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# **“Will you help me with my homework?”: A Case Use of Visual Methodologies in Research with (Deaf) Children**

*Jennifer S. Hensley*

## **Abstract**

This is an analysis of a qualitative study and the visually compelling methodology that aimed to create child-friendly/child-inclusive research conducted with deaf children. The researcher engaged in one-on-one and focus group interviews with young deaf children, ages 6 to 12 years old, in signing, deaf schools around the United States. The methodology employed a combination of videos, pictures, and modeling to portray the abstract concept of “research” and participation in research as a means to informed consent and to engage children in the task of considering personal reflections compared to others’ experiences. This article reviews techniques applied and the resulting effect, explicit and implicit, on data generation. The resulting discussion from this study of method provides implications and a recommendation on the implementation of visual-verbal assent in future research with children, specifically deaf children.

**Keywords:** *Deaf children; Video-cued method; Visual-verbal assent; Early childhood education; Preschool; Qualitative research*

## **Introduction**

This article presents a methodological analysis of the approaches used with deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children attending early childhood education (ECE) programs and discusses the unique challenges and benefits of working with visually-oriented populations and for engaging children directly as participants in research about pedagogical approaches. While the project in focus and the populations to be discussed are themselves niche in scope, it is often in these unique scenarios that lessons can be learned to benefit educational research broadly. As such, a cycle is completed in that the original impetus for this study was itself a broad, non-niche study that spurred interest in similar issues with deaf populations (Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009).

The article begins with an overview of the formation of a project in the context of a larger study of ECE programs at Schools for the Deaf, then discusses the specific methodological innovations employed with deaf<sup>1</sup> and hard of hearing children, and the possible applications or lessons to be learned. These are, namely, (1) child participants as valued informants in educational research, (2) focus groups, the use of active consent with child participants, and (3) the use of materials and procedure in the research design.

This is an analysis on the design of a study conducted with deaf children that attended various (self-identified) bilingual Schools for the Deaf across the United States. While prior international studies in China, the US, and Japan have employed visual methodologies with adult, non-deaf populations by Educational Anthropologists Tobin and colleagues (Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009), this was the first of its kind to employ those techniques with deaf populations who most likely would benefit from such an approach. Tobin, of the aforementioned studies, joined Valente and Horejes to apply

1. Lower case "deaf" is used throughout this article, with the exception of named fields and formal categorization(s), to avoid declarative assumptions and/or to allow for fluidity in identification of peoples.

these previous visual methodologies with Deaf ECE programs in the United States (Tobin et al., 2010).

Chosen for its visual nature, Tobin and colleagues' ethnographic video-cued, multivocal approach (Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009) was therefore a new method on the scene in Deaf Education research. In the *Deaf Kindergartens in Three Countries: the US, France, and Japan* (Deaf Kindergartens) project (Tobin et al, 2010), perspectives were gathered from many adult stakeholders concerned with Deaf Early Childhood Education (Deaf ECE). The sub-project to be described here was an extension of that larger study with adults, this time seeking to include the perspectives of deaf children in the larger dialogue about Deaf ECE.

This inclusion of deaf children themselves as participants warranted further creativity in the application of visual methodologies. For practical purposes, the methods used in this study were created to provide direct and clear interactions, resulting in direct informed consent (assent) and purposeful data collection. In order to accomplish this, there were adaptations resulting from the consideration of participants' ages, and with the intention of allowing children to participate as fully as they would like. The adaptations include: Video/Verbal assent video in American Sign Language (ASL), visual cues in the form of still photos from the videos as conversational prompts, modified/edited video segments instead of full-day videos (to mitigate time limits set by schools and limited attention spans of children). These approaches allowed for methodological approaches that allowed the researcher to work with deaf children who are viewed as the experts in their own experiences of Deaf ECE.

### **The Value of Qualitative Research with Children**

Trends in research around child/ren rely heavily on qualitative methods and likely do not include their lived experiences (Graue & Walsh, 1998; (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). Further, the literature does little to tell readers about children's lives (Westcott & Littleton, 2005), as it often includes a combination of adults' vague understandings

of children's lived experiences and laboratory-like settings has led us to overlook the situated-ness of children's lived experiences (Graue & Walsh, 1998), but that "much of what we thought we knew about children stems from Piaget's markedly nonquantitative inquiry" (p. 1). As much as researchers recommend qualitative studies of children and childhood (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Corsaro, 1985), there remain challenges to an ethnographic approach. One of these unavoidable challenges is of the adult researcher studying children.

The outsider status, *adult*, both physically and psychologically separates the researcher from the subject (Corsaro, 1985). In his qualitative study of children's perspectives of media, Tobin (2000) applies theories of de Certeau (1984) to explain the *tactics* children may employ in research situations responding to the power differential between adults and children. Another researcher, Sheridan (2001) who is Deaf and uses ASL, also discusses a few instances where the deaf children interviewed in her study actively resisted her by covering their mouth and signing behind her back, both considered inappropriate while using visual modalities to communicate. Sheridan went a step further in her analysis by suggesting that the children may have been reacting to the uncomfortable new experience of being researched in addition to the adult-child dynamic. This outsider/insider relationship of the participant and researcher cannot be changed, but can be acknowledged and addressed during all stages of inquiry. Researchers Westcott and Littleton (2005) caution that researchers studying childhood need to consider the relationship of the child and researcher, as well as the context of study in order to make a conducive and comfortable experience for the child, possibly making plentiful data.

Acknowledging the rich, and growing presence of quantitative inquiry on children and childhood, this article illustrates the methodological approaches employed to engage individual, small, and large groups of deaf children in discussions about matters that are important to them. The methodological approaches described here are ethnographic in nature and allowed the researcher to consider the

context in which the children are situated. As Mason (2002) explains, qualitative research is “based on methods of data generation which are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced (rather than rigidly standardized or structured, or entirely abstracted from ‘real-life’ contexts)” (p. 3). There are various methods that could have been used in this study, including traditional observation, participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. However, the best solution appeared to be a combination of these approaches with the incorporation of newer, flexible ways of researching with deaf children.

**Adaptation or new design.** In a review of a written cultural model, Anderson-Levitt (1984), recommends that application of models (methods, in this case), can only occur generally, but the specific research design of any given study must be created with consideration of the context and culture in which it is situated. Researchers must weigh the question, the characteristics of the population of participants, and the cultural context in order to appropriately design the methodological approach of a study with children. Clark (2011) emphasizes that a child-centered approach to research enhances the “multi-voiced (not just adult-voiced)” types of discourse (p. 11-12). Adaptation of other methods and inclusion of new methods must both be considered in the research planning. In this spirit, any researcher aiming to “take everything into account” when designing research with deaf children should therefore consider visual, child-friendly methods.

**Narrowing the focus to child respondents.** Some researchers (Tobin, 2000; Eder, 1994) have recognized that researching children of varied cultural backgrounds changes how we approach child participants and the research we attempt to conduct. Considering what is known about research methods with (non-deaf) children, what lessons can inform our methods of inquiry with deaf children? By looking at adapted methodological tools from research on and with non-deaf individuals, this design of a more visual, child-friendly method of research aimed to engage deaf children in matters that impact them directly.

Studies often avoid younger deaf children as participants when collecting qualitative data to inform research questions. However, in some rare instances, there have been researchers that have sought deaf children's perspectives directly via interviews (Sheridan, 2001; Hindley et al., 1993), although some researchers focused primarily on methods of diagnostic interviewing with deaf children about experiences with Cochlear Implants (Punch & Hyde, 2011), and/or Anderson et al (2011) reports of deaf adults asked to reflect on trauma resulting from their educational experiences tied to language use and abuses during childhood/adolescence. These studies showed different ways to include experiences from youth/childhood. However this study was retrospective: they interviewed adults about their experiences when they were younger, it did not portray directly recent experiences of deaf children and youth. While doing this study, practical questions arose around the children's access to language to express their experiences and their ability to recall and/or decipher personal experiences vs. separate the experiences that they witness in the videos they in the study, both valid concerns.

In clinical settings, it has been cited that the data generated can be highly influenced by the child's language fluency (Hindley et al., 1993). To address the question of language use and reading fluency of her deaf child participants, Sheridan (1996) relied on visual techniques in her research, using drawing and photos to engage participation and understanding from the children. Schick et al. (2007) also addresses the concern of language levels having an impact on Theory of Mind tasks in their study of young deaf children ages four to eight. Shick et al.'s (2007) findings showed that age and language exposure indeed correlated to the children's abilities to process these abstract tasks. These studies show that these factors should be considered when selecting the age groups for research with children. If younger children are solicited for their perspectives then the researcher needs to design the study appropriately to the participants' developmental and linguistic abilities. Similarly, these language abilities need to be considered in order to meet the needs of the research design itself.

When applied directly to the children participating in this study, there are exceptions to the remembering, or recall ability of children in different language and cultural contexts. One contrary example shared by scholars Weigle and Bauer (2000) suggest that deaf and hard-of-hearing adults raised by hearing parents have very vague recollections of early years and “by virtue of later exposure to language, individuals who are d/Deaf yet are born to hearing parents may be expected to have later earliest memories.” On the other hand, deaf children born to deaf parents that are provided a visually accessible language at an earlier age are arguably able to recall events more readily; as deaf children with early language exposure have a better understanding of themselves at an earlier age, more similarly to their non-deaf peers (Nelson, 1993). While there would be representation from children with diverse language experiences participating, it is still far more likely that a majority of the child participants would be deaf children born to hearing parents with little to no exposure to previous knowledge or context of deafness (Padden & Humphries, 2005).

Since the goal of this study was to include deaf children with and without sign language exposure in the home, but some baseline of sign language fluency would be needed to participate in the study, participants were sought from bilingual (ASL and English) programs that had exposure to sign language since kindergarten. In addition to video-cued focus group interviews, other visual methodologies were the chosen path to address the challenge of recall for potentially non-verbal/physical stages of memory development in the children of this particular study.

### **Focus Group Interviews With Deaf Children**

It has been suggested that children are just as capable as adults to participate in interviews, but they often lack maturity, which makes it appear that they are not competent to provide insight beneficial to research about issues of childhood (Westcott & Littleton 2005). Rather than using forms of qualitative research that do not seek specific



themes, or certain types of information like *observation* or *participant observation*, researchers might choose to interact with children further by using *interviews* to seek direct, or specific information. A qualitative interview can be formal (structured) or casual (unstructured), as well as designed as a one-on-one interaction between a researcher and participant or the researcher with a group of participants, like a focus group (Mason, 2002). Interviews with individual children will vary greatly depending on experience and the context of the interview and the particular child; it is important to consider the interview process as an effort in joint meaning making between the child and the researcher (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). Further, Westcott and Littleton (2005) suggest that interviewing children can be challenging because children are often only approached in this type of back and forth exchange of dialogue with adults if the child has done something wrong. In order to avoid this perception, a researcher might attempt to be conscious of this possible perception from a child (or children) and employ an approach that might be more comfortable for participant(s).

In order to provide support, or foster a more comfortable exchange while interviewing, a researcher might use a *focus group* approach with children. This approach can be extremely advantageous for researchers working with children because the participants may feel more comfortable, or safe if they are with peers. They can share the meaning making, and the higher ratio of children to adults can attempt to address a power imbalance that would occur with adult researchers and child participants (D'Amato, 1986; Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Graue and Walsh (1998) address this method with research conducted by D'Amato (1986), who explains, "kids are more relaxed when with a friend than alone with an adult. They help each other with their answers. They also keep each other on track and truthful." (p. 114). In his study and resulting book, *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats*, Tobin (2000) chose to conduct focus groups with children rather than one-on-one interviews because he supported the assumption that the children

will “form their beliefs and ideas” with others (adults and peers) through discourse (p. 7).

Challenges of using focus groups with children (and adults) come with the potential of differing opinions; the researcher has little control over what the children might share from what transpired in the group outside of the group to others. A researcher of Early Childhood Studies, Dayan (2008) provides insight to these challenges posing that children may feel defensive or suspicious of the reasons behind an adult questioning them. Further, children are often ignored and may feel unmotivated to share their perspectives, or counter to that they may seek to give the “right” answer to adults even if they disagree with the answer. Perhaps more importantly in this case, Dayan (2008) suggests that children are more likely to share insight and perspective if they are comfortable with the context and the people in that context (p. 55). Although researching with children on issues of childhood and education seems a difficult task, it is a valuable perspective that scholars seek. Irwin and Johnson (2005) suggest the importance in building rapport with the children in a research project in order to build trust and cooperation.

A critical part of the relationship building piece is to establish a, “respectful relationship between researcher(s) and deaf children” of the study (McGuire, 2020). As researchers are beginning to consider the ethical side of research with deaf individuals (Graham & Horejes, 2017; Singleton et al., 2014, 2017; Harris et al., 2009) and deaf children (McGuire, 2020), it is imperative to include positionality in the research design and process. In this case, including the hearing status of the researcher was considered integral to the design of research with the deaf children, and therefore the primary researcher with the children chose to disclose this information early in the interactions with the child participants; the researcher made it explicit to participants that she identified as a hearing person raised by deaf, signing parents, also known as a *Coda*. All interactions between the children and the researcher were in ASL.

## **The Research Design**

The methodological design of this study is a version of Tobin and colleagues' (1989 & 2009) video cued and multi-vocal approach. This method was initially chosen because of its visual nature and successful implementation in a larger international study *Deaf Kindergartens in Three Countries: US, France, and Japan* project funded by the Spencer Foundation (2009). Valente (2019) details the critical nature of the "deaf lens" that supported the questions that led to the research with many adult stakeholders concerned with Deaf ECE. This immediate study with child participants was an extension of the larger study that sought perspectives of deaf children to add their insights to the larger dialogue about Deaf ECE. Deaf children were shown videos of a deaf preschool class and asked to comment on what they thought about what they saw. Therefore, deaf children were viewed as the experts in their experiences of Deaf ECE.

## **Video-Cued Method**

A visually based method was purposefully selected in order to better suit the participants of this study. In studies that have used video to capture children during the data generation process researchers have found that the children often ignore the filming after the initial distraction (Tobin et al, 1989 & 2009). The choice to use videos as an interviewing tool was ideally used as a way to direct attention to the subject of the video and away from the researcher, and camera used to document the research. Additionally, Tobin (2000) has employed a video-cued method of showing scenes from preschools as a means to elicit perspectives of children, which could be highly useful as a visual medium to interact with deaf children about Deaf Education.

In this study, the use of video as an interviewing tool indeed became a beneficial feature of the chosen methodology. A visual-cued methodology was chosen for two primary reasons; First, Deaf cultures are visual, as Harlan Lane and others have called Deaf people, "the people of the eye" (Lane, et al., 2011). Similar to another

conducted with deaf adolescents using photo elicitation, O’Brien (2013) aimed to employ a method that appealed to his participants’ visual and spatial natures related to their lived experiences. Secondly, a video-cued method has the virtue of redirecting attention away from both the researcher and the participant. It functions to create a site of joint attention (Tobin, 2019) where the researcher and informants can interact during the data generation process, and researchers found the children often became less distracted by the presence of a camera after the initial exposure, as recommended by Tobin in the earlier studies (1989 & 2009). In his study of children and the media, Tobin (2000) employed a video-cued method effectively to cue focus group discussions with elementary school aged children. In this study, the video-cues acted as effective tools for both redirection to the subject and as a visual means to show them what the researcher wanted them to discuss.

The initial findings of this study showed that utilizing a modified, video-cued method appeared to work as a result of the pilot interview. The focus of attention was on watching and discussing the videos, rather than direct questioning from the researcher. This likely reduced the insecurity children might have felt when being interviewed. The visual method of video-cued interviewing effectively drew deaf children to opine and reflect interchangeably while they participated in focus groups with peers. The challenge of using videos of other children and teachers in their classrooms only appeared occasionally when the content and actions differed from the experiences of the children in the focus groups, but these differences were beneficial as they became comparative points to discuss, and the children (for the most part) felt free to discuss them.

In addition to using video clips to elicit responses about the subject of Deaf Education, a video-assent was used to provide a practical explanation of the project, and the goals of the study and the researcher. Singleton and colleagues (2015) indicate practices that include sign language throughout the research process to allow for ethical practices while conducting inquiry with deaf individuals.

Additionally, because ‘verbal’ assent was needed from the child participants, a visual-verbal assent showing the research plan and method was ideal and innovative to the methodological approaches in the field of research on Deaf Education with deaf children. And finally, other means of visual cues were used to support the children’s recall and development of perspectives while expressing themselves were achieved by using photo stills from the videos in order to support the abstract recalling that the video-cued method required. Combining these various visual mediums provided an optimal approach to researching with deaf children.

Deaf children were asked to watch four video scenes from a bilingual (ASL-English), American deaf preschool class; responses and reflections were gathered in focus group interviews. Parameters were established to select participants. Children represented the following groupings: deaf children who had access to a bilingual (ASL-English) deaf school since Kindergarten, between the ages of 6-12 years old, and from three geographical regions in the United States. This age range was selected because these children would have recently experienced preschool themselves, the children (with the support of peers) were therefore able to build ideas in reaction to what the child saw, and share what they think is important. Purposefully limiting the age range of child participants—older than the study’s stimuli subject (preschoolers), but young enough to recently engage in current educational practices—allowing the children in this study to recall, explore, and share what they thought about their experiences in relation to what other preschoolers might experience in other deaf schools. Due to the possible developmental differences in the range selected, researchers aimed to group the children by age: 6-9 and 10-12 years old, though this was only truly implemented in two of the four interviews due to uncontrollable circumstances. As a result of time constraints and scheduling conflicts at one of the sites, the children were all grouped together.

The children were recruited for the study via ‘signing’ Schools for the Deaf. Upon contact, details of the project’s purpose and

methodology were shared with parents of potential participants. Due to the distinct and vulnerable nature of the population, preparations were made to meet with the school administrators, parents, and children before beginning the focus groups in order to respond to questions or concerns about the study and this research with deaf children. Participants were recruited from schools all over the United States, and the final study represented children from three regions in the southwest, southeast, and northeast. Participants were diverse in ages, sex, race, and language use.

**Materials: The video segments, descriptions and ordering.**

The video clips came from a surplus of footage taken of a preschool in the northeastern United States.<sup>2</sup> The school, staff and students in the primary footage may be recognizable to some individuals due to references from the international study of *Deaf Kindergartens*, and/or the low incidence of (signing) deaf communities across the United States and globally for that matter. However, the focus of this study is not on the individuals of the focal site, rather the broader communities of deaf children that collectively contributed to this study.

There were four chosen, edited clips used in the focus group interviews. The clips were edited to show a quicker version of the events as they occurred in real time on the day of the deaf, preschool class. Each of the four clips had varied subjects that were elements of the larger video-cued project filmed footage. The subjects and video footage were taken from the larger body of footage and edited, rather than from the pre-selected, edited videos used in the larger project. The choice to select raw footage and edit was simply to customize the video tools used for the intended audience. The exact footage used in the larger project's edited videos was not used in this instance for multiple reasons, primarily, because those videos may not have been appealing to children. Additionally, the participating schools and parents were concerned about the length of time spent away from class. Instead, the original footage from the

2. All teacher and students names referenced in this study are pseudonyms, and the sites where focus groups/interviews occurred have been only regionally referenced.

Deaf Kindergartens project was revisited and segments were specifically sought that would show interactions that children viewing might have found interesting, and inspire them to engage with the researcher (and each other) about the subject of study. These segments were edited into four video clips and named generally based on the overall subject and/or theme. The four video clips are briefly described below. Each video clip was shown to the participants, and the participants were engaged in short discussions between each viewing, all totaling one hour of watching and talking.

Initially, the videos were to be shown in a particular order: beginning with the whole class reading in (1) *Flower Book*, from there the transition would be the brief clip on (2) *Speech Therapy* as the first mentions the second in the clip, after that the children would be asked to watch a longer clip involving multiple approaches of reading in (3) *Quiet-time Reading*, and the final video viewed would be the livelier clip of a (4) *Lunchtime* scene. These selections mirrored the order these events occurred in the day while filming the original Deaf Kindergarten



Figure 1. Sonya seated in front of the class, next to the open book, “Flowers Around Town.” This still captures the end of the statement, “(Wow! Look at this long) word!” - referring to “Transportation” printed on the book.

(preschool) class, and it seemed a logical choice to follow that order while showing the children participating in the study.

*Flower Book.* The main teacher, Sonya, reviews a book with the whole class (six children). The book is about a local flower shop that provides concepts of importing products using various forms of transportation, with the preschool students. The students interact with the teacher about things in the story, and otherwise. The teacher asks questions, and responds to the students’ tangents.

*Speech Therapy.* A teacher’s aide, Bobbie, assists a female student with a hearing aid before she and another student join the speech therapist in a different room at school. The students work with the therapist on speech production and recognition of sounds using colors (Yellow) and shapes (Star).



Figure 2. Therapist momentarily holds a black hoop in front of the lower half of her face, while saying, “Yellow” “Star.” Moments later, the child seated in front of her to the right mimics the same words in spoken English.

*Quiet-time Reading.* The teacher, Sonya, instructs the children to disburse with mats and books throughout a room, dimly lit by a few windows along one wall. The first scene shows a young girl



and Sonya taking turns reading a book, *The Napping House* (Wood, 1996), to each other in ASL. The second shows a different teacher (Aide), Sarah, reading a book to a male student alternating between spoken English and ASL for each page. The third shows Sonya reading to a different male student. This student is not looking at the book, but rather being told what is in the book while he lies on the floor – half watching. The last part of this movie clip is of a student sent across the hall to join Sonya and read aloud (in sign) to the teacher at a table.



Figure 3. Sarah, the Teacher's Aide is reading with a student in spoken English and ASL, alternating languages on each page. Here she pauses to ask the student to repeat an English word from the page she just read, "Can you say airplane?" He responds back, "airplane" in spoken English

*Lunchtime.* The scene opens on the two girls from speech therapy now sitting at a round table in a cafeteria with trays of food in front of them. The Two main teachers, Tammie and Sonya, lead the rest of the preschool class into the room behind the girls, and they all go sit as the teachers bring trays to all the children. There is casual chatting around the table between some children. At another point, two girls in the movie sneakily eat pats of butter

while ducking under the table; later the girls playfully giggle and shove each other back and forth while eating their lunches. In both of these scenes, Reneé, a teacher from an older class, moves out of her seat at their table to address and correct the girls’ behavior. At another moment, Reneé corrected one of the girls for tricking other students and teasing them. The scene ends with the two girls practicing speech with each other using hats they made in therapy.



*Figure 4.* Moments before these students were bent under the table eating butter directly from small containers using their fingers. The teacher approached and explained to them (in this picture) that they should not eat butter like that.

After each scene, the child participants were asked to discuss the scene. Each scene was recorded in the same class from an American Deaf School, and the clips and narrations are all in ASL, with the exception of a few moments the individuals on screen use spoken English for specific word utterances in the speech therapy segment; these short segments were subtitled in English. Those segments were interpreted for the children as needed (depending on the reading levels of the participants). The choice to use clips only from

the United States was decided based on the language use of the participants in the focus groups, and segments that would possibly spark interesting discussions in the focus groups.

*The Pilot.* The hour-long interview with 10-year old Alex began first with both he and the researcher watching the two-minute assent video. *The researcher enters an office and approaches the large desk that is situated in the center of the space and frame. She sits down in front of a large monitor attached to a laptop with a video editing program open showing a screenshot of one of the video scenes from the Deaf Kindergartens video-cued material. She turns toward the camera and notices it is recording her. "Hi, there!" she says.* The visual-verbal assent continues as the researcher proceeds to show the viewer what she is working on, and invite the viewer(s) to help her with her "homework" on "deaf kindergarten." In this two-minute video<sup>3</sup> the researcher refers to the still image from a video segment on the monitor that the participants are about to watch. Additionally, the viewers are shown the actual digital camera that would be used to film them in the study, "to help me not forget what you (the participants) say."

Rather than following an English scripted prompt that is typically written (and interpreted for the child), the choice was made to create a visual demonstration and communicate directly in ASL the expectations of the study. At the time of this study and research design, there was no other study discussing this, nor the implications of this type of assent design, so this type of approach was quite experimental. However, after the video was shown to Alex, he looked to the researcher in the room (the same from the video) and signed, "Yes, I'll do it." Anecdotally, the visual-verbal assent appeared to be effective.

Two major shifts occurred in the methodological practice as a result of the pilot interview; both adjustments directly related to the method of the study. After an initial (unintentional) shuffling of the planned order of the sequential video segments, it became

3. View full visual-verbal assent video: <https://youtu.be/ShK1ehOGylw>

clear that the ordering was necessary to provide cohesion that was not as evident in the truncated versions of the fully edited video the adult participants had access to. The other area of adjustment came with the flexibility of allowance for one-on-one versus a focus group interviews. Earlier mining of other studies produced concern that a one-on-one interview with a young, deaf child might not yield the desired level of participation without their peers. However, the pilot interview allowed the researcher to move beyond both of these restrictions to a more fluid application of the methodology.

Due to a mix up earlier in the day, the previously planned focus group turned into a one-on-one interview. In the initial research design, the four video segments would be shown in the same order that the occurrences happened throughout the day as they were filmed, throughout the preschool schedule. The order changed and they were shown out of order, beginning with the clip showing (3) *Quiet-time Reading*, rather than the originally planned video (1) *Flower Story*. This change was in response to the participant sharing concern throughout the initial edited scenes of the teachers reading with individual students in different ways. His concern was directed to the individualized approach of the reading practice, and he immediately shared a recommendation for group reading instead—with young students. Alex’s overt preference for teachers reading-aloud to a group of children, rather than one-on-one, somewhat caused a distraction from what the researcher intended the focus would be related to the third video. Impressions like this further cemented the researcher’s previous decision to follow the planned order of videos more consistently for subsequent focus groups interviews.

Finally, the highly engaging interactions with Alex as a result of the “mix up” provided insight on the potential for possibly successful child/researcher interactions that would inform this study, as much as it informed the appropriate ordering of the video cues. This latter acknowledgement would be helpful, but perhaps inconsequential, while proceeding in the methods set forth in the project.

## Storytelling



*Figure 5.* Side-by-side images from the Storytelling Flower Story. On the left, a student is signing, “Airplane (flies)” next to two other peers and a Teacher’s Assistant sits in the background and on the right, the teacher at the front of the class is signing, “Airplane (carrying a car).”

## Speech Therapy



*Figure 6.* Side-by-side images from the Speech Therapy segment. On the left, the teacher’s assistant tests a hearing aid before giving it to a student, and on the right, the speech therapist holds a black hoop over her mouth while saying, “Yellow, Star.”

## Reading



*Figure 7.* Side-by-side images from the Quiet-Time Reading segment. On the left, the teacher is a book with a student, taking turns; On the right, the teacher is reading a book to a student who watches while laying down.

## Lunch



*Figure 8.* Side-by-side images from the Lunchtime segment. On the left, two students are looking across the table in front of lunch trays, while one signs, “You’re gullible!” to someone across the table. On the right, a teacher kneels between the same two girls signing, “Not (appropriate)” referring to a butter eating incident.

**Materials: Still-photo cue cards.** Along with creating a visual-verbal assent, still-photo cue cards with images from the video segments were created to use as a reference in the discussions after the videos had stopped. These still photo cards were not used in every discussion, but became a useful tool if/when asking the children to recall specific moments in the videos by showing, not explaining, those moments.

The (4) still photo-cue cards included visibly recognizable moments from the videos that would potentially provide prompting reminders to elicit discussion if the children were not as responsive as hoped. Overall, these cards were not used with the older children in the study, however the cards were used and seemed to be beneficial with younger children. The cards appeared to assist with attention and recall of the particular events and focal elements in the videos.

The combination of still photo-cue cards and the visual-verbal assent video were two primary methods that were created solely as visual research approaches to correlate directly with the video-cued method adapted from Tobin et al.'s work on *Preschool in Three Countries* (1989, 2009) and *Deaf Kindergartens in Three Countries* (2010). Beyond these visual strategies to research that were created and implemented, there were also more practical implementations establishing a visual environment for fieldwork.

**Physical setting.** All of the interviews occurred onsite at bilingual Deaf Schools. The schools were amicable with the researcher's request of a room, adequate for seating arranged in a semi-circle around a large screen to display the videos. The screen and room were provided, but the seating was left for the researcher to arrange upon arrival. The seating was arranged by the researcher with as little visual barrier(s) as possible, as all participants need a clear sight line of others in order to communicate. Some school sites provided conference type rooms that had larger tables surrounded by chairs. These settings were accessible for conversing with smaller groups, but proved challenging to capture all individuals signing on camera. In these settings, the seating was arranged around the

### Two Mockups Of The Rooms From The Focus Groups

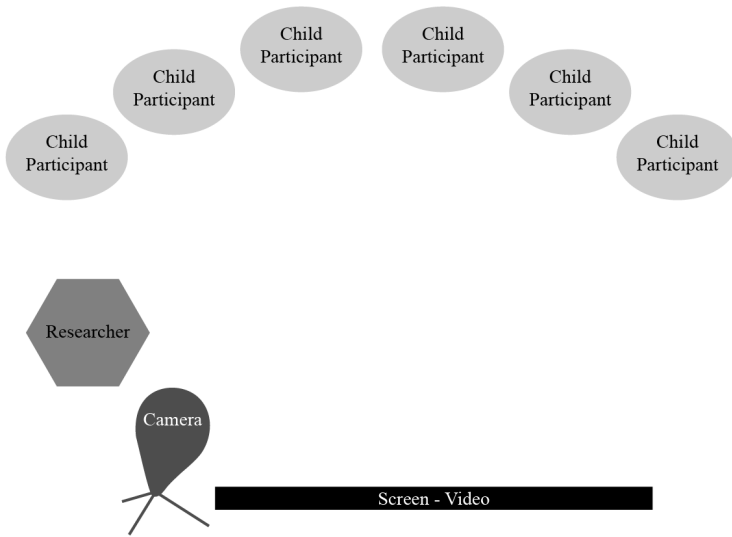


Figure 9. A semi-circle of participants are seated in front of a screen and a camera is next to the screen pointing back at the children.

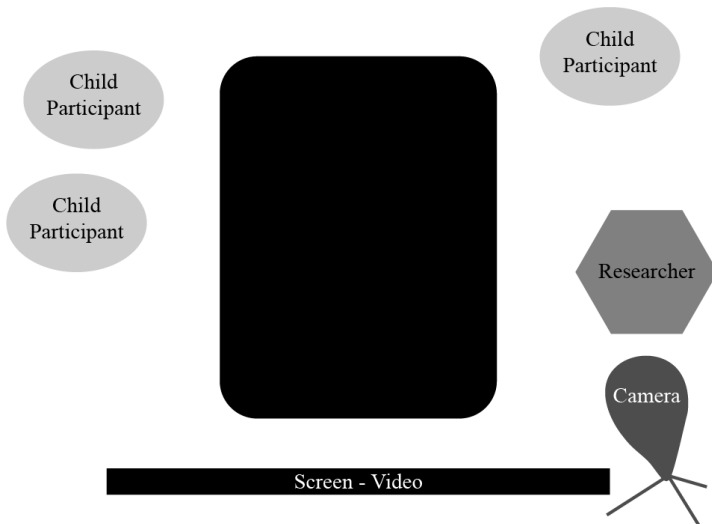


Figure 10. the participants are seated around a rectangular table and a camera is next to the screen pointing back at the children. In both, the researcher is near (but still in front of) the camera.



table, angled toward the screen. The camera was pointed back toward the participants and the researcher, to record the dialogue and allow participants to see each other.

The semi-circle around the conference table(s) was somewhat effective, but in some instances the table allowed for side-talk to occur under the table - as demonstrated by participants in one focus group.

**Procedure: Visual-verbal assent.** The children's parents went through a more formal consent process prior, but this more simplified process of assent is important as well. The purpose of an assent was to afford the participants the choice to participate, or not. On paper, to an IRB, an assent simply asks the children to talk with the researcher and/or in this case, talk with the researcher, answer some questions, and watch some videos about "Deaf Preschool." That's all that was needed to be done to satisfy the Internal Review Board (IRB) for all universities tied to the Deaf Kindergartens project (there were three), technically, a quick conversation (in ASL, though the submitted, approved document was in English) with the children to see if they wanted to do this (arguably abstract) study to help out a "stranger" that happened to get permission to talk to them *somehow*. All of this felt like the participants were less than informed. In response, the visual-verbal assent protocol was created.

After research and consultation with other deaf and hearing scholars who actively engage in research with deaf individuals (primarily adults, but not exclusively), a child-friendly assent video was created. Similar to the benefits of Tobin and colleagues' (Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009; Tobin et al. 2010) video-cued methods, the visual-verbal assent serves multiple purposes; it serves to introduce the act of using a video-cued method in a visual, active way (seeing and doing), showing where the source videos came from and what they are about, the purpose of the video project, and the purpose of filming the data collection—all in ASL, while using child-friendly phrasing. Rather than *saying* what will happen,

the visual-verbal assent video *shows* the researcher addressing the participants (the deaf children) directly, in an office where she does her “homework.” This concept was chosen to describe an overall purpose for being there and speaking to the participants in a familiar way—like the children in the study, she also had homework to do, and she could directly show them what she was doing and explain how they could help. From there, at each part of the short video the participants are shown and/or given more information (the video camera used in interviews) or told about their ability to “opt out” at any time, before the final agreement to participate, or not.



*Figure 11.* Researcher in an office sitting in front of a computer and monitors greets participants and welcomes them to see what she’s doing.

At the start of each focus group, the short video was shown to the children asked to participate. The result provided an immediate response from the children, often “yes” or “sure” and simple nods of their heads. The reaction from the children informed the researcher that they were comfortable proceeding with the study.

**Implementation and parameters of the focus group interviews.** The (initial) plan:

- Greeting the deaf children in the focus groups (check);
- Briefly introduce myself and explain that I will be filming the session in order to review what was said at a later time (I will do this by providing a visual-verbal scripted video asking for the participation of the children in this project) (check);
- The children of the study will initially be shown a video clip or edited scene (check);
- After each clip, ask what they think about what they saw. Use pictures from videos to assist with recall (check).



*Figure 12.* Researcher signing “help” at the end of the visual-verbal assent video question, “Will you help me with my homework?”

## **Results**

There were moments when these purposefully created environments did not provide adequate visual access. At those times, the children would advocate for themselves and their peers to

ensure access. This advocacy appeared when young students repositioned themselves to include others in the conversation; at other times, a child might be sure others were watching before responding, or repeating my questions for their classmates that missed what the researcher asked. These small strategies the children used to be inclusive were not unique to one group, and occurred across the focus groups—with little to no prompting of the adults (the researcher or the staff observing). The combination of these visual features provided appropriate tools and an environment to fully engage the deaf child(ren) participants in this study. There were minimal (physical) communication barriers, and participation of the children and researcher during the data gathering (focus groups).

### **“Thank You for Talking With Me Today.”**

For an adult researcher to understand the experience of a child (or children) as a stranger is in many ways an impossible task. Yet it is an important one because for too long we have assumed that children have nothing of interest or importance to tell us about their lives and that we adults understand much better than they what is good for them and how events impact them (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 18). James (2007) provides warnings and encouragement for scholars looking to seek “expert” advice and perspective from children on issues of childhood.

Appropriate research practices with deaf children are not often discussed in the literature or available on issues that directly impact them (Sheridan, 1996, 2001). Age, language, and experience are all things to consider when researching with this population. The methodology described in this article reveal a considerate approach that attempts to openly engage deaf children, incorporating their world-view in ways that are readily accessible (Singleton et al., 2015) in the small body of research on relevant topics.

**Significance of study.** Utilizing a video-cued method worked to reduce the insecurity children might have felt when being interviewed, as the focus of the attention was placed on the watching and

discussion of the videos, rather than directly on the questioning from the adult researcher. The visual method of video-cued interviewing drew deaf children to engage in discussion with peers, as discussed throughout this article. As Clark (2011) points out, “Children are as honest as adults, although they certainly parse the world and see experiences from distinctive angles and sometimes don’t know adults’ norms for socially appropriate disclosure” (p.4). As researchers, we can take opportunities to learn from our engagements with others, in this case with children, about how they view things of significance that impact them. What and how they choose to disclose this information is less important than the significance of the impact of that perspective, and how it might inform how we design meaningful opportunities for engagement.

A visual-verbal assent was purposefully created for participants in this study. The creation of this protocol was an intended response to consider not only the positionality of the researcher, which is critical in cross-cultural research, especially with children—not to mention with the added layers of complexity of deaf communities and language differences, etc. (Graham, P. J., & Horejes, T. P., 2017). In the case of young child participants, tradition has not caught up with social justice lenses that may present children as autonomous individuals with the right to consent; rather, verbal assent is the bar that we are required to meet in our research standards. This researcher argues the visual-verbal assent protocol, along with other methods created and implemented, supports the opportunity for an engaged child participant. Combining these various visual media provided an optimal approach to researching with (deaf) children.

The abstract nature of “research” and the adult researcher working to gain access to children’s perspectives and their worldview is challenging as other researchers have found (Malewski, 2005; James, 2007). Merging ethnographic work in cross-cultural, deaf educational settings by McGuire (2020) prompts a similar thought that, “deaf-friendly, child-friendly social research should be flexible, inclusive, and adaptive to a spectrum of communication needs and

preferences”(p. 25). The methodology used in this particular study was chosen in a study with deaf children for its direct and accessible nature. However, this article’s purpose is to suggest most pointedly that the visual-verbal assent developed for this study has the potential to influence and perhaps replace the verbal assent protocol traditionally used with children generally and is a contribution to the field of research on Deaf Education, and to research with children and other vulnerable populations.

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