education field.

Vita

Philip R. Mills began working in education at the age of fourteen as a custodian. Since that time, he has served as a groundskeeper, school bus driver, educational interpreter, teacher, assistant principal, substitute principal, assistant program administrator as supervisor of special education of a deaf and hard of hearing program, and adjunct professor. He has taught in urban, suburban, and rural schools. He has also taught in a maximum security federal penitentiary.