

Abstract

This research project synthesizes the literature that describes the role of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters with the literature that addresses varying topics regarding Deaf individuals with a disability (DWD) within the context of appropriate theoretical models. In an effort to discover how ASL interpreters work with individuals who are DWD as well as what unique challenges and rewards may be experienced by interpreters who work with this population, the researchers analyzed the published literature within the fields of ASL Interpreting and Special Education finding that there was no conglomerate of the two fields on this issue. Through the lens of various models including the bilingual-bicultural model of ASL interpreting, the primary goal of any interpreter is to mediate between the linguistic and cultural differences of the speaker and audience while maintaining the message meaning and dynamic equivalence. Given the nature of working with Deaf individuals with disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, or a learning disability, the interpreter's meaning extrapolation or interpretation can become distorted. Through the lens of the inclusive education model established by the Federal Government by laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1975), the primary goal of an interpreter is to act as a bridge between the Deaf student and the classroom content. When a Deaf student has disabilities, however, the role of an interpreter as outlined by this model can shift to becoming more of an educational aide. Furthermore, most of the published research addresses DWD students within the context of a Deaf school, where there is no need for an interpreter. The researchers call for further theoretical and applied research to outline best practices for, and to further define the role of ASL interpreters when working with DWD individuals.