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Samuel J. Supalla
University of Arizona

Anita Small
small Language Connections

Joanne S. Cripps
Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf

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American Sign Language for Everyone: Considerations for Universal Design and Youth Identity

Samuel J. Supalla

University of Arizona

Anita Small

small Language Connections

Joanne S. Cripps

Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf

Introduction¹

While western society is best described as a speaking society, signed language is used by a subgroup of the population—among Deaf people. The capitalized “D” in the term Deaf represents a Deaf culture framework cultivated through Deaf Studies, initiated in the 1980s. Deaf Studies scholars and researchers have demonstrated that an individual who experiences hearing loss has a tendency over time to become part of a community that is close-knit and displays the qualities of a cultural group. American Sign Language (ASL) serves as the primary basis for this Deaf socio-cultural and political phenomenon (Baker & Cokely, 1994; Carbin, 1996; Lane, 1999; Lane, 2010; Lane et al., 1996; Padden, 1980; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Rutherford, 1988). ASL possesses its own distinctive structure, as do spoken languages used around the world. This reinforces the concept that Deaf people are part of a cultural and linguistic minority.

This paper is intended to engender thought-provoking discussion to address the current experience of deaf children, youth, and adults in society and the role of universal design to enhance that experience for both deaf and hearing individuals. The authors propose that universal design has the unique potential to create a very different reality—an environment in which deaf people are truly at the “center” of society alongside their hearing neighbors and in which hearing individuals are enriched by this change.

While deaf people communicate perfectly well within their own community using signed language, the experience that they, as well as deaf people who do not know signed language, have in society at large is less than optimal. Spoken language constitutes a barrier for deaf individuals to fully participate and contribute to society. This not only limits deaf individuals from realizing their potential; it also impacts the benefits society could gain from their equal participation. One avenue for exploration is the concept of Universal Design.

The term *universal design* was coined originally by architect Ronald L. Mace to describe the designing of all products and the built environment to be both aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or status in life.² In 1963, Goldsmith, author of *Designing for the Disabled* (1963/2011) initiated the concept of free access for people with disabilities. This concept gained most traction with the creation of the dropped curb on all sidewalks—now a standard feature of our environment in many western countries. It has been legislated in the United States through the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, followed by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 in Australia.³ We propose the following basic Universal Design question for consideration:

Should western countries advocate *inclusion* whereby all individuals learn how to sign and it is no longer confined to special education or to what is currently considered by society as a *disability* group?

This proposition is relevant to deaf students living in Ontario, Canada, where the majority (92%) are mainstreamed as special education students in hearing public school board programs. Ninety-seven percent of deaf students attend these local public schools dominated by spoken language (Malkowski, 2011). Mainstreamed education for deaf students is even more dramatic across Canada, with 99% of deaf children (junior kindergarten to grade 12) enrolled in regular schools, and less than 1% attending the provincial schools for deaf students. Although schools for the deaf are known for providing rich

¹ Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf holds the copyright of this article funded by Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research. The authors also wish to acknowledge Jody H. Cripps for his review of and input on this document.

² “Ronald L. Mace on NC State University, College of Design”. Design.ncsu.edu. Retrieved 2013-09-09. http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud.htm

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_design. Retrieved 2013-09-09.

signing environments,⁴ integration in non-signing schools has been a priority in Canada. A similar situation occurs in the United States; over 85% of deaf students are placed in a regular public school setting (e.g., Stinson & Kluwin, 2011). We suggest that the special education/disability model undermines the identity and potential of deaf students by identifying them as special needs. Instead we propose reframing and identifying deaf students as champions of language that potentially benefits all of greater society to which they belong.

To understand the concept of Universal Design (UD), we must first gain a greater understanding about deaf youth identity and their role in society (Small et al., 2012). Deaf youth need to develop as productive members of society while maintaining their identity. This includes becoming proficient in ASL. Unlike English or any spoken language, ASL is fully accessible to deaf children for language acquisition and mastery (Supalla & McKee, 2002; see Supalla & Cripps, 2008, for further discussion on the concept of linguistic accessibility). Addressing the issues deaf youth face with English is also critical for improving their well-being, especially in terms of learning to read and becoming literate in a language they do not hear. Viewing this challenge from the Deaf culture model perspective, we can address the critical role of ASL in the development of English literacy for deaf students to become fluent readers.

J. H. Cripps and Supalla (2012) explained that the power of spoken language is so immense that it penetrates practically every aspect of daily life. The Canadian and American public is frequently narrow in their thinking that language must be spoken. The UD paradigm provides an opportunity to reexamine spoken language as the undisputed language of instruction in schools and provides an expanded notion of inclusion or what it means to be integrated in the mainstream. Although the Deaf community and its members have advocated against society's preoccupation with spoken language over the years, they have not gained a solid platform for dialogue, nor have we seen significant social change. The common recurring theme in Deaf Studies research and scholarship is oppression associated with signed language. The fact that culturally deaf people do not perceive themselves as disabled is especially relevant (see Lane et al., 2011, for the most recent discussion on the topic of disability in the Deaf community). We do not dispute the realities of language oppression and what the perceptions are, but we do believe that more can be done and that a different approach must be considered. Thus, if culturally deaf people do not identify themselves as having a disability, then the question becomes how deaf people AND society at large can benefit from a paradigm shift, and what directions for change must be considered for individual societies to follow.

Think of the deaf child or youth as a visual learner. What does this visually based child need in order to feel truly included in all social and academic situations? What is needed for this child to learn in a visual environment? What is needed for their literacy development? What could Universal Design offer visual learners? To be provocative for a moment, we can "step outside of the box." If we step away from thinking of integration as we know it and disconnect it from "disability," we can extend the inclusion paradigm to incorporate the visual environment in Universal Design to include *signed language for all*.⁵

For this reason, UD is a worthy paradigm to explore, especially for the prospect of signed language proliferation. Many would likely be curious about what society has to say about the basic notion that signing should and could be part of mainstream culture even to the extent that speaking is. This paper is intended to raise questions and provoke dialogue and consideration of possibilities not yet explored.

Historically, there have been many accommodations of people with disabilities into society. Deaf people have experienced accommodations, but their integration into society is far from realized. With access to language (spoken vs. signed) at the core, it is not difficult to understand why traditional inclusion or integration practices have been controversial to the Deaf community as well as within the field of education. UD theoretically represents a broader perspective and potentially offers inclusion or integration a more successful outcome. As such, ASL is presented as a component of UD that potentially benefits society at large as well as deaf individuals and culturally deaf people. If accepted as part of UD, ASL would reduce or help eliminate the tension currently experienced between hearing and deaf individuals in our society and could potentially benefit all.

Socialization and Literacy are Key

For the education of deaf students, we propose a more expanded integration model than has been explored to date. Current conventional integration practices place deaf students in a regular public-school setting, often with supports that separate them from the mainstream while keeping them in the setting, and hope for the best in regards to their academic and social success.

⁴ See Carbin (1996; 2005) for the historical development of the deaf school system in Canada and Van Cleve and Crouch (1989) for the deaf education system in the United States.

⁵ The description of deaf children as "visual learners" does not include the fact that ASL is also accessible for deaf-blind people (who are clearly not visual learners). Deaf-blind people are known to place their hands on a person's signing to follow the conversation, for example (Collins & Petronio, 1998; Quinto-Pozos, 2002). Signed language allows the use of tactile and visual means for communication. ASL is actually a UD language (being accessible for everybody). Hearing individuals are also known to be fluent or native signers, especially those born to deaf parents and raised in a signing household (e.g., Singleton & Tittle, 2000).

Students are often relegated to the periphery. A lack of opportunity for socialization for deaf students when the schools use spoken language is one important consideration. According to J. H. Cripps and Supalla, the impact on the socio-emotional welfare of deaf students is adverse (e.g., being lonely and frequently ostracized by non-signing hearing peers; see Calderon & Greenberg, 2003, for review on the well-being of deaf students).

A critical part of education involves learning to read during the early elementary school years. This impacts students' overall success and identity as learners. Students need to "learn to read" in a timely manner so that they can "read to learn" as expected in more advanced grades in school. Western societies anticipate that their citizens (including those who are deaf) will be literate, so schools have this important task. Literacy is the foundation on which academic success rests and, as such, must be given particular attention.

J. H. Cripps and Supalla identified the dominance of spoken language in the education process and in literacy education in public school settings. Public school's emphasis on spoken language is especially evident when it comes to teaching students how to read. Although research on the benefits of signed language proficiency in relationship to English literacy for deaf students has been available for many years, consistent use of signed language in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (CIA) with deaf students has not been established. In terms of best reading instruction practices, deaf students require pedagogy that allows them to learn to read in English *through* ASL (see Supalla & J. H. Cripps, 2011, for review of ASL Gloss for teaching English literacy to deaf students). Since signed language is what deaf students can naturally access, a process of transitioning from ASL to written English must be comprehensively addressed in CIA. Reading standards would serve as the basis for CIA alignment that suits the needs of deaf students as a group (see Supalla & Blackburn, 2003, for further discussion on how CIA can be aligned with the standards for a school with deaf students in attendance). That said, having ASL as primary in teaching English literacy would likely require so much from the regular public school that the placement of deaf students in such settings would be deemed not feasible.

This raises the important question: Do the needs of deaf students and ASL exceed the capacity of special education? We suspect the answer is yes. Current conventional integration as defined by special education places pressure on deaf students to conform to how hearing students are taught reading. The barriers that deaf students experience in the classroom lie in the fact that reading instruction practices are based on the assumption that all students can hear and enjoy access to English. Hearing students, whether they know English or are learning English (as a second language), can sound out the words in print (as part of developing decoding skills) and participate in reading aloud sentences, for example. Deaf students cannot.

J. H. Cripps and Supalla explained that CIA was fixed or rigid and assumed to be the "right" way for students with or without disabilities until very recently. The primary job that special educators had was seeing that deaf students' needs were met, but with the spoken language orientation of CIA, the task became impossible. Special educators were doing the best they could under the circumstances. Although there has been significant positive effort and CIA alignment is now widely promoted in schools for all students, we still believe that the solution goes beyond a special education model when it comes to the education of deaf students.

How do we know this? The answer lies in the very basis of the special education model. According to the individualized education design, it is not so much about whether a child is deaf, visually impaired, or has another disability, but that all students with disabilities have special needs. Individualization serves as a hallmark of special education. Thus, whatever need(s) deaf students have as a group is overlooked by design. To demonstrate this flaw, special educators would have a hard time coping with this question: How can we meet the needs of deaf students who know ASL and need to learn to read in English? Here one would have to "segregate" deaf students as a group instead of breaking up the group to try and serve individual needs. Any reference to ASL for CIA considerations would be perceived as something specific to being deaf and thus undermining integration. So, pursuing conventional integration, by necessity, makes special education biased toward spoken language.

Many special education programs provide services such as interpreters for access and resource services that pull students out of the classroom to provide additional support one on one. Here, too, the special education model does not address full inclusion or integration as we believe educators would truly like to see. The "interactions" taking place through interpreters, auditory systems, and note takers cannot be described as authentic. In what we tend to call an inclusive environment, deaf students must expend increased effort in attempts to establish direct and deep interactions with fellow students and teachers in their academic setting. Rarely are they effortlessly in the center of interactions. In contrast, for deaf children, Deaf Cultural Space embodies an empowering environment that goes far beyond inclusion. Deaf Cultural Space includes "ASL, Deaf culture, Deaf role models, and an environment where students are already in the core of the system both in academic studies as well as in the social arena where much learning takes place by osmosis" (Small & J. S. Cripps, 2012, p. 36). UD provides an opportunity to expand our current paradigm of inclusion or integration to be one where deaf students are at the center of their educational environment along with their hearing peers (and the hearing students are enriched in the process along with their deaf peers).

Integration: An Enrichment Model

J. H. Cripps and Supalla proposed that schools for deaf students be revamped under the name of signed language schools. Reverse integration would allow hearing students to attend the historically deaf schools. The signed language schools would be open to deaf and hearing students in keeping with an enrichment model of education (Hornberger, 1991) where members of the majority language in society are enriched by the minority language. In addition, any hearing or deaf student with a learning disability could continue to receive special education services within the signed language schools (paralleling what takes place in spoken language schools). Deaf students enrolled at spoken language schools will participate in the special education process, but the inaccessibility of CIA will likely result in redirecting deaf students to signed language schools. Hearing siblings of deaf children and hearing children of deaf parents would likely attend the signed language schools and many hearing parents who provide signed language for their hearing newborns, as is increasingly popular, may wish their children to be enrolled and enriched in the signed language schools.

With an enrichment model of reverse integration and UD, the dilemma of segregation as is currently evident in traditional deaf education would be avoided. With the signed language schools, ASL would be designated as the language of instruction for all students, deaf and hearing alike. Students who hear would be proficient in ASL upon enrollment or willing to learn signed language through immersion with deaf students and others who know ASL. This would not be an unreasonable expectation given the expectations of French language schools in Ontario, for example. Likewise, all students attending signed language schools would undergo reading instruction based on ASL to obtain literacy skills in English. Classroom discourse would be conducted in signed language and reading materials would be provided in written English. This is with the critical understanding that the students become literate in English through ASL. Students would also become literate in ASL, learning the signed literature of well-known poets, storytellers, etc. Auditory capacity or spoken language knowledge for learning to read will not be used to the detriment of deaf students. Deaf and hearing students would have full and equal access to the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. We know from research on deaf children with deaf parents that their English literacy and academic achievements are comparable to their hearing peers and surpass that of deaf children with hearing parents (Israelite et al., 1992). This gives credence to the potential of a signed language environment in attaining literacy and academic success. As well, there is much literature on the benefits of signed language for hearing children in early language development as well as on other developmental measures (Pettito, 2000).

Deaf youth identity would be maintained, if not strengthened, when an aligned CIA is in place. Deaf students will have the opportunity to develop English reading skills and become highly literate, made possible through signed language-based pedagogy. This includes deaf students being able to socialize with hearing peers effectively (when signed language is widely used throughout the school setting) and being deaf not framed as disability in the education process. The signed language school will provide a context for direct, real, and meaningful interaction between the two student bodies, whereas the spoken language school cannot do so. Deaf students would not be isolated, as there is strength in numbers, and deaf and hearing students would integrate both in and outside of the classroom. Extracurricular activities would take place in signed language and would be accessible to all. Students attending the signed language school will come to understand how deaf and hearing populations relate. The educational environment will naturally incorporate Deaf culture throughout, since the language is tied to the culture and literature.

We expect that the reading difficulties long known for deaf students as a group (e.g., Marschark & Harris, 1996; Musselman, 2000; Padden & Ramsey, 1998) will cease through the alignment of CIA. We also anticipate that deaf schools that have historically produced lower academic outcomes will, in turn, be elevated in quality to be on par with speaking schools. Reverse integration in practice will result in having signed language schools as a new option for the public. Hearing students will have the benefit of being enriched by the signed language and culture.

J. H. Cripps and Supalla emphasize that reverse integration with signed language is not new; it has already been implemented in a few charter schools in the United States. Charter schools are public schools that provide alternative public education. In the signing schools, teachers are employed to sign throughout the day, and both deaf and hearing students are encouraged to enroll. The Deaf community is supportive of the founding of signing charter schools (and many of the founders are deaf).

In Canada, charter schools exist in the province of Alberta but do not yet include signing schools. Charter schools that practice reverse integration in the United States, however, are producing a new generation of hearing students who use signed language in addition to speaking. As they grow into adulthood, they will become contributing members of society that will eventually reflect their signing backgrounds.

Proliferation of ASL throughout Society

The notion of signed language schools coincides with ASL becoming a popular language to learn and use among individuals who are not deaf in Canada and the United States. The timing cannot be better for the enrichment model of integration to be implemented in signed language schools since increasingly more people in general are learning how to sign.

Signed Language Programmes in Canada

Baby Sign programming for families serves as one avenue that fosters ASL proliferation as well as signed language classes offered in high schools, colleges, and universities (Kurz & Taylor, 2008; Rosen, 2008; Wilcox & Wilcox, 1997). The latter creates a strong incentive among hearing students to study ASL to meet language requirements previously reserved for spoken languages (e.g., French, Native Languages, Classical and International Languages in Ontario). In the United States, ASL is growing faster than spoken languages offered for study, according to the *New York Times* (December 8, 2010), and ASL is now the fourth most popular language to study after Spanish, French, and German. This media attention is significant, as the public takes note of options for language study. The implications for the Deaf community are significant, as more people become signers. Culturally deaf people themselves are frequently instructors of ASL in classrooms (e.g., Cooper et al., 2008).⁶ Deaf culture awareness and improved communication opportunities (such as ordering food in a restaurant with a server who knows how to sign) are all new to culturally deaf people's experiences.

We note that there are some differences when considering Canada and the United States. In Canada, ASL is offered for foreign/second language study, but to a lesser degree as compared to the United States, while Baby Sign programming is more popular in Canada. It appears that families are eager to improve communication between primary caregivers and toddlers. Signing is becoming part of the household where it was previously limited to speaking. Reduced levels of frustration and better communication abilities for toddlers are part of the Baby Sign's increasing popularity (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1996; see Doherty-Sneddon, 2008 for review of research literature on Baby Sign). The impact on society is evident, as signing is now becoming part of mainstream culture.

As signing proliferates, hearing people who are accustomed to speaking only would benefit from using signed language when talking over a distance, in a noisy environment, through a window, or when one needs to be quiet in a completely quiet environment. Losing hearing is a serious matter for the elderly, as they frequently find themselves socially isolated (e.g., Ciorba et al., 2012). Many elderly who suffer hearing loss do not use a hearing aid for a variety of reasons (e.g., Oberg et al., 2012). In a society that speaks and also knows signed language, the change from having full hearing to partial hearing would not be so traumatic for the elderly or for their family members and friends. This will become even more pertinent as the baby boom generation ages and as the next generation, used to listening to loud music through headphones, ages. As it states in the introduction to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* (Government of Ontario, 2005), "increasing accessibility will help prepare Ontario for the future. As the population ages, the number of people with disabilities will increase. Visitors and tourists, along with their friends and family, will need to travel, shop, use programs, services, and information and to access buildings, parks, and other places in a way that is accessible to them."⁷

With our focus on deaf youth, the widespread use of signed language would be critical to social change. If hearing students learn ASL in schools, through increased natural interaction with their deaf peers, deaf students would more likely feel that they are equal to their hearing counterparts. Hearing students learning ASL in school serves as an equalizer and parallels deaf students learning English through the school system.

As more hearing members of society become signers, the less "disabled" by society are deaf people. This includes downplaying the preoccupation of deaf individuals developing the capacity for spoken language in order to participate in society since more people would know how to sign. Creating a platform for full-scale proliferation of ASL in Canada and the United States will serve as a strong countermeasure to the cochlear implant technology (which attempts to make deaf children "hearing" and for them to rely on spoken language exclusively; see Humphries et al., 2012, and Kushalnagar et al., 2010, for ethical issues associated with denial of signed language exposure). If hearing students learn ASL in school, hearing parents with deaf children will less likely be afraid to expose their deaf child to ASL. They would not feel that they have to choose between signed or spoken language. Deaf children with cochlear implants today are exposed to spoken language only in Ontario (with rare exceptions) and continue to be part of special education in schools. This would not be needed.

Ambitious Agenda in New Zealand

In New Zealand, we see full-scale signed language proliferation seriously addressed. The signed language in use is New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). A parliamentary bill passed in 2006 resulted in a move by Ministry of Education officials to

6 To our knowledge, many of the officers of the national organization American Sign Language Teachers Association (and its state and local affiliates) are deaf (<http://www.aslta.org/>). The impact of ASL instruction includes signed language teaching becoming an increasing employment opportunity for culturally deaf people.

7 <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/accessibility/customerService/guideToAccessibilityStandards/background.aspx>

ensure that signed language is part of the curriculum taught in public schools throughout New Zealand. New Zealanders are expected to become signers through the education system. NZSL is recognized as an official language alongside English and Maori (an indigenous language used by natives to New Zealand prior to Europeans' arrival). Signed language is viewed as no longer in the realm of special education (Dyson, 2007; see McKee, 2005–2006, for review of the NZSL legislation). Deaf culture with its emphasis on the use of signed language is integral to the everyday life of New Zealanders.

Martha's Vineyard in the United States

Martha's Vineyard off the Massachusetts coast in the United States had widespread use of signed language from the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries (Groce, 1985; Bahan & Poole-Nash, 1996) due to a large proportion of deaf individuals compared to the deaf population reported off-island. The unusually strong deaf hereditary traits produced a unique socio-linguistic phenomenon. Hearing and deaf islanders thus became signers for linguistic access on behalf of all islanders without note of who was deaf and who was hearing.

Consequently, deaf Vineyarders enjoyed access to daily life on the island in terms of social, political, and employment opportunities. "Disability" was rendered irrelevant as it related to deaf islanders. The benefits of signed language were universal. Hearing islanders who fished used signed language among themselves, especially when they needed a way to communicate between boats out at sea, for example. With the decline of the deaf genetic pool and disappearance of deaf islanders over time, this lifestyle as described on Martha's Vineyard became historic. However, what took place on the island could be someday duplicated. Martha's Vineyard serves as a model for true integration and what society can do.

Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf

A more current example of ASL proliferation close to home is Gallaudet University, in Washington, D.C., the only liberal arts university in the world that uses signed language for instruction and in the environment. Gallaudet University was established in 1864 to serve deaf students, but there was a significant change in policy in 2001.⁸ Gallaudet University now enrolls hearing students (based on a quota) as part of its effort to promote reverse integration while maintaining a signing environment. Hearing students enrolled at this higher education institution are expected to sign and attend all classes that are signed.

Similarly, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) established in 1965 is one of the colleges and shares grounds with the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). It practices an enrichment model with reverse integration of hearing students with deaf students and includes classes with signed language instruction. It presents somewhat more complex dynamics as it is housed within the RIT grounds—a hearing-based institution. However, hearing students may enroll in NTID courses and study their course content in signed language-based classes.⁹

Together, these higher institutions of learning can serve as models for reverse integration and enrichment models concerning deaf students, hearing students, and UD in elementary and high schools.

UD is evolving, with potential for expansion as follows:

Work in the area of UD is being approached from differing perspectives. Some applications of UD are drawing heavily on the architectural roots of the concept and are building on the Principles of UD (North Carolina State University, 1997). Others are looking more holistically at what "universal" might mean in higher education settings and exploring inclusive strategies (Scott et al., 2003, p. 1).

Universal Design Concept Applied Broadly

ASL as a product and signing as an environment are clearly not architectural in nature, but what we have discussed in regards to signed language proliferation resembles the history of people in wheelchairs who rallied for ramps, a well-known architectural design. The need for ramps was once considered unique to those in wheelchairs. However, after years of advocacy and financial expenditures for the installation of ramps in Canada and the United States, individuals who do not have any significant mobility "disability" now reap the benefits of ramps. Users are not only people in wheelchairs, but anyone pushing a baby stroller, or

⁸ Admissions.gallaudet.edu/Admissions/HUG/HUG_Program.htm

⁹ Once again, the prevalent signed language use at RIT/NTID spilling over to Rochester, New York (where the institution is located), received media attention, evident with a New York Times article (December 25, 2006). The city's transformation with so many people knowing how to sign is described in the article as something that will influence the rest of the country in the near future. The title of the article, "Where Sign Language Is Far from Foreign," is part of the UD vision for ASL discussed in this chapter.

grocery cart, or in need of an incline versus a step. Authentic integration is realized when *all* individuals experience the benefits of this architectural design firsthand.

The Deaf community has unfortunately not yet experienced UD applied to visual fire alarms in all public places for safety. They have, however, experienced UD regarding other public access, such as captioning. Culturally deaf people fought for captioned TV programs in the 1970s and 1980s. Initially only news programs were captioned. Other TV programs followed, and today almost all TV programs are captioned. What is key to UD is how captioning has become mainstreamed over time and is used by individuals who can hear on many occasions (Burgstahler, 2012). In a gym or bar, for example, TV programs are frequently shown with captions. The bar is either too noisy to have the TV audible or has multiple TV sets with different programs shown at the same time. A hearing person would not be able to follow the programs auditorally (i.e., the information being spoken from different programs would conflict with each other). A person working out in the gym experiences a similar situation with multiple TV programs being shown at the same time. Captions have solved the problem of “accessing” TV programs in those situations (although admittedly it does not address these situations for blind customers). Captioning, once thought to be something specific to deaf people, now has invested interest among the deaf and hearing public such that its use should be ensured for a long time.

Limitations of Interpreting Services

The Disability Studies scholar Sheryl Burgstahler admitted that the popular practice of employing signed language interpreters for deaf students in higher education settings is not part of UD (2013, p. 3). Deaf students attending regular universities in Canada and the United States are frequently provided with the option of having a signed language interpreter. Deaf students who rely on signed language interpreters in the classroom are without a signing environment beyond the confines of the classroom. One can assume that deaf students are highly social beings just like those who can hear, yet it is hearing students who have access to the entire university and college life. Deaf students with interpreters do not have this access. This is precisely why Gallaudet University is an important example of a true UD model. An enrichment model with reverse integration provides a dynamic among deaf and hearing students that far surpasses the limitations of settings with interpreters for “access.”

Signed language interpreting services are frequently provided to help integrate deaf students in Canadian and American public schools. However, the provision of signed language interpreting services inadvertently supports the status quo of limited integration. Interpreters are not at recess or in the lunchroom when deaf students struggle with socialization. The interpreter being a third party in the classroom is awkward and not natural to the socialization process between peers and for communication with the teacher.¹⁰ Research by Canadian interpreter and former David Peikoff Chair of Deaf Studies Debra Russell bears out these findings (Russell, 2012). Interpreters cannot serve as the answer to true integration.

If widespread signed language use in Canada and the United States is highly desirable, we believe that there are two basic routes to accomplish this. One would be the mandate for students in the educational system to take ASL classes like they do math, science, history, and other content areas. This will result in having all students knowing ASL. This will be different from how the signed language classes have been offered through the foreign/second language setup (where students make a choice between ASL and other foreign/second languages and only some students become signers). The offering of ASL classes would take place in all spoken language schools. This is still only a partial solution, as students would miss the enculturation that happens through natural interaction in a fully signing environment. (We know from the situation in Ontario where students take French classes that students’ French language competency is limited since it is not an interactive immersion educational experience.) The other route is attending a signed language school with reverse integration. There, hearing students will be immersed in signed language. It is through these two routes that all youth in society will know how to sign and eventually society as a whole would know sign.

Conclusions

Currently, the majority of young deaf students are at risk for not learning or mastering ASL in a timely fashion (Snoddon, 2008). A rich signing environment as provided through a signed language school would play a significant role in ensuring that all students become fluent signers. With a UD model there would be increased opportunities for hearing parents of deaf or hearing children to learn ASL and to use it in their natural environment—not only at home with their immediate family. This applies to

¹⁰ The common provision of interpreting services does not address the need for deaf students to experience direct instruction by teachers. If hearing students are entitled to spoken language instruction in school, the same should be true for deaf students with signed language. As a full-fledged human language, ASL is supposed to function as well as English or any spoken language. Teaching reading to deaf students also requires the use of ASL in direct instruction if they are to become literate, supported through a well-aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment program.

parents of both deaf and hearing students with the reverse integration model. Spoken language schools could also operate with hearing students learning ASL (through classes) as part of creating social change, with everybody acquiring ASL in due time.

In educational terms, all students would be entitled to a signed language education in their schooling (see Padden, 2003, for the emergence of signed language education as a concept). Current conventional integration practices continue to sustain a disability/special needs model. Hearing people being strictly speakers have been seen as the “norm,” and the status quo has been maintained at the expense of many members of society. An expanded UD reverse integration model with deaf and hearing students from kindergarten through higher education would provide the following:

- ASL would be recognized for use in the environment.
- ASL would be recognized as a product that is of benefit to society.
- Audism¹¹ would be diminished. Spoken language would not retain a superior position in society, and ASL would take its just place with specific benefits for all.
- ASL would be recognized for its utilitarian value in such circumstances as communicating in a noisy environment, across a window, in a quiet zone, etc.
- ASL will also be recognized for its rich heritage, with its own literature, history, body of knowledge, just as any language carries.
- ASL will be a Universal Design language due to its status as a signed language with implications for integration practices, linguistic accessibility, optimal reading instruction practices, and true inclusion.

UD offers a way of shifting from an emphasis on disability as deaf youth establish their sense of identity in schools to one that provides an environment for deaf students to feel a true sense of “agency”—where they are key players, in the center of interactions and central to their environment alongside their hearing peers. “Agency” draws upon unique competencies that enrich our society (Small & Cripps, 2012, p. 41). Hearing students acquiring ASL can similarly feel a sense of pride in becoming enriched by the signed language and culture in which they are engaged.

With this framework, ASL would be seen as a valuable product leading to the creation of a signing environment as part of everyday life in society. With UD, the education process favors everybody, not one group over another.

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¹¹ The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or to behave in a manner of one who hears (Humphries, 1977).

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