



Chapter 2

Differing Opinions for One Student: Dual Modality Collaborations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind has sought to create collaboration between the traditionally opposing language philosophies of ASL/English and Listening and Spoken Language through partnering teachers together to educate students whose families want instruction in both modalities, but not simultaneous instruction in both languages. This collaboration was tested in preschool/early childhood grades and brought opposing viewpoints together and partnerships were not always successful. Through this process of collaboration, teachers learned a great deal about how to professionally work with people who may believe very different things when working toward the common goal of student success. Lessons from the struggles and successes of the collaboration are shared in the story of a Deaf teacher, Natalie, and the teachers she partnered with.

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*Differing Opinions for One Student***ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND**

In schools and programs for the deaf¹, decisions made by previous administrations even decades ago have long-term impacts on the current setting, structures, and programming of the school. Like many schools for the deaf, the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB) has experienced a range of communication philosophies as a school, often aligning with the prevailing Deaf Education theories of the time. USDB was founded in 1884 as a program under the University of Deseret (now the University of Utah) and was guided by the existing expertise of teachers at the school. After USDB became independent from the university and moved to its permanent home in Ogden, Utah, an administrator and two graduates headed to Gallaudet College to gain official training in Deaf education. Due to the time of its founding, USDB was influenced by the decisions of the Milan Conference, which stated that the best approach to the education of deaf students was an oral approach over the “manual” approach of using sign language (Brill, 1985). Thus, the educational and language approaches of USDB followed what was considered the best practices of the field as understood at that time.

Looking at the language philosophy history of the school, USDB initially had both sign language and oral classes in the 1880s, presumably with a heavier focus on the oral classes. However, by the 1950s, USDB had focused on an oral/aural only approach. In the 1960s, USDB incorporated a “dual track” program that used the Total Communication philosophy, claiming to be one of the first schools in the nation to use this dual track. From the 1960s to the late 1990s, these two tracks were kept fairly separate. Over time, multiple campuses across the state were organized, either as separate buildings or housed within mainstream school districts. In 1999, the Deaf Community of Salt Lake City wanted a Bilingual-Bicultural program and established the Jean Massieu School of the Deaf charter school. In 2005, this charter school merged with USDB and over the next several years the Total Communication program was phased out in favor of Bilingual-Bicultural education. The two language philosophies continued to be separate and parents were expected to choose one path for the education of their child (Kinner, 2021). In 2015, now serving students using both ASL/English and Listening and Spoken Language philosophies, USDB leadership decided to end the “or” approach and allow parents to choose one or both language modalities for their child. After a long history of separation, these two programs began to work together, but the philosophical divides of the teachers expected to collaborate may have seemed insurmountable, at first.

At the time of this case study, ASL/English and Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) programs had been separated by physical location and programmatically with each division having their own administration. Each division hired staff independent of the other and, while very friendly and professional with each other, did not have

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frequent interactions. Part of this social divide was due to the physical separation of the programs, of course, but it also was partly due to the cultural divide between the two prevailing philosophies in Deaf Education. With some teacher preparation programs, national organizations, or teacher professional development including a sense of distrust for the other modality and philosophy, educators in either modality have been bombarded with an underlying feeling of unconscious bias and antagonism towards their peers. The goal at USDB in recent years has been to work collaboratively focusing on the common goal of both philosophies: the highest levels of academic and linguistic success for deaf and hard of hearing students. That isn't to say that this has been a smooth or simple process, but rather, that by focusing on the human connections and professional respect that should exist in our schools and programs, opposing viewpoints don't have to mean that there is no hope for friendship and giving the language support that is unique for each student.

SETTING THE STAGE

Classrooms in schools/programs for the deaf are highly diverse and dynamic (Simms et al., 2008). Each classroom in schools/programs for the deaf has unique mixes and ratios of races, genders, religions, socio-economic groups, and, of course, language skills. In the same class, teachers can find themselves working with a student who is a first-generation refugee who has been without language until arriving at the classroom all the way to multi-generation Deaf students who arrived at school with strong bilingual understanding. This diversity is part of the power and beauty of working with deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

An interesting area of diversity unique to our field are the hearing levels of students in the classroom and the impact of those hearing levels on language choice, classroom environment, learning, and interactions. Historically, the philosophical divide between sign language and spoken language meant that students were placed in a program aligning with one or the other modalities, often with students considered "hard of hearing" attending mainstream schools and students considered "deaf" attending specialized schools (Shaver et al., 2013). With the advent of hearing technologies, bilingual bimodal philosophies, and special education law, there are a greater number of students who access both spoken language and American Sign Language (ASL) and parents who expect this dual access, although biases remain and influence parental decision making (Clark et al., 2020). This can be challenging when a school uses an ASL/English language philosophy and can be of the utmost challenge to a teacher who identifies as Deaf when confronted with a language approach and modality that can act as a barrier.

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Educators of the deaf and hard of hearing are well aware of the philosophical battle between proponents of spoken language and signed language as the language of instruction for deaf and hard of hearing students. This longstanding debate has created teacher preparation programs, schools/programs for the deaf, advocacy groups, and parent groups that are odds with one another over the value, purpose, and efficacy of one language modality over the other. Currently, educators find themselves polarized between the Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) and ASL/English camps. The closer in contact these philosophical evangelists come together, the more potential for friction between philosophies occurs. This is felt even more in schools/programs that have historically had both LSL and ASL/English programs; especially when leadership of these schools/programs expect collaboration for each student. This occurs even when research suggests that a bimodal approach may be beneficial to certain students (Mineiro et al, 2014; Ormel & Giezen, 2014; van Berkel-van Hoof, 2019) and that either modality does not harm the other (Kovelman et al, 2009; Krentz & Corina, 2008; Walker & Tomblin, 2014).

However, the reality of our current Deaf Education landscape is that teachers who use ASL/English approaches will have students who identify as hard of hearing and students who will be using spoken language as part of their education (Swanwick, 2018; Knoors, 2016), whether by their own choice or parent choice (Porter et al., 2018). A teacher needs to develop the collaborative and student-focused skills of working with educators and providers who are focusing on the spoken language modality of students (Hall et al., 2019). However, this has the potential to create a situation where there are differing opinions for one student that are connected to deep-seated philosophical approaches and the roles and instruction using different language modalities. Being able to approach these dual modality collaborations is an essential skill, especially when emotions behind philosophies runs high.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Natalie Brown recently graduated from her university program where she was trained to educate deaf and hard of hearing students using an ASL/English approach. As a Deaf individual, she understands the importance of American Sign Language for language development and possesses a lifelong understanding the Deaf Culture. She is also well-versed in the age-old debate on the best way to educate deaf and hard-of-hearing students. She knows there are strong opposing opinions between educators supporting a listening and spoken language approach and those that support the natural language of Deaf people. These opposing philosophies have shaped the current landscape and her own education. She knew before she entered college that she would become an ASL/English teacher of the deaf focusing on a

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bilingual-bicultural approach. Her teacher preparation program prepared her well to teach using an ASL/English philosophy. She feels confident in her understanding of how to use specific techniques to incorporate ASL and use that language to teach other academic subjects and written English in her classroom. She is particularly excited to be teaching in early childhood education with the opportunity to provide a strong language foundation with the most formative school age.

Eager to start her first year Natalie is hired to teach preschool at the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind as an ASL/English teacher alongside a listening and spoken language teacher. Her initial reaction is one of confusion. “I thought this school was a proponent of the ASL/English philosophy!” “How can I work with a teacher that supports a listening and spoken language approach?” “How can we work together with such opposing philosophies?” Knowing the hostility that has existed in the field of deaf education since almost the inception of the profession, she is anticipating arguments will be a constant issue.

Hailey Maroon has been an educator of the deaf at USDB for almost 10 years as a listening and spoken language teacher. During that time her sole focus has been on improving the educational outcomes of her students by enhancing the use of amplification and mitigating speech concerns with the hopes that her students can be mainstreamed with typical hearing students. Although the school for the deaf has always supported the LSL and ASL/English philosophies, she has rarely had to interact with the ASL/English program. However, this year will be different, the administration has asked that the preschool teachers work collaboratively with a teacher of the other philosophy/modality to improve student outcomes.

Hailey is not happy about this turn of events. She has been very pleased with the outcomes of her students and is a strong advocate for using a listening and spoken language approach for teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing students. She does not know sign language and can only use some basic signs that she learned from one class she took in college almost 10 years ago. She harbors the belief that sign language hinders the development of speech and believes this decision will have a negative impact on the students she serves. To add to her concern, Hailey has learned that she will be partnering with an ASL/English teacher who is deaf.

A week before school starts Natalie and Hailey meet in the LSL classroom. Their rooms will be next to one another, with a passageway between rooms that contains a shared student restroom. They are introduced to one another by the principals of each program and use an interpreter to facilitate communication. The introduction is awkward. Hailey tries to use her best sign language but knows it is inadequate. This is recognized by Natalie, but she is used to this kind of introduction. She has experienced this awkwardness many times as she is introduced to a hearing person for the first time. Hailey wants to get this awkward “meet and greet” over with and move into her classroom. She has prepared for a new school year many times and she

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has her pattern set. She knows what she needs to get done and views this introduction as an irritation. She is still upset that the administration is forcing this collaboration. Natalie feels overwhelmed and just looking at the four empty walls frightens her. She is not sure what to think about Hailey. As much as Natalie would like to rely on her, she is not sure she can trust her since she can't sign and is a proponent of using listening and spoken language, which is completely at odds with Natalie's personal life and community experience and her college training program. Once the principals leave the room each teacher returns to their respective classrooms to set up for the new school year with a sense of foreboding.

Hailey and Natalie are expected to create an annual plan together for their instruction that includes some combined activities. They are both a little unsure about what an annual plan is meant to include in this collaboration. The administration has asked that they adjust their schedules to make the movement of students between classes easier. With any student that is shared between the two teachers, the administration has asked that communication with parents include both educators. Finally, the teachers are asked to plan their lessons together on a weekly basis. Hailey and Natalie meet with the other teachers that have been asked to collaborate across philosophies. Natalie quickly bonds with the other ASL/English teachers, they understand her philosophy and share her same educational beliefs, and most importantly, they use ASL, which makes communication easy. When she has questions, she feels she can trust their responses. Hailey reaches out to Natalie to share a few ideas based on her years of experience in preschool but learns very quickly that her ideas don't seem to resonate with Natalie.

Once the students arrive, Hailey settles into her typical school routine. She has taught school days hundreds of times and she knows what works and what doesn't with her classroom of students. Although she sees Natalie in the hallways each day and they provide each other a friendly nod, they rarely interact and have not planned their weekly lessons and typically talk to parents separately to focus on their own areas of expertise. This pattern continued until their principals called meetings to see how things are going. Although both programs are under the school for the deaf, each program has developed slightly different procedures to accomplish the objectives required by the school. These differences in accomplishing the goals of the school create a further divide between the two teachers as the year begins to move forward.

Soon each teacher complains to their respective philosophical partners about the collaboration. Natalie feels her ideas and input are not valued and she is afraid to express her thoughts to a seasoned teacher with strong differing opinions. As they move forward Natalie is plagued with memories of oppression that she has experienced at the hands of "oralists" and this further hinders communication and understanding between the two teachers. Hailey is not sure if the disconnect is related to the difference in experience between the two teachers, the philosophical

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debate, or the obvious communication barriers, but she feels her students are being negatively impacted by this unnecessary collaboration. It isn't very long before the weekly meetings end and communication with parents becomes discussions about why one philosophy or another is better for the child instead of a combination of both programs. Complaints escalate to the respective principals and then the superintendent that when a student transitions from one class to the other, academic and behavioral problems arise with the students. However, each teacher has a differing opinion about what is causing issues for the students.

When all the teachers, including Natalie and Hailey, come together, there are many concerns and complaints. One teacher is upset that a student is transitioning from one class to another at inconvenient times. One teacher feels that the other teacher is purposefully planning fun activities during transition time to cause the student to be upset to leave. Teachers feel they are not getting enough time with the students before transitions happen. Some teachers use the term "50/50" to describe what they thought the program would provide students while other teachers feel that splitting time in half does not give enough time to either spoken English or ASL. Each teacher is emailing the parents separately and not including the other teacher. Parents begin to gravitate toward one teacher over another in the partnerships, and Natalie is worried that some parents gravitate to Hailey due to her being hearing. The educational advice from each teacher to parents and classroom aides is often conflicting.

In an effort to reverse these problems, the administration calls meetings to fix the logistical issues. During the meetings, teachers with more longevity refuse to alter their schedules, which appears to administrators as a form of resistance to requiring the collaboration. Some teachers revert back to their previous annual planning calendars rather than the collaborative calendars, which administrators again view as resistance to the required collaboration. Natalie is even more overwhelmed as she is trying to establish her curriculum and deal with all of the struggles a typical first-year teacher encounters while dealing with a partner that has very different opinions and approaches. The added drama of this dynamic of collaborating with an LSL teacher has significantly increased her stress. IEPs become contentious as each teacher expresses a differing solution to language delays. Since Natalie is still unsure of the IEP process, she is often overrun by Hailey's experience. This dynamic causes Natalie to feel further diminished and breeds more animosity towards Hailey.

Hoping to salvage the relationships between teachers and the collaboration between classrooms, the administration requires the collaboration teams to meet weekly and ask both teachers to meet weekly with parents together. The teachers agree to meet weekly to plan on Monday mornings. Even these meetings begin to wane when the LSL teachers show up late or miss the meetings entirely, citing that these early meetings have cut into the time they need to eat a healthy breakfast before

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school. This frustrates the ASL/English teachers when they show up to a meeting to collaborate and the other team isn't present. Due to this, the administration begins providing breakfast each week to encourage a more positive atmosphere. This works for a short period of time and then the LSL teachers explain that they are no longer eating the provided breakfast because they are on a diet. The administration calls several meetings with both sets of teachers to "clear the air" and adjustments to the student schedules are made several times to resolve the issues. However, all of these efforts appear to have a limited effect. The year ends in frustration among all parties involved. It seems as if the war between the philosophies will continue and that the differences are too great to overcome. Everyone begins to question if the administration was wrong to ask the two groups to collaborate.

The next year things start differently. Natalie has a valuable year of experience under her belt. She has applied practical experience to the knowledge she gained at college and feels more confident about teaching. The collaboration is still happening, but this year she is paired with a new LSL teacher. Hailey has been reassigned to teach another preschool class that is not working directly with the ASL/English classrooms. Natalie is hopeful that she and the new LSL teacher, Betty Andersen, will get along better. Betty recently graduated from her college program in Listening and Spoken Language and during the interview process was screened to determine her openness to working with an ASL/English teacher. Although she isn't any more fluent in ASL than Hailey, she is very willing to learn more ASL to improve her communication. This quickly has a dramatic impact on the relationship between the two teachers and, ultimately, the success of the collaboration.

Betty is much more open minded. Although she is nervous, she is not afraid to try new things and her opinions about deaf education are not as strongly rooted. Natalie and Betty are closer in age and seem to have more things in common. Both are willing to try new educational approaches. They are open to collaborating and meet formally on a weekly basis for planning, but informally on a daily basis as they work with students. There are still disagreements about teaching approaches but these are resolved by openly talking to one another and sticking to their strengths. Betty defers to Natalie whenever the topic is about visual language. Natalie is open to Betty's ideas about teaching spoken English. Although they do not agree on many philosophical issues, they are respectful of their partner and what they bring to the partnership. This mutual respect develops into a positive collegial friendship and they even begin to spend time after hours in recreational activities. Each sees the value in the other. They see value in the relationship, and this resonates with the students. Students try their best to excel at both communication modalities. Some use more ASL and others use more spoken language. But each teacher is accepting of the communication modality and provides the support of their preferred modality.

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The administration has learned some things, too, from the previous school year and interactions. The introduction of each pairing of teachers is outside of either classroom and is more personable in nature. An interpreter is assigned full-time as part of the team throughout the day to facilitate communication between the teachers and the students. The administration participated in the initial annual plan for the school year and how the daily schedule is coordinated. Transitions are limited to natural breaks in the day. Teachers that are collaborating across philosophies are sent out of state to observe other teachers of the deaf from differing philosophies working together. Meetings throughout the school year are focused on team building and respect. Family meetings are required to have both teachers in attendance and communication includes both teachers. An informal motto is used often that you “speak about your expertise, not the other modality” to ensure that teachers aren’t giving negative biases to parents.

Philosophical Concerns

The philosophical differences have the greatest chance of causing these collaborative efforts to fail. When the focus is on the debates that will naturally arise between the philosophies, the collaboration will fail. In order for the students to make their greatest gains in this type of collaborative environment there must be mutual respect for the other teacher and each must “stay within their lane.” When one teacher presumes to know the answer to a question about the other philosophy, problems arise. It is important in these situations to respect and value what the other partner provides, which is a strength that the other partner doesn’t possess. It is important that each teacher know what they believe and why without forcing the other teacher to believe the same.

Anytime there are two individuals working together with opposing philosophies, there is the potential for friction which is created by both conscious and unconscious biases stemming from their philosophical base. Some aspects of each philosophy will always be in conflict, in this case one major conflict was how often to focus on which modality. In these situations, conflict will arise. These partnerships should be prepared to manage these difficult conversations. Conflict, though, does not have to be defined as two opposing camps engaged in a war; a healthier view of conflict is that it is an emotional state in a relationship where miscommunication, misperception, or disagreement means that some sort of change is needed for the relationship to continue (Mandt, 2022). In this perspective, the teachers are not opposing parties but partners who need to work through some of the philosophical differences and perceptions they have to maintain their professional relationship. As seen in the partnership of Natalie and Betty, each person sought to better understand their partner and seek to work together more closely.

*Differing Opinions for One Student***Collaboration Concerns**

Anytime there is a collaboration between two teachers, there will be issues that need to be resolved. In these collaborations it can be difficult to coordinate the amount of time each child will be instructed in each modality throughout the day, especially when parents have strong opinions too. Other questions that need to be addressed are: Will the teachers ever teach some topics together? When do you incorporate the other teacher? How we adjust a teaching schedule with teachers that have two different teaching styles? Which room will be utilized for what activity? What would the parents like to see? What is the best way to communicate with the parent(s) and both teachers? How often should planning occur? The answers to these questions will depend on the personality and skills of each teacher in the partnership. There is not one right answer to how to best collaborate, however it is key that mutual respect exists while there is a sincere effort to understand and value the other teaching partner.

Collaboration requires trust (Holtzman & Anderberg, 2011), and these collaborating teachers had several barriers to forming trust with each other. The first and foremost of these barriers was the difference in their educational and pedagogical philosophies. Second, teachers were told to build this collaboration instead of choosing to build the collaboration due to seeing a need according to their own professional expertise and experience. Third, there were communication barriers that existed between the two teachers, which also carried an underlying sense of cultural conflict. Finally, there was also the difficulty of having limited hours of preschool each day and each teacher feeling that they were not able to have the time that is required to provide a quality education for their students in the language modality that they were using. In the initial stages of this collaboration, sometimes these barriers would seem to be insurmountable, as we can see in the case of Natalie being partnered with Hailey. However, these barriers need not be a permanent state of being and collaboration is possible when barriers are addressed (even if not completely removed), as we can see in the case of Natalie's partnership with Betty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering who will be collaborating is vital for a collaboration that brings teachers from potentially contentious philosophies together. The intentional selection of current teachers and the carefully considered hiring of new teachers must be part of administrative practice. Organizations often hire those who already hold the same values as they do (Little & Miller, 2006), but working in a bimodal collaborative program requires teachers to be able to open themselves to those who are on the

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other side of their beliefs. Administrators should be aware of this when assigning or hiring staff for collaborations. At the same time, teachers, especially those focusing on early childhood education, should be aware of the potential for collaborations like this, decide upon their willingness to collaborate, and where their philosophies are personally. While this hiring or assigning process takes place, it is also important to consider who is currently involved with the collaboration and their fit for the partnership.

In the case study, we see the difference when Hailey was assigned out of the collaboration and Betty joined. Beyond the case study, one of the first Deaf teachers to be part of the collaboration in its initial stages suffered feelings of oppression and isolation and was reassigned out of the collaboration for her mental health. There is nothing wrong with an educator's beliefs, experience, and training. However, collaboration requires a willingness to review personal beliefs, values, and biases and find more points of common ground than being outside the collaboration requires.

Biases are an inherent part of life and are certainly apparent in the field of deaf education. We each bring background knowledge and experience to each activity we engage in with others. There is no need to suppress those biases, but acknowledging each has a bias and feeling comfortable sharing why that perception exists while still maintaining an open mind can be challenging although very rewarding. This ability to recognize our biases yet remain open to learning from others with opposing views can help us personally and professionally. It is probably also one of the most challenging skills to master. To look at this from a positive perspective, these types of classrooms where collaboration is required with someone of an opposing philosophy can help build this skill.

Inherently as part of teaching, we must show continuous flexibility. This willingness to be flexible is even more critical in these types of collaborative efforts. Educators with strong opinions and resistance to continual growth would be a poor selection for this environment. Educators must be open-minded to another point of view and possess a willingness to consider it. Flexibility with scheduling is critical to the success of a productive partnership. Each teacher must be willing to adjust a schedule and readjust the schedule several times until the students' needs are met within each program. Initially, the partnership was viewed as a "50/50" model, which led to some difficulties in how transitions occurred and student success. As the collaboration became more effective, teachers could openly discuss student needs with each other and parents and scheduling was adjusted individually based on student needs and strengths. It is anticipated that the schedule will change from one year to the next, and it will often change within a given school year. Anticipating these changes and being willing to accept them and consider other options is key to a solid team.

Strong administrative support cannot be underestimated. Although most of the success of these collaborations depends upon the actual participants. The

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administration must be aligned with the goal of collaboration. Everyone must be unified that this relationship should be cultivated and believe that the students will be more successful because of it. In the case study, each program had a different principal. This structure was problematic since each teacher had a different supervisor with different styles and processes. This factor impacted the success of the collaboration. When each teacher reports to the same supervisor, the experiences in this case study suggest that problems diminish because only one person is giving direction. If it is not possible to have one supervisor, then the administrators must meet as frequently as the teachers to ensure alignment on all issues. The administrators must be as flexible and open as possible while acknowledging their biases as well.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

ASL/English: Defined as the bilingual approach to utilizing signed ASL and written/read English text and, when accessible and desired spoken English.

Bimodal: The use of both ASL and spoken English in instructional design but the languages are kept separate, often through the use of two different teachers or locations.

Collaboration: As used in this school program, two teachers using different language modalities working together to educate the same student in an overlapping curriculum trying to maximize the outcomes of the student in both modalities while jointly communicating and planning with parents. The teachers are not co-teachers but, rather, separate teachers acting in parallel to ensure the best quality of linguistic instruction for their modality.

Deaf/deaf: In common usage, the lowercase “deaf” refers to the audiological condition of not hearing and the uppercase “Deaf” when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language – American Sign Language (ASL) – and a culture.

Language Modality: The use of American Sign Language or spoken English as the mode of communication used for instruction in a school/program for the deaf and hard of hearing

Language Philosophy: The linguistic approach used by a school/program for the deaf and hard of hearing which impacts the pedagogies of educators in the school, usually aligned with one of three major philosophies: ASL/English, Listening & Spoken Language, or Total Communication

Listening and Spoken English: Defined as a communication option consistently utilizing hearing technology with the purpose of attaining spoken language.

Preschool/Early Childhood Education: Typically defined in the United States as the school program provided before Kindergarten and usually for children ages 3 and 4, although some schools include Kindergarten in preschool. Pedagogy and standards for preschool focus on preacademic skills in preparation for the academic

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work of elementary and include developmentally appropriate activities that have a heavy emphasis on language development. ¹ This chapter uses the lowercase “deaf” to refer students, schools, and programs for those who have the audiological condition of not hearing and the uppercase “Deaf” to refer to students, adults, and organizations who share both ASL as a common language and the associated culture (see Padden & Humphries, 1988, as cited in National Association of the Deaf, n.d.).