Abstract
Teaching language to Deaf students is difficult because techniques often disrupt traditional models of bilingual language learning that require speech before learning to read and write. Balanced bilingual education is a relatively recent pedagogical strategy in Deaf education and modern approaches include chaining concepts using American Sign Language (ASL) rather than speech and lip-reading. Rather than focusing on speech as an initial step to learning English, ASL is used to teach reading and writing. Five face-to-face interviews with educators at a large Deaf residential school are used to explore issues and prescriptions for teaching language to Deaf students. Five themes are used for discussion: understanding ASL–English bilingualism, the significance of technology in Deaf education, the goals of bilingual language models, how identification plays a role in language learning, and suggestions for ideal ways to teach Deaf students. Limitations and suggestions for future research are offered.

*Keywords:* bilingualism, Deaf, language education, American Sign Language, English
Bilingualism & Biculturalism: Educators’ Perspectives of the Interaction of ASL and English

“It is not the ‘ear’th; it is the ‘eye’th. Everything depends on reading skills.” -Diane

Schools for the Deaf in the United States have colorful histories – some dating back over 150 years. The rich traditions of Deaf institutions revolve closely around the languages that are used to communicate in the classrooms, throughout residential housing, and on campus. Lately, the majority of Deaf and hard-of-hearing\(^1\) students are being educated in mainstream public school programs and consequently the need for Deaf schools is dwindling (Hadjikakou, Petridou & Stylianou, 2005; Stinson & Antia, 1999). For instance, Deaf-Blind enrollment in public schools from 2009 to 2011 increased by 25% while enrollment in separate, specialized schools for the Deaf and Blind decreased by 5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The strategies and policies for language use and classroom instruction (and teaching language) for Deaf students are continually in flux in both Deaf and mainstream school settings. With the wide variety of pedagogical perspectives on how to teach Deaf students it is difficult to determine the most appropriate educational language practices being utilized.

The language(s) used at home with a Deaf child and the type of school placement chosen for the student (i.e., Deaf school versus mainstreaming/inclusion schooling) will impact the student’s language acquisition (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004), educational achievement (Shaver, Newman, Huang, Yu & Knokey, 2011), and overall quality of life (de Wit, 2011; Schick et al., 2013). Theoretical arguments about types of school placement and language use that is most

\(^1\)It is conventional to capitalize the word *Deaf* when referring to a person or group of people who belong to the socio-linguistic cultural group who use American Sign Language. For stylistic purposes, and to avoid confusion, we use and capitalize the word Deaf throughout to refer to all person(s) with varying degrees of hearing ability. Hard-of-hearing is only used on the one occasion previous to this note.
suitable for Deaf students are ubiquitous in the literature. However, data revealing the way languages and policies on language education are applied by Deaf educators is sparse in the published research. For instance, there is approximately 76.4% more literature regarding the needs of “Deaf students” than there is applicable “Deaf education” techniques in popular databases such as Google Books (Ngram viewer, n.d.). As a consequence, the outcomes of educational language practices on student performance and development are inadequate.

Strategies for teaching language to Deaf students vary from school to school based on pedagogical stances, and among students depending on hearing levels and other specialized needs of individual students. It is important to note that estimates show 50% of children who are Deaf also have an additional disability (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2005). Moreover, Guardino (2008) reported that data collection difficulties cause an underestimation of the number of Deaf children with additional disabilities. Therefore, as would be expected, those with multiple (and varied) disabilities require unique pedagogical techniques for the acquisition of language. The incidence and variety of disabilities among Deaf children further complicates the intricate nature of how educators should best teach and utilize language in the classroom.

Deaf students do not all learn to sign, but in the United States they all learn English in some capacity. For instance, Deaf students are taught to read and write in English. Moreover, speech comprehension and production, or oral communication, as well as lip-reading is often encouraged with Deaf students. However, when audiological status (i.e., limited hearing ability) or a resistance (i.e, deliberate choice) in the student inhibits oral acquisition, oral methods are often abandoned for more visual forms of communication like American Sign Language. Students who develop a proficiency in American Sign Language as well as English literacy are considered bilingual. It is of note that English literacy is not affected by hearing status, and
orientation toward reading and writing is equivalent to those found in most pupils. However, linguistic reading and writing learning models used with Deaf students to teach these skills are unique. These techniques do not fit traditional models of bilingualism (Evans & Seifert, 2009).

In most cases, bilingual language acquisition occurs between two oral languages. The bilingual experience of Deaf persons in the United States bridges a visual-spatial language to an oral language. That is, bilingual Deaf use American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Traditional bilingual models require learners to naturally *speak* and understand a language before steps are taken toward reading comprehension followed by writing production. Bilingual education of the Deaf does not follow traditional progression of language development because a majority of students are unable to perceive speech sounds and progress into speech production.

Historically, Deaf pedagogy has largely ignored the importance of building a strong linguistic foundation in students’ accessible language, i.e., ASL, before moving to English learning experiences (Meier, 1991). Oftentimes students are exposed to speech production and speech reading before tackling reading and writing (in attempts to follow the traditional language learning model). In cases where speech production and comprehension progress is unsuccessful students lack necessary linguistic foundations and as a consequence language progression is negatively affected (Morford & Carlson, 2011).

For the last few decades it has become more common to find bilingual practices that encourage the use of ASL for teaching Deaf students English literacy. These pedagogies rely on the belief that learning a first, more accessible, language benefits the learning of a second language (Baker & Baker, 1997). The culmination of early research supporting bilingual students’ advancement in school and cognitive tasks (e.g., Lambert & Anisfeld, 1969; Peal & Lambert, 1962) allowed for institutional changes towards bilingual education of the Deaf to take
place. Bilingualism as a positive practice (whereas it had previously held negative stereotypes) facilitated the understanding that Deaf students should learn ASL before focusing on English oral or literacy skills. Currently, positive sentiments and bilingual practices supporting the use of ASL to teach English continue to take shape.

Gallaudet University unveiled a new logo in 2011 that is representative of the mission to use both ASL and English in education of the university’s students. As a flagship for Deaf research and pedagogy, the school’s new logo signifies the acceptance of bilingualism as the appropriate educational choice for Deaf students. Historically, Deaf education as a discipline and practice has suffered from constant change and controversy regarding what is accepted as effective teaching and language methods (Moores, 2010). For example, one respondent from the interviews reported here described metaphorically how pedagogy should be constructed in ways that can adapt quickly to the advances in Deaf education by stating that, “[Teaching] philosophy should be made in sand.”

While the research in the past decade has overwhelmingly supported the notion that Deaf students should first learn a language that is accessible to them fully (i.e., ASL) before beginning to learn to read and write English (Mayberry, 2010), or that bilingualism should start as early as possible (Grosjean, 2010), the literature lacks data that reveals precisely how educators of the Deaf utilize languages together in their teaching practices. All in all, ASL-English bilingualism is becoming a more familiar practice within the Deaf schools (DeLana, Gentry, & Andrews, 2007). Moreover, mainstream programs throughout the United States are integrating American Sign Language programs into their curriculum (DeLana, Gentry, & Andrews, 2007; Rosen, 2008) and seeking improved techniques to educate Deaf students (Spencer & Marschark, 2010); therefore, it is necessary to obtain perspectives of the bilingual teaching practices where they are
being implemented. The reported research relies on data derived from in-person interviews with Deaf educators to explore how bilingual practices are being used classrooms and to illuminate some of the issues that revolve around bilingual education of the Deaf.

Method

Face-to-face interviews were conducted individually with five educators at a residential school for the Deaf in the United States regarding the school’s bilingual education practices. A pre-prepared open-ended question prompt sheet (see Appendix) was used to guide the semi-structured interviews with the goal of exploring the educators’ opinions about bilingualism at their school. In response to the interview questions, but in their own words, these participants explained the ways in which ASL and English are employed at their institution, the types of language policies used by the school, strategies for reading comprehension, issues surrounding writing and spoken English, cultural identity, and opinions on the ideal ways to prepare Deaf students for a future outside of school. The script helped to organize the interviews, and was prepared in advanced based on the extent literature on bilingualism and deaf education. However, as the interviewees raised novel topics, ad hoc probe questions allowed the discussion to take relevant departures from the script. The interviews took place during business (school) hours and therefore the discussions were all limited to no more than one hour.

Participants

The respondents’ names were replaced with pseudonyms in the author’s interview notes to maintain anonymity – all references to the respondents hereafter rely on these fictional names. Two of the five participants interviewed were working as teachers and the other three participants were currently in managerial roles at the school. At the time of the interviews, all
five of the interviewees worked at the same residential school for the Deaf. Following are brief
descriptions and demographics for the five respondents: Shawna, Lisa, Diane, Susan, and Beth.

Shawna, who is Deaf, is a seventh-grade middle school teacher who has worked at the
school for five years and has been a Deaf educator for eight years in total. While completing her
duties as a seventh grade teacher, she simultaneously holds a middle manager position for a
program for ASL & English bilingual research located at the school. Her duties at the language
program require her to train 14 other middle school teachers on bilingual education techniques.

Lisa, who is hearing, has worked at this Deaf school for 30 years teaching various grade
levels of elementary students. At the time of the interview she was teaching first-grade students.
Her other duties involve being the chairperson for the committee of elementary school teachers
and she organizes and controls all field trip and extracurricular activities of the elementary
school at the institution.

The remaining three participants described themselves as middle managers at the school.
They either facilitate teaching programs or are in charge of curriculum and technology. Diane,
who is hearing, heads up a federally funded reading program that is financed under the No Child
Left Behind Act of 2002. The program grants approximately $177,000 annually to the school for
a span of six years. She is responsible for assisting elementary teachers from kindergarten to
third grade in reading comprehension. She has taught at this school for 10 years and has worked
predominately with middle school students until accepting her new position with the funded
reading program.

Susan is Deaf and works as a curriculum specialist, focusing on language arts, social
studies, and linguistics – ASL and English are both taught as second language in the middle
school and high school. She has worked at this Deaf school for slightly over a year, but she has
taught at other Deaf institutions for a several years prior to working at her current job. Susan has the least amount of experience in Deaf education out of all of the participants interviewed.

Beth, who is hearing, is the curriculum specialist for students with special needs and for the elementary school. She is responsible for technology integration in the classrooms. She has been employed at this Deaf school for 31 years and taught for 29 years in classrooms ranging from second- to sixth-grade, but reported that she most commonly worked with second-grade and fifth-grade students. Beth described her other responsibilities as observing teachers, participating in student placement meetings, and as a resource person for the entire campus.

Procedure

Initial contact was made by the first author with an administrator at the Deaf school via email. The goals and design of the research project were shared in this correspondence (i.e., interviews about language education practices at the school). The email indicated that we were seeking educators who would volunteer their time to discuss their experiences using bilingual methods in the classroom. Initially, the administrator denied the request and explained that employees on the language planning committee “are not ready to be able to discuss it [language policies] with others as they are still learning with us [the language planning committee].” In reply, further detail was provided that explained that the purpose of the research was not to investigate the formal policies of the institution, but rather that we wanted to discuss the teaching strategies and experiences of the individual instructors who use bilingual education in the classroom. The administrator agreed to connect us to employees at the school for the purpose of the research project.

The names and contact information of five employees at the school were provided via an email following the aforementioned exchange with the administrator. All five of the employees
who were contacted (by email) agreed to meet for an interview; individual face-to-face meetings were scheduled that were convenient for both parties. The standardized questionnaire and all procedures were approved by the university’s review board, and the purpose of the research and procedures was revealed to all respondents before the interviews started.

Five interviews were conducted to discover the opinions of those closest to ASL-English bilingualism, educators of the Deaf. All of the interviews occurred on the campus of the Deaf school in the teachers’ classrooms or offices with the exception of one interview that took place at a café near the campus (presumably for access to coffee and/or privacy). Only the participant and the first author were present during the discussions. Two of the five participants are Deaf and used ASL to converse during the interviews. The remaining three participants are hearing and relied on spoken English to share their viewpoints with the author. To eliminate the risk of participant identification, breach of confidentiality, or self-censorship the interviews were not filmed or audio recorded. The author is hearing and also fluent in ASL. Scratch-notes were used during the interviews for note taking, and as soon as possible after the interviews, the first author revisited the notes and expanded them from memory to create fuller version field notes (see Sanjek, 1990).

The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes guided by the pre-prepared script of questions. Participants were allowed to discuss any answer at length without disruption. Additional free-form probe questions were asked during the interviews to elicit elaboration or to explore unanticipated points of discussions. Previous to any of the interviews a script with questions was developed deductively from the published research on bilingual education of the Deaf. For face validity, drafts of the interview questions were shared with a linguist who is
knowledgeable about ASL, bilingualism, and language polices. After feedback and discussions of the drafts the script was finalized (see Appendix).

For rapport building purposes the interviews began with an explanation of the purpose of the research, how the interview would be conducted, and information about the academic and family background of the investigator (i.e., having Deaf parents). After obtaining consent, the participants were asked to describe their role and tenure at the Deaf school specifically, and about their length of experience in Deaf education in general. The two Deaf participants were asked to describe their personal education upbringing and opinions on the experience as Deaf students. Next, the scripted questions were used to guide the interview. A final question asked respondents to provide any additional comments or information that they felt might have added to the information discussed in the session. Probe questions were used throughout the interview to encourage the participants to elaborate during their responses.

**Data Analysis/Interpretation**

Using the respondents’ answers to the scripted questions the author was able to deduce the techniques and outcomes at this institution specifically. Because these interviews all were with teachers at the same institution, the findings cannot situate the position of Deaf education holistically, although these data do, however, highlight the state in which one large and prestigious Deaf residential school finds itself. The information extracted from the interviews hold valuable implications and value for all those interested in language education of Deaf students—and perhaps even those concerned with bilingual education in general.

Due to the researcher guided interviews and the limited number of interviewees that were interviewed the data could not be rigorously analyzed using traditional qualitative procedures. However, a grounded theory approach was used to collapse the responses into meaningful
thematic categories (Charmaz, 2000) that could be used to further explore the issues relevant to this project.

**Results**

**Themes**

The scripted questions allowed five themes to emerge from the interviews: ASL-English bilingualism, the significance of technology, the goals of bilingual education, identification issues, and the ideal ways to prepare Deaf students for life.

**ASL-English bilingualism.** After discussing the influence of writing and speech therapy on their students, the participants’ responses composed the first of the five study themes: ASL-English bilingualism. As a reading specialist, Diane seemed to stray away from answering some of the scripted questions by relating her answers to the context of reading comprehension. English is a spoken and written language but some Deaf people do not hear intelligible speech sounds or produce speech sounds, therefore making mastery of English difficult. Diane pointed out a not so obvious point when she clarified, “the biggest issue in reading is that ASL is not written.” Diane explained that Deaf students do not automatically know the distinction between ASL and print English. It is challenging to reveal to Deaf students that printed words are not the same as the signs used for the vocabulary of ASL.

Overall, the respondents were of the opinion that speech production is not a defining factor in the education of the students at this institution. Still, speech therapy was reportedly an option offered in the school. For instance, students were at times pulled out of the classroom for instruction. Lisa, the first-grade teacher, prefers the pull-out method. In her opinion the other methods are a distraction; “I prefer when they pull them out”. She added that she did not mind when a speech-pathologist visits the classroom and mirrors the teacher. In her opinion, speech is
an important component of the educational process for Deaf students; “Whatever helps is great to me; education is education.”

Second, Shawna described the “mirror” method, as used in her classroom, wherein a speech pathologist attends normal classroom instruction and the specialist directs speech training toward selected students while the teacher provides normal curriculum. Shawna preferred this method to the pull-out of class method because students do not miss curriculum and other students in the class do not feel left out. Any students are permitted to participate in the speech training if they have an interest. Susan revealed a third method, in which all of the students in a class to attend a speech session together. She preferred this technique because some of the students receive speech training while others can practice linguistic or communication skills such as the skills a Deaf person may use to communicate more effectively with hearing people in public. The remaining participant did not say much about what she preferred, but suggested that the speech-pathologist in her program was not a good signer and that, “the kids find this frustrating”. She feels that better signing would benefit the speech training the students receive.

**Significance of technology.** The second of the five themes that emerged from the interviews was significance of technology. For example, Lisa expressed that there are great opportunities for the Deaf regarding technology and the improved communication it provides. Also, she feels that her school is utilizing technology in ways to bring hearing and Deaf individuals together, both at the campus and in the outside community. For example, Lisa said “We tear down the walls.” The school is utilizing technology for distance learning. We have a “big Video Phone” that we use to connect to classrooms that are far away. In the end, Lisa believes, with technology, “there is no reason for a Deaf person to be isolated any longer.” In addition, Beth said that the interactive computerized SMART Boards™ the teachers are using in
the classroom “are a great thing for Deaf education.” The boards are not yet in every classroom because they are costly, but Beth hopes someday every student will have one of the boards in every classroom because they facilitate learning in ways that are novel and effective.

**Goals of bilingual education.** The third of the five study themes from the participants’ responses composed is: goals of bilingual education. The interviews revealed that many students come to the Deaf school at older ages with a lack of foundation or systematic exposure to any language, suggesting Deafness can confound bilingual education outcomes. Moreover, the interviewees explained that some students arrive as school age children relying solely on gestures or home signs. Thus, the respondents’ school uses a bilingual maintenance approach to teaching English to their Deaf students wherein, students’ first language, ASL, is being embraced and respected while simultaneously teaching the benefits and usefulness of English.

On this note, Diane told a hypothetical story of a Deaf child who is born to hearing parents. For the first year of the child’s life the parents are depressed and have yet to accept that their child is Deaf. During year two the parents remain in denial and believe erroneously that their child will speak so they instill oral and aural methods of English language training. After failing at oral strategies into the third and sometimes fourth year of the child’s life the parents realize the Deaf child is not communicating and should learn ASL. Ultimately, when asked how Deaf students should be prepared to participate in the world one interviewee responded, “bilingualism to the greatest extent.” Hence, this was a theme that carried out throughout the interviews with these educators.

**Identification issues.** The fourth theme that emerged from this study was that of identification issues. To explore common (mis)perceptions regarding Deafness, the interviewees shared how their school navigates Deaf and hearing cultural lessons in the classroom. From their
responses it is clear that the school has found ways to embrace both cultures and prepares Deaf students for a world comprised of hearing people while simultaneously encouraging employees who are hearing to participate in and value Deaf culture. Accordingly, two of the educators explained that being bilingual/bicultural was more important than being culturally Deaf. “Don’t get me wrong, big ‘D’ Deaf is still important, but being able to read and write English and use ASL is the important thing right now.” Another respondent expressed that the current perspective has changed by saying, “Right now there is a balance.” Also, some of the respondents made it clear that it was their opinion that Deaf-hearing identification was not important, because it placed labels on people and, “labels can be negative.”

Susan expressed that she is culturally Deaf and uses ASL, but she also knows and uses English. “When I go to the store I write in English to communicate with the employees.” She believes that using English does not depreciate her Deafness. Alternatively, Diane felt that language use causes group separation and tension at the school’s campus. For both employees and students the use of ASL determines what group one fits into. This viewpoint further illuminates how a focus on a specific language can factor into group identification. As Diane explained the situation, cliques are not formed because of whether or not a person is Deaf or hearing, but rather due to the person’s use or ability to use ASL (or English). At the time of the interviews the high school at the institution was completing the first year of having an ASL curriculum class. All of the respondents discussed this during the interviews and were supportive of the ASL course. Some of the respondents expressed a desire for the middle school and elementary to also offer ASL classes. The elementary school on the campus does have a Deaf studies curriculum so students can learn about Deaf history, but they do not study ASL from a linguistic language learning approach.
Ideal ways to prepare a Deaf student. The final theme that arose from this study is the ideal way in which to prepare a Deaf student. Diane, the reading specialist, responded, “Language, then reading, then education, they all connect together. Once we do this the sky is the limit for the student.” She also believes education of the Deaf needs to instill “bilingualism to the fullest extent” in the students. This point highlights bilingualism, as mentioned previously, as a vital component of the current Deaf educational model.

Susan felt that the answer lies in personal confidence. “Students need to be informed about the world. They will make their way somehow or another if they are confident in themselves.” Prompted by a tag question to provide more detail about how they can be confident she added, “Through knowledge.” In her opinion, student confidence and success is not a matter of language fluency as much as an education issue.

As noted previously, Lisa felt that technology is the answer to succeeding and shaping Deaf students’ lives. The school’s resources allow the students to do a lot with the community and for themselves. “Getting information is the best thing we can do for the kids”, Lisa expressed. She ended with a comment that we all just need to, “have fun” followed by a giggle – perhaps an expression indicating that some people may take the education of Deaf students too seriously at the school.

Beth felt that for students to succeed in the world they need to “have a mutual respect for ASL and English alike.” She feels that the Deaf students will need to have a respect for both groups of people, hearing and the Deaf. She described communication classes that the school has for the kids. “We take them to McDonald’s and they order their own food.” Just as Lisa mentioned, Beth also feels that helping the students to function in a hearing world is one of the best things the Deaf school can do for them.
Discussion

**ASL-English bilingualism.** An overly simplistic view of bilingualism holds that a person can communicate in two languages. However, any attempt to classify levels of proficiency required in the two languages creates immediate complication (Bialystok, 1998). Although the State government for this particular Deaf school does not require a specific level of fluency, the objective of the school is to achieve a point at which the students are using ASL and English in balance (i.e., a 50-50 language rule). This becomes an ambiguous endeavor because it is difficult to test language proficiency – especially when languages differ in modality constraints (Singleton, Supalla, Litchfield, & Schley, 1998). For example, as Diane previously discussed, Deaf students never read ASL in print, because a written form of the language is not in use (although several notation attempts exist: e.g., Stokoe, 1960; Stokoe, Casterline, & Croneberg, 1965; see also www.si5s.org). Signs and printed words are two separate symbol systems from two distinct languages.

A problem that arises from this school’s 50-50 language rule is the misconception that as long as a student is equally fluent in ASL and English then an acceptable standard is being upheld. Take for example a hypothetical fifth-grade student who is Deaf of Deaf, that is, she has parents who are also Deaf. She is a fluent signer in her native/first language ASL and the 50/50 rule indicates that this student must comprehend and produce English at the same level as her ASL. Alternatively, one of her classmates is not a native signer; he is Deaf and his parents are hearing. He acquired ASL when he came to the Deaf school during the first grade. These two hypothetical students differ tremendously in their ASL fluency! Using the rule as a rubric to measure bilingual language proficiency is problematic, because as this example reveals a student’s experience and linguistic background alters the standard for balancing bilingual skills.
Goldin-Meadow and Mayberry (2001) assert that a young Deaf person’s level of ASL fluency can predict the level at which the student will read print English. Thus, a lowered bilingual language standard for a student with a late onset of either language will create a disadvantage that is likely to follow him or her throughout life. In practice it is challenging to enforce a 50-50 bilingual language rule with Deaf students because their language experiences and abilities differ considerably.

Strides in bilingual education can be made once there is a clear distinction in the student’s mind between print and ASL, when the teacher can proceed to a strategy that educators refer to as “chaining” or “bridging.” Padden and Ramsey (2000) have described chaining as a system that teachers use to make connections between printed words and vocabulary (signs) in ASL. Chaining is switching back and forth from ASL to print English, and using fingerspelling and ASL vocabulary to teach students to read and write English. Chaining is a challenging learning tool to use with students; Diane stated that, “it takes a good teacher to do chaining right, it is not easy.” Bridging/chaining is utilized by this Deaf school’s teachers to teach reading and writing to Deaf students.

Seldom do profoundly Deaf students master English speech production (Vlastarakos, 2012), and as a consequence they are often frustrated with the continuous attempts by parents and teachers to practice speech skills. Anecdotes are abundant that describe Deaf people who refrain from using any speech sounds when communicating, a behavior that is commonly attributed to negative experiences from unsuccessful speech training. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) contend that for second language learning to be successful responsibility for the novice’s performance must naturally evolve from the teacher to the learner. Also, explicit feedback must come during the appropriate stages of language development. A lack of transition in language
learning and sustained levels of feedback from a teacher will negatively impact learning. The process of speech development of the Deaf does not mirror the model of acquisition for hearing children, but psychological responses caused by success, failure, and feedback are equivalent in both groups of children.

Speech can be impeded because of several factors: the child’s level of hearing may prevent auditory access to others’ speech, parents may have no desire for their child to learn speech, or the child’s school may not engage the child in speech training. The Deaf school where the respondents work has speech training, but English reading and writing skills are the focal point in the school’s educational paradigm. At this point one may ask, is speech necessary for a Deaf student to be bilingual? Respondents’ answers to this question were unanimous – speech is not required for knowledge and use of English, but it can help students because it “[speech] is just another tool in their [the student’s] tool belt.” Speech is viewed as an opportunity, but a lack of speech skills is not detrimental to Deaf students’ success. There are controversies concerning, first, the ways in which children have been taught speech, and second, the reasons for speech instruction.

First, a review of speech training methods is not the purpose of this study although, as aforementioned, the respondents did highlight some of the practices that take place at this particular Deaf school: students are either (1) pulled out of the classroom for speech instruction, (2) participate in a mirror classroom, or (3) participate in speech instruction with the entire classroom. An important distinction that evolved from our inquiries about speech training is the expectation that sign should accompany speech training – for a speech pathologist to be effective some of these educators believe the specialist should utilize ASL, further highlighting the interplay of the two languages during language learning skills. Second, some students are taught
speech, either because their parents and/or an educational committee decide it is best for the child, or because the child expresses personal interest in working with a speech therapist or enrolling in a speech class. Interestingly, while visiting Deaf classrooms in the past, the first author observed a student openly rebelling against being pulled out of a classroom to attend an isolated (one-on-one) speech session with a speech-language pathologist. This does not imply that the lesson was unconstructive or that it should be condemned because many young children revolt at formal educational practices of any kind. But this observation should serve as a reminder that not all children want to learn to use speech, and it should not be thought of as a default in the model for language education.

**Significance of technology.** Technology is improving the lives of the Deaf as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being rapidly developed and continue to be introduced to the public. Trends towards the use of e-mail, text-messaging, social networking sites, and video sharing websites (e.g., YouTube) continue to increase accessibility for the Deaf. Video phones (VP) and telephone and VP relay services also facilitate quicker and more efficient communication opportunities for Deaf people. On this note, as Lisa discussed, technology is viewed by some as the answer to the isolation that Deaf people have traditionally faced. She mentioned that, “technology gives our kids equality in getting jobs. Who knows you’re Deaf over e-mail?” Currently, Deaf students are being educated with the absence of some of the communication walls and stigmas that the Deaf of the past experienced.

Technology and the influence it has on communication are changing the boundaries and limits that the Deaf have with one another and with the hearing in positive ways. Language, education, and socialization are affected by new ways the Deaf are provided to communicate (Keating & Mirus, 2003). Recently, Snodden (2010) found that technology use in the classrooms
of the Deaf facilitated linguistic and cultural identity and promoted ASL literacy. Also, animated conversational agents (i.e., simulated faces) have been used to facilitate specific learning efforts such as speech training (Cole et al., 1999). Griffin and Griffin (2012) argue that ICTs play an intricate role in facilitating relationships and exchanges among deaf people in online communities. In these ways, there is ample evidence that indicates that technology is important in the lives of the Deaf and can increase awareness of identity, facilitate culture, and benefit educational achievement.

**Goals of bilingual education.** Bilingual programs are commonly motivated by one of two initiatives. The first, transitional bilingual language programs are those that teach a second language with the goal that the original language will eventually be abandoned. The second are bilingual maintenance programs that intend for a second language to be taught so that both languages will be retained for future use. Transitional bilingual programs are common with Spanish speakers who are learning English as a second language in the United States. Bilingual programs of this type often leave feelings of resentment and domination because the native language of the student is not treated with equal respect. Historically, Deaf education programs that taught English to the Deaf were conducted with the philosophy that the Deaf student would discontinue the use of signing in the future – and these programs are known for instilling resentment in Deaf students.

A major contributor to the failure of transitional bilingual language programs with Deaf students is a failure to utilize the first language (ASL) of the students fully. These programs put a lot of emphasis on speech training and ignored that some Deaf students would never be able to speak. These oversights were likely caused because traditional bilingual models are based on the misconception that one must first speak a language to then learn to read and write that language.
As previously mentioned, educators should depend on a student’s capacity to learn reading and writing by using ASL *chaining* mechanisms.

Transitional English language programs for the Deaf have ignored that ASL is a true and full language that can stand on its own. Educators and language planners failed to acknowledge the socio-cultural phenomena surrounding ASL, Deafness, and the community of people who use the language. Consequently, there is resentment among some Deaf people who have had English imposed on them in school in ways that ignored their identity and the richness, significance, and usefulness of their native language, ASL.

Bilingual maintenance programs like the respondents’ school supports rely on and encourage use of one’s first language during and after second language proficiency. Research reveals that respect for the culture tied to a particular language increases motivation for learning the language (Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002). Historically, bilingual education was believed to have negative linguistic and cognitive effects on children (see Cummins, 1977). Current research largely dismisses the belief that bilingual education hinders cognitive development and learning, but improves it (Owens, 2012). Rather, as illustrated by Diane previously, Deafness can confound bilingual education. In the end, balanced bilingual practices and equivalent respect towards both ASL and English is an effective method Deaf educators have to educate Deaf students.

**Identification issues.** People who are Deaf constantly must negotiate their membership in a socio-linguistic sub-culture of American society. Audiological Deafness does not necessarily guarantee one’s place in the Deaf cultural atmosphere. Senghas and Monaghan (2002) reveal that classification of hearing ability is much different than cultural membership in the Deaf
community that derives from socialization, acculturation, identification and language use. Deaf identification is a unique and important component of Deaf life.

English is predominantly the language of the hearing while ASL is the language of the Deaf. As a consequence, it is common for Deaf and the hearing cultures to be thought of as opposite or opposing one another. According to the respondents, the contrast between Deaf and hearing cultures that is often expressed in literature on Deafness (e.g., see Deaf identity scale by Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh, & Allen, 1998) was not relevant or a key component in educating their students. Rather, than spending a great deal of time negotiating a hearing-Deaf cultural continuum, the respondents reported focusing on academia and bilingualism with their students.

Still, Deafness is trending towards being recognized as a unique sub-culture in the United States by the status quo; as a culture with a unique language and way of life. In 2012, The White House distributed an email response to an online petition with over 37,000 signatures named *Officially recognize American Sign Language as a community language and a language of instruction in schools.* “ASL is vital for many individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. We agree that is an important aspect of American culture and that it facilitates communication among our citizens.” This message reflects a societal trend away from a Deaf-hearing dichotomy and civil right inequalities towards the Deaf community. The Deaf and hearing are living in shared communities, working in the same professional environments, and are communicating in a shared technological world. The hearing are placing more importance on ASL and learning it in growing numbers (Rosen, 2008) and Deaf educators are successfully teaching students to read and write English and to be communicatively savvy in the hearing world.

Deaf people vary in their use of English and ASL, but these differences should not alter their identity as a Deaf person, like they have not altered Susan’s. As a result, Susan introduced
the term deafness – a concept that conveys the shared experience of people with varying hearing abilities. In the book Understanding Deaf culture: In Search of Deafhood author Paddy Ladd (2003) argues for the usefulness of including all those who have experienced a life with audiological Deafness under one typology. Deafhood includes all of the signed languages of the world, signed systems, ways people are educated, and the different ways in which Deaf people identify themselves. It is an all-encompassing philosophy that believes the shared experience of any Deaf person can bring all people with varying hearing abilities together. It is a compelling and contemporary ideology that this educator has embraced in her profession and personal outlook.

Lastly, some perspectives gained from these interviews are unique because they provide valuable insight into situations that may otherwise be undocumented. Someone other than a student or employee at a Deaf school, like Diane, may not understand that some identifications issues relative to Deafness in an educational setting have more to do with “group” issues that surround political and social tensions.

**Ideal ways to prepare a Deaf student.** The interviews provided unique and moving answers to the question about how Deaf students should be prepared for the world. To reiterate, Diane and Beth called for bilingualism, Susan for confidence, and Lisa for the use of technology. In the end, the significance of English reading and writing skills are not only important, but are also valued by educators at this Deaf school. Through special reading programs, speech training strategies, and techniques such as “chaining” ASL with English, language can be used in ways that strengthen a student’s first language, and sustains the acquisition of a second language, English (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Padden & Ramsey, 2000). Bilingual maintenance of two languages is viewed as a necessary aspect of Deaf students’ lives and in the minds of these
educators it will prove to be successful and benefit their students’ futures. These educators appear to be satisfied teaching using the bilingual methods they have and feel they are doing what is best for their students.

Limitations and Future Research

The educators in this sample all worked at the same Deaf school and it is likely that they have all been trained in similar ways and perhaps are influenced by the policies from the school where they all work. Their sentiments and behaviors regarding bilingual methods of teaching are likely to be homogenous because of their shared demographics. However, these participants’ reflections on the state of the language education practices at this specific Deaf school are valuable because it is a state funded Deaf school and one of the larger institutions of its kind. This school teaches children starting in early childhood (younger than one year of age) all the way through high school seniors; it is a leader in the education of the Deaf and a center for research and the use of leading Deaf pedagogical techniques.

The reported research fails to capture the bilingual techniques of teachers at mainstreamed public schools. The vast majority of Deaf students are now being mainstreamed in public schools alongside their hearing peers (Stinson & Antia, 1999), therefore the observations from these conversations with five educators at one Deaf school specifically do not speak to the state of the education of the Deaf in general. These findings do serve to instill curiosity about language learning techniques employed at public schools where Deaf students attend classes. Future research should explore how public schools use bilingualism to teach their Deaf students. Conversations with a more diverse sample than was provided in this study will help to dispel potential assumptions and lead to beneficial comparisons. Researchers wishing to gain access to
educators or students should be aware of the sensitive nature of Deaf education practices and use caution when asking for access to respondents or their classrooms.

What is very probable is that the themes that were relevant in this study will also be salient in a sample of educators at different Deaf schools and mainstream programs. The questions asked in these interviews and the results from the respondents should be used to build questions for future research that will explore the use of bilingual language models, use of technology, and the identification and cultural issues relevant when teaching Deaf students ASL and English.

Last, the author’s prior views or biases may have influenced the outcomes of this research. From the interview script development to the final analysis of emergent themes from the interview notes, bias is difficult to avoid. However, being conscious and mindful of one’s biases is helpful – and we certainly maintained a close watch on our prior beliefs. It is also important to note that the first author, who conducted the interviews and analyses, is a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA) and is fluent in spoken English and ASL. While this may pose some limitations, it is also the reason for the inquiry and provided access to both hearing and Deaf teachers at the Deaf School.
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Footnote

1It is conventional to capitalize the word Deaf when referring to a person or group of people who belong to the socio-linguistic cultural group who use American Sign Language. For stylistic purposes, and to avoid confusion, we use and capitalize the word Deaf throughout to refer to all person(s) with varying degrees of hearing ability. Hard-of-hearing is only used on the one occasion previous to this note.
Appendix

Interview Questions

Describe my background (context) to the participant (CODA, degree in Deaf studies, etc.) as to eliminate a lot of redundancy and information not important in the interview/conversation.

Describe your role or position at this school:
How long have you worked or been a part of educating the Deaf?
How long have you worked at this school?
   If the participant is Deaf - ask these questions:
      How were you educated? English, ASL, or both?
      What are your feelings/opinions on the ways in which you were educated?

1) Describe in your own words the way in which this school uses ASL and/or English in educating Deaf students.
   (Probe) why is more weight is put on one than the other?
2) What sorts of language policies and strategies does the school employ?
   Do you know how they came to be (e.g., imposed from outside, developed locally, changed by administrators, etc.)?
3) How does this school decide to teach English: speech, reading, and writing to students?
   On a case-by-case basis with individual students?
   Do some students get more training in English than other students?
      (Probe) because of his/her skills or ability to hear or speak?
4) If students are individually selected to go through more English training how do you feel about this?
   What works well about these selection procedures? Are there ways in which the process or system might be improved?
5) Among Deaf people, Deaf and hearing cultures are often seen as opposing one another. Has this school found ways to embrace both cultures? How does it prepare Deaf people to live in the larger hearing culture and the hearing people who work here to participate in or value Deaf culture?
6) What, to you, would be the ideal way to prepare Deaf students to participate as fully as possible in the Deaf and hearing cultures and communities?
7) Is there anything else you would like to inform me about concerning these or other matters?