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Training Deaf Learners to Become Interpreters: A Pilot Project

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Abstract

This article reports on a pilot project to train 20 Deaf learners in an attempt to equip them with the skills and knowledge required for interpreting assignments, including how to manage visual communication in various service settings and apply ethical standards to their interpreting practice. This is the first time such training has been delivered in a tertiary environment in Victoria, Australia. The project chose three non-language-specific units of competency from the national qualification of Diploma of Interpreting under the Public Sector Training Package. In addition to outlining the curriculum design and student learning outcomes, this article presents insight and qualitative feedback collected from semistructured interviews with the educators engaged for the project. Recommendations made at the conclusion of this project serve as a stepping-stone to delivery of a full Diploma of Interpreting for Deaf learners in the near future.

Keywords: Deaf Interpreting, Deaf interpreter training, diploma of interpreting, Auslan interpreting, skill set

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Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

Training Deaf Learners to Become Interpreters: A Pilot Project

Vocational training for Australian Sign Language (Auslan) interpreters is available in several states in Australia. In the state of Victoria, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University), where the author is based, has been the sole provider of such training over the past two decades. The RMIT Diploma of Interpreting in Auslan admits hearing students who are either native or near-native speakers of Auslan, and those who acquire Auslan as a second language through stepwise vocational qualifications, from lower certificates to the diploma² in Auslan. However, the same opportunities have been lacking for Deaf learners who aspire to become interpreters so they can serve as a communication medium between various native signers as well as Deaf immigrants, and standard Auslan users. It is in this light that the Victorian Deaf Society (Vicdeaf) acquired funding from the Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion (MASC) Division under the Victorian state government to train a group of 20 Deaf learners. Established in 1884, Vicdeaf is a not-for-profit organization committed to achieving “access and equity for people who are deaf or hard of hearing” (Vicdeaf, 2015, p. 1). RMIT was commissioned by MASC to design and deliver a 2-month pilot project to train the Deaf learners recruited through Vicdeaf, with an aim to equip them with essential skills and knowledge about interpreting so they are better placed to become fully fledged Deaf Interpreters (DIs) in the future.

Given the limited literature on DIs and Deaf interpreting (Boudreault, 2005; Forestal, 2011), this article starts with an overview of what Deaf interpreting is, why it is needed, and its professionalization and credentialing. The article then introduces various models of how Deaf interpreting is carried out, and outlines the status quo of DI training in Australia and overseas. The rest of the article focuses on the 2017 MASC pilot project, explaining the design and delivery of the 2-month training for the Deaf learners, followed by qualitative feedback collected from the educators involved. Recommendations for future delivery and limitations of the study are summarized in the concluding remarks.

1. What is Deaf interpreting?

Deaf interpreting describes interpreting undertaken by a Deaf native speaker of an indigenous sign language (MASC, 2017). The terminology used to refer to those who perform the service, however, varies across the literature, including “deaf interpreters”, “relay interpreters”, “deaf relay interpreters”, “intermediaries”, “mirror interpreters” and so on (Adam, Aro, Druetta, Dunne, & af Klintberg, 2014, p. 5). Adam et al. (2014) contend that terms such as “relay interpreters”, “intermediary interpreters” and “mirror interpreters” carry negative connotations in that they suggest that “DIs exist only to assist the non-DIs” (p. 6).

² Certificates and diplomas are entry level qualifications under the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF). The AQF is a 10-tier national system of qualifications encompassing vocational education (from Certificates I, II, III, and IV to Diploma and Advanced Diploma) and higher education (from Bachelor to Masters to PhD). For more information see <https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-levels>

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

In the Australian context, Deaf interpreting is typically provided by a Deaf person who is fluent in Auslan, has extensive knowledge of its language register, is able to use written English, and may have additional familiarity with a foreign sign language or pidgin (i.e., nonstandard Auslan; MASC, 2017; National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters [NAATI], 2017). In contrast to hearing Auslan interpreters, who transfer meaning between English and Auslan, DIs typically transfer meaning between Auslan and “a highly visual form of communication that can be understood by sign language users who are not using standard Auslan” (Vicdeaf, 2010, p. 1). Anecdotally, Deaf people are experienced in relying on visual cues for most communication. They are also gifted in discerning idiosyncratic gestures or signs and able to understand different signs out of context that a Deaf person who is not fluent in Auslan may use (NAATI, 2017). In international contexts, Deaf interpreting is often performed by Deaf bilinguals who are proficient in at least one written and one sign language, and they may also provide translation. According to Boudreault (2005), qualified DIs possess the linguistic and cognitive adaptability to create and transfer messages that satisfy different Deaf clients of varying degrees of communication abilities. In addition to transferring linguistic information, DIs play a crucial role in understanding and mediating cross-cultural differences from a Deaf perspective.

2. Why Deaf interpreting?

For spoken language interpreting, interpreters can be native speakers of one or more of their working languages. In community interpreting settings, interpreters often are drawn from the minority community they interpret for. On the contrary, most (hearing) sign language interpreters are typically not Deaf community members; this means not only that they are unable to share the same experiences, but also that they have typically been less exposed to language variation within the Deaf community, hence the need in certain settings for further language mediation by Deaf individuals. The experiential “sameness” and cultural identification afforded by DIs, according to Boudreault (2005), is critical in establishing rapport and creating positive psychological impact, thus fostering a sense of empowerment within the clients so they are more confident in expressing their thoughts to those with whom they would otherwise be unable to communicate as effectively and clearly (Bienvenu & Colonosmos, 1992; Boudreault, 2005, p. 335).

Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray (2009) have observed reticence among service users to employ DIs and to pay for “what is sometimes viewed as an unnecessary, supplementary interpreter” (p. 165). However, Vicdeaf (2010) asserts that the benefit far outweighs the extra costs, because when DIs are present communication is more complete and accurate, and the organization’s duty of care and informed consents is properly discharged to meet legal responsibilities. There is a new trend around the world for the DI service provider to be an integral part of Deaf life (Boudreault, 2005), and DIs have gradually been recognized and are working in professional capacities in many countries, including Australia (MASC, 2017).

Traditionally it has been difficult for Deaf people to qualify as sign language interpreters, due to the usual requirement for sign language interpreters to be fluent in a spoken language (e.g., English, in the Australian context) and a signed language (e.g., Auslan). There has, therefore, been a need to adapt existing curricula and credentialing systems to allow for the specific roles and settings in which DIs work. One parallel for the DI’s unique role can be found in the intralingual mediation work tasked for Registered Intermediaries (RIs) in the English and Welsh criminal justice systems (Cooper & Mattison, 2017). RIs were introduced in these jurisdictions in 2004 to facilitate effective communication between vulnerable witnesses and the people they encounter in the criminal justice system, such as police, lawyers, and judges, without a diminution in the defendants’ right to a fair trial (O’Mahony, 2009; Powell, Bowden, & Mattison, 2015). In certain ways, the work of these intermediaries is analogous to that of DIs, but in the context of spoken language and for a specific field of application. Among the 150 RIs in England and Wales (O’Mahony, 2009) are speech therapists, psychologists, and social workers specifically trained to assist vulnerable witnesses for prosecution or defense. “Vulnerable” means people who are under 18 years old, are suffering from a mental disorder, have a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning, or have a physical disability (s. 16, Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999). An RI is tasked to communicate

1. to the witness, questions put to the witness and

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

2. to any person asking such questions and the answers given by the witness in reply to them; and
3. to explain such questions or answers as far as necessary to enable them to be understood by the witness or person in question. (Hepner, Woodward, & Stewart, 2015)

It is important to note, though, that the intermediary role in this legal context is impartial and RIs do not work for the police or the defense (O'Mahony, 2009).

Similar models of intermediary can be found in Israel, South Africa, and some Scandinavian countries (Powell et al., 2015), and they have been introduced more recently to Northern Ireland, in 2013, and New South Wales, Australia, in 2016 (Cooper & Mattison, 2017). Powell et al. (2015) give examples of how intermediaries work:

They may communicate to the witness questions that are put to them during an investigative interview or cross-examination in court, or request that questions be rephrased so that they can be adequately comprehended by the witness [emphasis added]. Intermediaries may also help the witness to understand the complicated judicial process itself and become familiarised with the procedures and setting. Intermediaries may brief interviewing [police] officers or the court on the witness' specific needs and limitations prior to the interview or trial, and suggest ways to maximise the witness' ability to provide accurate testimony and minimise his or her anxiety and trauma. Finally, intermediaries may assist investigating officers and the court to understand the witness's responses to questions, such as in the instance of witnesses with a speech impediment, language deficit, or alternative means of communication such a communication board [emphasis added]. (p. 500)

Because intermediaries are professional speech therapists, psychologists, and social workers, it is understandable that, in addition to providing language mediation proper (emphasized text in above quotation), they take a proactive role in facilitating the best possible communication between the witness and the other party (text not emphasized in above quotation). Despite working closely with witnesses, the police, and the judiciary, the fundamental role of intermediaries is to assist the criminal justice system, and therefore they act as a neutral party whose paramount duty is to the court (Powell et al., 2015). It is also worth noting that their role is publicly funded, with an aim to support communication by and with vulnerable people (Cooper & Mattison, 2017).

Although the intermediaries described above have their underpinning profession and undertake more activities other than language mediation to enable effective communication with vulnerable witnesses, without jeopardizing the principle of a fair trial, it is clear that the "intralingual translation or rewording" (Jakobson, 1959) intermediaries perform in spoken languages is very similar to what DIs do as the major part of their work. If intermediaries can legitimately be trained, regulated, deployed, and remunerated in the criminal justice systems, DIs should also have the potential to expand their roles and grow in the legal context and beyond, in that these contexts have the same need for this kind of expert if Deaf people using nonstandard sign language are to have equal access to many public service institutions.

3. Settings requiring Deaf interpreting

There are members of the Deaf population in the Australian context who do not use the standard version of Auslan. The variation of the sign language they use makes communication through traditional interpreting means difficult. People who will benefit from the service of a specialized DI for communication are those who are deaf and:

- use idiosyncratic nonstandard signs or gestures such as those commonly referred to as "home signs" that are unique to a family or original village community

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

- have a cognitive disability (mild to severe) or multiple disability that compromises communication and results in disfluency
- are linguistically or socially isolated with limited conventional language proficiency
- are blind or deaf with low vision and use tactile or visually modified sign language
- are children whose language is not fully developed
- use sign particular to a given region, ethnic, or age group that is inaccessible by other qualified interpreters, for example, indigenous Deaf people
- are experiencing complex trust issues in which cultural sensitivity or comfort factor is paramount, such as in trauma counseling
- use a foreign sign language and there are no accredited or qualified foreign sign language interpreters available—these may be refugees or migrants arriving from other countries or individuals arriving from another country where a formal language (signed, spoken, or written) was not taught
- are users of a pidgin or contact variety of sign language or a common international lingua franca known as International Sign (IS; Bontempo & Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Department of Health and Human Services, 2017; MASC, 2017; NAATI, 2017; Vicdeaf, 2010)

Contexts in which DIs are critical to be included in the interpreting team may include:

- mental health settings, particularly during times of hospitalization as well as during times of assessment and diagnosis
- other health settings where complex medical conditions are being assessed and/or treated, as well as when treatment is explained, particularly if informed consent is required
- any setting in which the Deaf person is particularly vulnerable or at risk (Vicdeaf, 2010)

According to Vicdeaf, the demand for this type of specialist language service is growing in Australia. Particularly in view of Australia's migration and humanitarian programs through which immigrants and refugees are accepted into the country, there has been a growing need for DIs to work with the increasing numbers of Deaf people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In the state of Victoria, Vicdeaf provides an Auslan class for newly arrived Deaf migrants. Anecdotally, the class size grew from four in 2011 to 22 (with four on a waiting list) in 2017, pointing to possible growth in the overall numbers of this cohort of Deaf people (MASC, 2017).

4. How does Deaf interpreting work?

In countries where there is more than one official language, DIs may work for the Deaf between the signed versions of the two languages. In Canada, for example, where English and French are both official languages, DIs would work between American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ or Quebec Sign Language). However, Deaf interpreting “does not necessarily always involve two languages but instead can mean working from one language to some other form of communication, such as gesturing, drawing, using props, idiosyncratic signs, International Sign, etc.” (Boudreault, 2005, p. 329). In the Australian context, DIs may work in tandem with Auslan–English interpreters to bridge the communication gap between the Deaf client and the standard Auslan–English interpreter.

According to Boudreault (2005), there are three types of Deaf interpreting within a single language:

- Mirroring (DI-M; also known as “shadowing” or “shadow interpreting” (Boudreault, 2005, p. 329): This technique reproduces every grammatical feature from the source message and is mostly used during the question period of a large-scale meeting with a large audience who are deaf. The aim is to “maintain communication efficiency in terms of both fluency and time management for all members of the audience” (Boudreault, 2005, p. 330).

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

- The DI as facilitator (DI-F): This technique takes place when hearing interpreters acknowledge they have difficulties in comprehending signs by Deaf clients, who may be semilingual because of their educational or cultural backgrounds, or who may use a particular dialect.
- Working with International Sign (DI-IS): This technique is typically used in international conferences (e.g., Deaf Way II), Deaflympics, or international meetings where Deaf individuals use various signed languages, including a combination of gestures, loan signs from various existing signed languages, and pidgin signs.

In a simplified schema, the chain of communication is shown in Figure 1, where “each interpreter receives the message in one communication mode, processes it linguistically and culturally, then passes it on in the appropriate target language” (NAATI, 2017, p. 2).

Figure 1. Communication flow for Deaf interpreting.

Hearing Person → Interpreter → Deaf Interpreter → Deaf Person

Hearing Person ← Interpreter ← Deaf Interpreter ← Deaf Person

(Source: Canadian Hearing Society, <https://www.chs.ca/about-deaf-interpreting>)

5. Training for Deaf interpreters

With the value of DIs’ work increasing and the demand for Deaf interpreting growing, there is also growing awareness of the need for DIs to be better trained and credentialed (MASC, 2017). In countries where public service interpreting has developed to more advanced stages, such as Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and Scandinavian countries, it is no longer acceptable for public service interpreters to simply enter the profession without any form of training and systematic professional development. The same should apply to DIs, in that:

No deaf individuals should become interpreters “on the job” or just by taking a few workshops, or by being mentored briefly and then passing a certification exam. They need more extensive and rigorous training to attend the degree of excellence that is desired in the field of interpreting. (Boudreault, 2005, p. 350)

Before the current pilot project, Vicdeaf had offered workshop-style training for a number of years in the state of Victoria, Australia, to augment the skills of the DI, with typical class sizes of around 15. However, it is recognized that DIs should receive recognized national training to the same standards as their hearing counterparts (MASC, 2017), and therefore the current project is particularly welcome because the training covers three non-language-specific units of competency from the national qualification of Diploma of Interpreting and can serve as a pathway to the full diploma qualification in the future.

In the broader Australian context, according to Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray (2009), DI training has been offered in an ad hoc manner since the late 1990s primarily by state deaf society organizations or Australian Sign Language Interpreters’ Association (ASLIA) branches, ranging from a weekend workshop to courses of several weeks’ duration to a 1-year Diploma of Interpreting course at Central TAFE³ in Perth, Western Australia, in 2001. The diploma course was taught to a group of Deaf learners in Auslan by hearing and Deaf educators who were

³ TAFE stands for Technical and Further Education. Each state and territory in Australia has a vocational education and training system, which prepares people for work in a career that does not need a university degree (for more information, see <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/education>). The vocational education and training system in each state and territory typically includes public TAFE institutes and private providers.

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

themselves interpreters. It was focused on the consecutive mode of interpreting rather than the simultaneous mode, which is the norm for hearing Auslan interpreters.

In the state of South Australia (SA), TAFE SA has delivered DI training in the national qualification Diploma of Interpreting since 2013. Two cohorts of mixed hearing and Deaf learners have been taught to date, with some graduates achieving NAATI Recognition and others acquiring NAATI Paraprofessional Interpreter⁴ accreditation in Deaf Interpreting (M. Rowan, personal communication, November 8, 2017).

In Europe, many countries are in a “transitional phase,” in which they are “moving from a situation where Deaf Interpreting has been an informal profession that is not recognized, carried out by Deaf individuals without any formal interpreter training, to a situation where the profession has become more formalized” (Lindsay, 2016, p. 6). Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany and the UK have better developed DI professions, in that they have:

- a formal, publicly funded interpreter education for Deaf students
- a public system of registration or authorization of DIs
- public funding of Deaf Interpreting. (Lindsay, 2016, p. 23)

Of the 31 countries or regions surveyed by Lindsay (2016), 10 have one interpreting training program for DIs mixed with hearing students, whereas eight have one program training DIs separately from their hearing counterparts. The training programs in these countries or regions appear to be a mixture of vocational, bachelor, and short courses. The remaining 13 countries do not have any training for DIs at all (Lindsay, 2016, p. 86).

6. Professionalization of and credentialing for Deaf interpreters

The United States (U.S.) took the lead in considering professional status for DIs in the 1970s (Bienvenu & Colonomos, 1992). The professionalization of DIs in the U.S. continued through the 1980s until the late 1990s, when, in 1998, a full DI certification was offered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID; Boudreault, 2005). A Deaf person interested in becoming a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) must sit a two-part exam: a written exam and an interpreting performance exam. After gaining certification, DIs are required to undertake continuous professional development to maintain their certification, similar to hearing colleagues (Boudreault, 2005).

In Australia and Canada, the professionalization of DIs has taken a much slower pace. Boudreault (2005) spoke of it as “virtually non-existent” (p. 325) in Canada. More than a decade later, some progress has been achieved in Canada, evidenced by the position paper issued by the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (2015), whereby DIs’ value and inclusion in the association was acknowledged and confirmed. In Australia, NAATI only started granting Deaf Interpreter Recognition in 2013 and Paraprofessional Deaf Interpreter accreditation in 2017; both groups achieved credentialing through completing NAATI-approved vocational training courses (R. Foote, personal communication, November 20, 2017). To date, NAATI has recognized 27 DIs (four have since lapsed) and six Paraprofessional Deaf Interpreters (R. Foote, personal communication, November 20, 2017). Until only a few years ago, NAATI refused to award accreditation to DIs, because it held that “the nature of their work is largely intralingual rather than interlingual” (Bontempo & Levitzke-Gray, 2009, p. 162).

NAATI published its first information booklet for DI Recognition as recent as in February 2017. To gain NAATI Recognition in Deaf Interpreting, individuals must:

⁴ Up to the end of 2017, NAATI system catered for accreditation by either training or testing. For languages NAATI tested, two main levels were available for community interpreting: Professional Interpreter and Paraprofessional Interpreter. For languages of low community demand for which, therefore, NAATI did not test, a Recognition status was available if one could provide evidence of language proficiency, proof of relevant work experience, and completion of a short training course. NAATI has introduced a new certification system since 2018. For details of the new system see <https://www.naati.com.au/certification/the-certification-system/>

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

1. prove their proficiency in Auslan,
2. complete a short training course, and
3. have relevant work experience. (NAATI, 2017)

NAATI has identified the following five language combinations or areas of competency for awarding DI Recognition, which is very useful in informing provider agencies and clients about the types of work DIs have experience working in.

1. Auslan–Nonconventional Sign Language (NCSL): Interpreting between Auslan and a sign language that is idiosyncratic or nonconventional.
2. Written English–Nonconventional Sign Language (NSCL): Sight translation from written English forms or documents into sign language that is idiosyncratic or nonconventional.
3. Auslan–Adapted Sign Language: Interpreting between Auslan and a visually adapted or tactile form of sign language used by Deafblind or Deaf persons with low vision.
4. Written English–Auslan: Sight translation from written English forms or documents into Auslan.
5. Auslan–Conventional Sign Language: Interpreting between Auslan and a standardized foreign signed language (e.g., British Sign Language, Japanese Sign Language, American Sign Language; NAATI, 2017)

In the U.S., RID has offered full DI certification (CDI) since 1998, catering for those who are deaf or hard of hearing and have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of interpreting, deafness, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture (RID, n.d.). The certification contains two parts: the CDI Knowledge Exam, after minimum training of 40 hours, followed by the CDI Performance Exam, for those who have completed an associate degree (expected to upgrade to a Bachelor of Arts in 2018; RID, n.d.). Canada, in contrast, has yet to establish certification for DIs, although the demand has increased and there have been several attempts to do so since the 1990s (Boudreault, 2005).

Another relevant area of development is a system to recognize proficient IS interpreters, jointly developed by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI). IS is a contact sign, which has evolved among Deaf people who need to communicate but do not share a common signed language (WFD & WASLI, 2015, p. 2). In light of the increasing engagement of Deaf people in international events, Deaf peoples' demand for the same access to proceedings as their nonsigning counterparts enjoy is increasing. Communication with and among Deaf people from different countries using various sign languages may only be possible through an IS interpreter. WFD & WASLI (2015) propose to emulate NAATI's Recognition model, where "there is need to recognize skills of an interpreter to give them legitimate status, but there is not yet a formal training program or a NAATI test offered in that language" (p. 7). WFD & WASLI (2015) go on to suggest a "clear process to establish initial 'register' of IS interpreters, while further work is carried out to develop . . . IS interpreter training and accreditation system" (p. 7).

7. 2017 Deaf interpreter training pilot project

For the purpose of this pilot project, three non-language-specific units of competency (see Table 1) under the national qualification of Diploma of Interpreting were chosen to form a skill set. A *skill set* in the context of Australian vocational training refers to a collection of units of competency, which are "combined into an interrelated set below the level of a full qualification" (Mills, Crean, Ranshaw, & Bowman, 2012, p. 10). Each unit of competency has its defined learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills and their application parameters. A full qualification enables performance of a whole vocational occupation, whereas a skill set enables performance of job tasks or functions (Mills et al., 2012). The skill set under this pilot project included the skills and knowledge required to prepare interpreting assignments, manage visual communication, and apply ethical standards to their practice. Under the full diploma of interpreting qualification, there are two interpreting units, for dialogue and for monologue. These two interpreting units were not chosen for the current project because the

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

number of hours for learners to achieve competence would require the course to be much longer and would exceed MASC's funding range.

Table 1. Units of competency.

National codes	Unit of competency
PSPTIS001	Apply codes and standards to ethical practice
PSPTIS003	Prepare to translate and interpret
PSPTIS042	Manage discourse in general settings

The Diploma of Interpreting is a national qualification from the PSP Public Sector Training Package released in 2016 (for more information, see <https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/PSP50916#>). Learners who have completed this skill set can then obtain credit transfers and pathway into the full diploma qualification. Although RMIT has delivered the Diploma of Interpreting for hearing Auslan-speaking students for the past 20 years, this is the first time the institution has taken on the training of Deaf learners. This project serves as the first DI training delivered in a tertiary educational setting in Victoria, Australia.

7.1. Participants

Twenty Deaf learners were accepted into the project based on the information they provided in the application form and screened by one deaf teacher and two hearing educators who are Auslan interpreters. Selection criteria focused on language capabilities, including the ability to communicate with Deaf people from other countries and fluency in IS, and context-specific communication experiences, such as working with children, Deafblind, and intellectually disabled people, and in medical and mental health settings. Only a small percentage of the learners (30%) reported that they had received DI training previously.

7.2. Course delivery

The team that screened the deaf learners was also tasked to design the syllabus and deliver the workshops. Vicdeaf as the project partner was consulted for the course content and delivery plan. The course was delivered in 5 full-day face-to-face workshops on certain Saturdays from April to June 2017. The Deaf teacher was there for all sessions, and the two hearing Auslan interpreting teachers took turns to coteach with the deaf teacher. Print versions of learning materials were distributed in class and digital versions were made available on the RMIT online learning platform, which also hosts additional learning materials. A hard-copy study guide was produced and distributed to all learners, containing the three units of competency and outlining the unit descriptors, performance criteria, essential knowledge, reference materials, and additional sources of information. The educators agreed that the most efficient pedagogical design was to cover all three units of competency concurrently in each weekly workshop, rather than concentrating on one unit in each workshop sequentially. This way the educators were able to address the interconnectedness of all units at all times.

Table 2 Course syllabus.

Date/Format	Unit 1: Apply codes and standards to ethical practice	Unit 2: Prepare to translate and interpret	Unit 3: Manage discourse in general settings
Week 1	– Course introduction	– Role of interpreter and	– Mind map for various

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

Saturday full-day workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is interpreting? - Codes of ethics: ASLIA, AUSIT, RID, WASLI - Role of interpreter and DI 	DI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working in a team - Examples from settings such as medical, legal, psychology, and finance 	contexts: Deafblind, human services, medical, children, and adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual and group activities
	Assessment Task 1: Video Activity Film yourself twice introducing yourself to a doctor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - first with a hearing Auslan interpreter - second without another interpreter 		
Week 2 Saturday full-day workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demand-control schema - Revised role of DI - Roles and methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various interpreting contexts and settings - Agency booking procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discourse management issues - Arrange seating and sight lines
	Assessment Task 2: Ethics take-home test to be completed in English or Auslan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One question on a job offer scenario, and “what questions will you ask the agency?” - One question on seating and arranging positions 		
Break	Meet with Deafblind Victoria and clients.		
Week 3 Saturday full-day workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theory of Deafblind interpreting: linguistic, ethical, cultural issues, and guiding - Incorporate demand-control schema and ethics in group reflection and discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practical interpreting activities in groups, SMS job offers and discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Migrant and nonstandard Auslan: issues for interpreting - Guests for personal information and practice - Reflections on role play
	Assessment Task 3: Reflection on practical activities in class Assessment Task 4: Simulated interpreting assignment		
Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attending Diploma of Interpreting—Auslan class and interact with hearing students - Vicdeaf site visit 		
Week 4 Saturday full-day workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection on Vicdeaf site visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Video relay interpreting and new technology: how to prepare for assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Video relay interpreting and new technology: strategies for working in this environment
	Assessment Task 5: Practical test in simulated settings		
Week 5 Saturday full-day workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to assess clients’ Auslan or nonstandard sign language - Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review

Note. ASLIA = Australian Sign Language Interpreters’ Association; AUSIT = Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators; RID = Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf; WASLI = World Association of Sign Language Interpreters; SMS = short message service.

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

Attendance at the five Saturday workshops remained high. Two Saturdays during the course period had no classes scheduled; instead, students visited Deafblind Victoria and Vicdeaf, and they attended the Diploma of Interpreting Auslan group during the week, interacting with the hearing Auslan interpreting students. All students completed all required assessments under the course and achieved competence for all three units. The attainment of the course satisfies the short course training requirement stipulated by NAATI for DI Recognition (NAATI, 2017).

7.3. Educator feedback

Semistructured interviews were conducted by the author on campus after the conclusion of the course with all three educators, in order to elicit their responses to answer two research questions: (a) Has the pilot project selected the right learners and applied appropriate pedagogical design to achieve best learning outcomes? (b) What can be improved in future delivery? Using a list of open questions, the author spent roughly an hour with each educator on separate occasions to note down their qualitative feedback. The five topic areas as reported for the rest of Section 7 answer Research Question A, and Section 8 addresses Research Question B. Completing data collection in this way allowed the author to probe further any points of interest that arose during the interviews.

7.3.1 Learner selection

The educators all felt that the learners selected for the course were the right candidates for the training, although it was agreed that face-to-face interviews to supplement the self-reported language capabilities and relevant Deaf Interpreting experience may be helpful in future recruitment. This will provide an additional degree of objectivity in the learners' linguistic and vocational competence at entry to ensure that individual variations among learners are within a reasonable range.

7.3.2 Learner experience

It was agreed that an all-Auslan environment was positively received by the learners and contributed to the best possible learning outcomes, in that the communication and interaction among learners and with educators was able to take place organically in Auslan; had the language of instruction been spoken English, a hearing interpreter would have been needed to mediate. This contributed to much more efficient learning, in which the learners could exchange their ideas and communicate with the educators comfortably in their native Auslan. Using Auslan as the language of instruction also contributed to the high levels of engagement and motivation to learn demonstrated by the learners in the workshops. This exclusively deaf setting was compared with another possible class configuration where hearing and Deaf learners are admitted and taught together. Although benefit may be gained in relation to cross-pollination of the students' linguistic and interactional competencies, the educators felt that Deaf learners in such settings often tend to miss out on learning because of the dominant effect of spoken languages in the same environment, particularly if the instructor can use only spoken English.

7.3.3 Pedagogical reflections

A considerable amount of time was dedicated to course planning and design prior to the commencement of the delivery, and therefore the educators felt they were able to cover the required content areas comprehensively, with valuable input from guest presenters, an abundance of in-class activities, and interesting assessment tasks. Course contents were practical and always related to actual interpreting environments. Group discussions and reporting back to the class were well received by the learners, and learners commented on how they enjoyed their homework and in-class tasks. Deaf-specific resources were in short supply, but in the end, there was not as much time to sit and watch videos or visit other sites as the educators would have liked. With the assistance of and contribution from Vicdeaf, a 36-minute dedicated DI training video was produced (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS5nTQd0izQ&feature=youtu.be>). The video covers the role of DIs, work

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

protocols, and working in a team with a hearing Auslan interpreter. This is an excellent pedagogical tool for teaching the three units and generated insightful discussions among learners and educators when used in class.

Reflecting on the learning outcomes achieved, the Deaf teacher stated, “Although the students were very engaged with their learning, still to date I don’t know if the course should be introduced before any hands-on interpreting in class/simulations. I don’t know if they can connect the dots—why this set of skills is central to interpreting. Instead of teaching from the more theoretical aspects to the practical applications, I would start from practice to theory next time.” She also remarked on the class size of 20 being too big, because “at times I was too busy facilitating/responding to questions and missed opportunities to teach.” The other two hearing Auslan interpreting teachers commented on the benefit of having a skilled and experienced Deaf teacher who is an interpreter, pointing to the successful model of team teaching in DI education.

All educators agreed that the assessments were pitched at the right level; however, the intricacy of the kind of interpreting involving DIs may require more time for face-to-face learning. It is because DIs rarely work alone, and therefore they must manage their Deaf clients and work with the hearing interpreter. Thus, in Assessment Task 5, the learners were required to show their capability in managing an interpreting assignment with their peers, who are hearing Auslan interpreting students studying in the Diploma of Interpreting at RMIT, and this proved to be challenging for the DI students to manage. The Deaf teacher contended that hearing students at the Advanced Diploma of Interpreting level may be a better fit, in that they would have higher Auslan proficiency and already have some interpreting experience. One of the educators also remarked on the usefulness of off-campus activities and tasks, because those committed made the effort to complete them.

7.3.4 Delivery hours

All educators agreed that the workshop hours were not sufficient to cover all the content to the depth they desired. They felt strongly that more time was needed for face-to-face instruction for a Deaf group to achieve the desired learning outcomes. They also commented that the learners did not have enough time to take in what they were taught, but the hours were sufficient for them to know whether they wanted to pursue further studies in the future.

7.3.5 NAATI recognition outcomes

All but one learner completed the course and achieved competence in all three units. One way of measuring the outcome of the course is the attainment of NAATI Recognition. As this skill set is accepted by NAATI as the required short training course (see NAATI DI Recognition in Section 6), learners who also fulfill the other two requirements were eligible to apply to NAATI for Recognition. Two learners, as a result, have acquired their NAATI Recognition (10% attainment rate). Meeting NAATI’s stipulated requirements and completing the application process proved to be onerous for the majority of the learners. The educators explained that most Deaf people have full-time employment, meaning that only two or three qualified DIs contracted to Vicdeaf are available at short notice to work with Deaf people. Although requests for DIs are few and far between compared with spoken language interpreters, Deaf interpreting is fraught and often takes place in high-stakes settings such as legal, serious medical or immigration/social services, police, prison, child protection, and Department of Health and Human Services. To function in these more serious settings, working DIs must have an in-depth understanding of language use as well as the knowledge and ethical understanding about their work. It is a conundrum that cannot be solved in the short term. As more opportunities for training such as this project become available, more DIs will be appropriately equipped to work in these settings. A buddy system should be helpful for novice or occasional DIs, and Vicdeaf has expressed willingness to facilitate such a system.

8. Recommendations for DI training

From the points summarized above, it can be said that the three educators felt that the pilot project recruited and trained appropriately selected learners and reasonably achieved what the syllabus was designed to achieve, but with low attainment (10%) of NAATI Recognition. Although the educators were overall positive about the

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

project, in view of future developments of the DI education and the sustainability of quality DI supply, the following four aspects summarize the educators' responses and answer Research Question B about future improvement of the course.

8.1. *Delivery of full qualification*

As affirmed by Boudreault (2005), DIs should not be made to rely on “on the job” (p. 350) experience as the only form of training, nor should they attempt their certification exam after simply attending a few workshops or being mentored over a brief period. There is no reason why DIs should not be offered more extensive and rigorous training in degreed courses or full vocational qualifications to access excellent training before they become fully fledged practitioners, just like their hearing counterparts and colleagues in spoken languages. It is therefore a logical next step for education institutions to commit to this cause.

8.2. *Contact hours*

As concurred by all educators, the contact hours for the project were not sufficient to cover the content to the depth they wanted, nor was the time sufficient for detailed feedback to be provided on the spot for in-class assessments. They were not confident that the learners properly digested the course contents delivered. Therefore, more contact hours for DI learners in the future should be considered. Naturally, this has cost implications that must be taken into account.

8.3. *Pedagogical settings*

DIs are able to utilize a range of specialist communication skills, as they draw on their lived experience of making meaning visually. This special competency is difficult to capture and teach to a group of second-language learners, that is, hearing students who have learned Auslan as a second language, in a vocational training program (MASC, 2017). Deaf people with the unique experience of living and communicating visually are therefore in an advantageous position of possessing substantial communicative skills beyond what is currently taught in Translating & Interpreting programs (MASC, 2017). For future delivery of DI training in either a skill set or preferably a full qualification, a class of exclusively Deaf learners is conducive to positive classroom dynamics, as evidenced by this pilot project. However, in certain elements of the training, a mixed group of Deaf and hearing students may be beneficial on two fronts: It would allow hearing students a sign language immersion experience in the classroom, and facilitate a pedagogical environment where the DI learners can immediately practice relay interpreting working in tandem with hearing interpreting students. In addition, team teaching in an all-deaf or mixed deaf/hearing setting is most effective, in that each teacher provides vital instructions beneficial to DI learners' future practice in which they act as an intermediary between their Deaf client and the hearing interpreter.

What is clear is that Deaf people must have the same opportunities as their hearing counterparts who have been able to access sign language interpreter training. When considering the pedagogical setting for DI training, whether to imbed Deaf learners in a sign language interpreting class with hearing students or to formulate specific training programs exclusively for DIs, or even to create a hybrid syllabus where certain components are delivered with hearing students and others are Deaf learners only, remains a point for further study and evaluation.

8.4. *Learning materials and activities*

A lack of video footage of DIs working in real-life or simulated settings is a drawback in effective teaching. The production of a 36-minute training video under this project catered specifically to Deaf interpreting has proven to be valuable and effective. More such materials should be progressively produced to add to the pool of learning materials for future delivery of either a skill set or full qualification. Other useful learning activities should be further incorporated into the curricula, such as bringing in Deaf guests who are foreign signers or Deafblind,

Pilot Deaf Interpreter Training

inviting experienced DIs who are able to demonstrate and model effective interpreting practices and talk about their experiences, and organizing visits to interpreting agencies and service providers.

9. Conclusion

Deaf interpreting has come a long way. It has always been done by Deaf people as a way to assist other Deaf community members to better communicate with spoken or sign language speakers. Its importance and level of skills and knowledge required have gradually been recognized, and therefore much more scholarly attention and financial investment should be directed to formal training and professionalization. Having evaluated the current project, the natural next step is to create a pathway for the learners to complete a full Diploma of Interpreting. Lastly, it should be noted that the data collection of this pilot project only covers the three educators involved in the delivery. Future studies on similar projects should include learner feedback in order to capture their equally important perspective.

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