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Dissertation Abstracts

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Dissertation Abstracts

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Deaf Employees' Perspectives on Effective American Sign Language-English Interpreting in the Workplace: An Investigation Using the Critical Incident Technique

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Abstract

With legislated rights for employment of Deaf people in the United States and the greater availability of professional American Sign Language (ASL)-English interpreters, one might imagine that communication is no longer a barrier to workplace productivity, success, and job satisfaction. However, several studies suggest that conditions for Deaf employees remain less than ideal. In this study, I examine questions of what constitutes effective interpreter behaviors and systemic structures that underlie interpreter provision. Using the Critical Incident Technique documented by Flanagan (1954), I investigate the experience of 17 Deaf, white-collar employees, whose dominant language is ASL, regarding their observations of interpreter-mediated communication in the workplace. Specifically, I explore how Deaf professionals characterize both effective and ineffective interpreting, as well as the provision of interpreting services. Drawing on 947 critical incidents, I created a taxonomy of 270 desired behaviors, 50 themes, and seven thematic clusters surrounding interpreter behaviors and systemic factors. Data analysis resulted in six findings, including (a) Deaf professionals have a rich understanding of effective interpreter behaviors and systems of interpreter provision; (b) Deaf professionals are burdened with "access work" in relation to interpreters; and (c) Deaf professionals are acutely aware that they are being represented through interpreters. I argue in two recommendations and associated caveats that the only way forward in applying these findings is for interpreters to adopt a customer service frame and for institutions to recognize that Deaf professionals are the experts in access to workplace communication and their delineation of interpreting needs should be followed. The findings provide the first large-scale examination of Deaf employees' perceptions of interpreter-mediated communication in

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the workplace. By providing a detailed account of what constitutes effective services, the results hold implications for interpreters, interpreter educators, professional organizations, employers, interpreting agencies, and Deaf employees themselves. Ultimately, this study provides vital concepts that may be used to fulfil the legislated promise of communication access in the workplace.

Keywords: work, Deaf, American Sign Language, ASL, interpreter, behavior, system, Critical Incident Technique

Reference:

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51(4), 327.

First Impressions: Improving the Connection between Deaf Consumers and ASL-English Interpreters

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the first impressions that occur between Deaf consumers and American Sign Language (ASL)-English interpreters prior to a healthcare appointment. Negative first impressions can lead to a disconnect or loss of trust between Deaf consumers and interpreters and increase the risk for Deaf consumers to receive inadequate healthcare. The recognition of this risk led to an action research study to look at barriers to successful interactions between ASL-English interpreters and Deaf consumers. The mixed-methods research design and associated research questions discovered factors and perceptions that contributed to the disconnect and subsequently informed a 10-week intervention with a small group of ASL-English interpreters and Deaf consumers. The factors that influence feelings of connection are system related: the lack of a standardized approach to using name badges, missing or incorrect appointment details; and an inconsistent protocol for interpreter behavior when a healthcare provider leaves the room. The intervention allowed the interpreter participants to generate solutions to mitigate these barriers to connection and apply them during the 10 weeks. The generated solutions included redesign of an interpreter referral agency's name badge, using small talk as a way to learn information about the nature of the healthcare appointment, and proactively discussing procedures when a healthcare provider leaves the exam room. Deaf consumer feedback was gathered during the intervention period and was used to modify the generated solutions. Use of these solutions resulted in an increase of feelings of trust and connection for both interpreters and Deaf consumers. The findings of this study offer new approaches that create a sense of connection between interpreters and Deaf consumers and may lead to more satisfactory healthcare interactions for Deaf consumers.

Keywords: soft skills, connection, first impressions, medical interpreting, action research, communities of practice

Deaf students' experience of engagement in a mediated education: It is what it is

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Abstract

The purpose of this comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) was to gain insight into and greater understanding of the perceived impacts of the policy and practice of educational interpreters on the school engagement experiences of American deaf signing youth. This study examined educational policy as practice using multiple levels of analysis (vertical, horizontal, and transversal) to trace the line of inquiry in the following guiding questions. At the macro level: What is the state-level policy discourse informing the practice of educational interpreting, including qualifications, hiring practices, and interpreter supervision? At the meso level: How do local education agencies appropriate the provision of educational interpreting, including educational team decisions related to each student's Individualized Education Program? At the micro level: How do deaf signing youth and their parents experience educational engagement in mediated educational settings?

A multimethod approach to data gathering led to a review of archives, inventory of documents and public records, observations, and interviews to trace the actor networks across scales from macro to micro. Educational interpreters in the study setting are required to meet minimum performance standards but are not included in the student's Individualized Education Program as policy requires. Through interviews and observations of three deaf-of-deaf high school students who experience both direct and mediated instruction, the study examined students' perceptions of school engagement. Deaf student participants in this study exhibit a resigned, fatalistic, "it is what it is" perspective on the educational interpreting services they receive in their mainstream classes; however, they choose to remain in the setting in order to be exposed to the hearing world. Findings indicate that neither the policy nor practice of educational interpreting support the full educational engagement of signing deaf students in mediated classrooms.

Keywords: comparative case study, deaf education, deaf students, education policy, interpreters, sign language

Reference:

Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2017). *Rethinking case study research: A comparative approach*. New York, NY: Routledge.