

Integrating American Sign Language into the Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract

An Inclusive classroom is an environment where students with various educational needs are educated within the same setting. Integrating American Sign Language into an inclusive classroom has the ability to better assist students who are children of Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing adults, students who have hearing impairments and are educated in a general education classroom and students who have certain types of learning disabilities. This integration can also help teachers with general classroom management as well as promoting inclusivity within their classroom. Integrating American Sign Language into an inclusive classroom is beneficial for students because it will assist them in learning the language, make the classroom a more comfortable setting for students whose first language is American Sign Language, as well as assist students who do not communicate orally.

Keywords: Education, D/deaf, Hard of hearing, American Sign Language

Integrating American Sign Language into the Inclusive Classroom

There are a million and one ways to conduct a classroom and no classroom setting, student or teacher is alike. Every teacher has their own preferences and methods to use in the classroom. One of the hardest tasks when teaching a class is figuring out how to make the content as accessible and approachable as possible for *all* of your students. This can be a very overwhelming idea. For some teachers, the thought of this can be even more overwhelming when teaching an inclusion class which includes students who have learning, amongst other disabilities and students who do not. This is because teachers want to be able to create the most successful environment as possible for their students, but they may feel unprepared or overwhelmed if they are not exactly sure how to accomplish that goal. Every student has a different set of needs and a teacher must attempt to accommodate all of them. Some teachers are completely aware not all of their students comprehend the content, but they feel helpless due to restrictions on time and resources. There are around 460 million people worldwide who have some form of hearing loss and that number is estimated to rise to about 900 million people by the year 2050 (Organization, 2019). There are currently 34 million children who have a degree of hearing loss (Organization, 2019). Educators must find a way to include this population of people into their inclusive classroom. Fortunately, in some cases, teachers have support from their school's special education department, administrators, parents, and the community.

Hearing Impairments

There are different types of hearing impairments. One type is "little d" deaf. This is described using a lower case letter *d*. This is used when referring to people who have an audiological condition of not hearing (Ballenger, 2013). This term is typically used to describe people who have little to no functional hearing (Rochester Institute of Technology). 'Little d'

deaf is a part of the medical model. The medical model describes disability as “An individual or medical phenomenon that results from impairments in body functions or structures; a deficiency or abnormality” (Hodge & Haegele, 2016, p.194). Targets of interventions in the medical model include “fixing” the disability, in this case, the hearing impairment, and “normalizing” the person as much as possible (2016). Hearing aids or cochlear implants are typically the technology used by people who identify as the medical model, ‘little d’ deaf.

‘Big D’ Deaf refers to people who are deaf who use ASL and are involved in Deaf culture and the Deaf community (Ballenger, 2013). The Deaf community is a “linguistic and culture minority group” (Napier, 2002, p. 141). Within this community, cultural and linguistic experiences, a sense of identity and pride of that identity are shared (Napier, 2002). ‘Big D’ Deaf is a part of the social model of disability. The way disability is described in the social model is “A social construct that is imposed on top of impairments by society; a difference” (2002, p. 141). The targets of interventions of disability in the social model include creating social or political change within society in an attempt to decrease social barriers and increase the level of understanding (2002).

Hard of Hearing is a term used to describe people who have mild-to-moderate hearing loss (Rochester Institute of Technology). Those who are Hard of Hearing may use spoken language, ASL or both (Rochester Institute of Technology). The term Hearing Impaired is used to describe individuals with any level of hearing loss (Rochester Institute of Technology). This term typically groups people who are hard of hearing and people who are d/Deaf into one category, thus taking away their different individual identities.

Types of Sign Language and Communication

Students who are hard of hearing are typically mainstreamed into general education classrooms. This means general education teachers must change the way they may normally teach their class in order to accommodate their students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing. Implementing American Sign Language (ASL) or other types of sign language such as Pidgin Signed English (PSE) and Signed Exact English (SEE) can help a student who is D/deaf and hard of hearing excel in the mainstream/inclusive classroom (Knopf, 1983). It is very hard for a student to excel in a classroom where another language that they cannot understand nor hear is being used. Although some people with hearing loss can read lips, it is often very hard to understand what a person is saying when solely relying on lip reading. Even a good lip reader can typically only understand five to twenty percent of what is being said to them (Smith, 1996). This is simply because there is not enough distinction between the movements of people's lips in spoken language. Only 40% of English phonemes are visible because most speech sounds are not made from the mouth (Knopf, 1983 p. 23).

American Sign Language (ASL). There are three main types of communication used throughout the Deaf Community. They are American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Signed Language (PSE) and Signed Exact English (SEE). ASL is a visual language that was designed in the United States. ASL has its own syntax and grammar which makes it different from English and other spoken and signed languages (Disorders, 2017). It is used by signing and having the brain "process linguistic information through the eyes" (National Association for the Deaf, 2019). The signs shape, placement, movement of the hands and body and facial expressions are important when conveying information when using ASL (2019). The language is mainly used by those who are D/deaf and hard of hearing and involved in the Deaf Community. ASL is the first language for many people who are deaf or who have parents who are deaf (CODAs). ASL is

mainly used in the United States and some parts of Canada but there are different dialects across different regions of North America (Disorders, 2017). ASL is one of the fastest growing languages of instruction within high schools and universities in the United States (Bauman, 2004).

Pidgin Signed English (PSE) and Signed Exact English (SEE). PSE is a combination of ASL and English (Association, 2015). PSE typically uses ASL signs but in an English syntax (2015). Many English speaking people who lose their hearing later in life use PSE because they have a better understanding of English compared to ASL. SEE is not a language, rather it is a manually coded form of English that uses ASL signs that are supplemented with special signs or inflections, such as the words “the” and “or” which allow English to be signed exactly as it is spoken (2015). Typically people who are deaf, but are not involved in the Deaf Community or people who learned English as their first language and use sign language later on in life tend to use PSE or SEE (2015).

The Oral Method. Some people, such as Alexander Graham Bell, believe people who are hard of hearing or deaf should use the Oral Method rather than ASL or other signed languages. The Oral Method or Oralism is a “philosophy of communication whereby hard-of-hearing people, identified as being oral deaf, favor speech communication only, without the use of a visual signing system” (Reed, 2009). Thus, people are forced into communicating orally rather than using ASL. Oralists favor the abolition of the use of sign because they see it as being inferior to speech (Knopf, 1983). They believe it was lower on the evolutionary scale, thus making those who use sign more like apes than humans (1983). They also believe “sign preceded speech” which relates to the idea that sign is not as valuable or as intellectual as speech, thus reiterating their point that ASL is inferior (1983). Hence, Oralists believe if they could teach people who are

Deaf or hard-of-hearing how to speak, they would be transitioning upwards on the social scale (1983). Those who use the Oral Method typically use cochlear implants or other assistive hearing devices such as hearing aids to help them with their speech (Reed, 2009). Although very difficult to understand, lip-reading is sometimes used to help people who are hard-of-hearing understand what other people are saying. The Oral Movement began in the late nineteenth century (Padden & Humphries, 2005). It pushed to eliminate the use of sign within schools for the deaf and did this by removing sign from their education system and banning their students from using it (1983). If students were ever caught using sign in oral school, they would be punished (1983). Oral schools were typically day schools where students could be admitted as young as five years old (1983). Some schools even offered preschool programs (1983). The class size of oral programs were typically three to four students per class but some schools offered one-to-one classes (1983). However, some people who are deaf or hard of hearing choose to “turn their voices off” which means they choose to not use their voices. This is because they would either prefer to sign or sometimes people are embarrassed by the way their voice sounds to other people. People who are deaf typically have different sounding voices than hearing people because they are unable to mimic the sounds of other voices without hearing them.

Hearing students have a vocabulary of about several thousand words by the time they are five years old (Knopf, 1983). Deaf students who are involved in oral programs in kindergarten learn about fifty words by the time they were five years old (1983). In addition, Deaf children who have Deaf parents and practice sign language have a vocabulary of several thousand signs (1983). However, about ninety percent of children who are deaf have hearing parents and attend a school that does not utilize ASL (1983). This results in these children having little to no vocabulary because of their restricted access to these languages (1983). The practice of total

communication within a classroom can help students have access to both of these languages and have an even greater level of understanding vocabulary.

Total Communication. Total communication is a communication method that involves “simultaneous presentation of both a manual sign and an associated spoken word” (Carbone, et al., 2006, p. 181). Research has shown that this method of communication leads to mastery in both verbal languages as well as manual languages (2006). This method is sometimes used when teaching people with autism or other developmental disabilities sign language (2006). Brady and Smouse conducted a study to see which communication would provide the best results in behavioral responses in children with autism. The three communication methods they used in their experiment were voice-alone, sign-alone and total communication (Brady & Smouse, 1987). Their results proved voice-alone communication resulted in a significant decrease in behavioral responses, sign-alone resulted in no significant differences in response and total communication produced astounding results (1987). In this experiment, the use of total communication led to “significant gains in behavior responses” (1987, 173). There is also evidence that shows the use of total communication during developmental stages can be beneficial for students who are non-verbal (2006). During an observation of a four-year-old boy who is autistic and does not speak to communicate, there was an increase in his knowledge of both ASL and an increase in his vocal responses after he was submerged in a total communication setting (2006).

These observations show that using ASL in the inclusive classroom is not only beneficial to the students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing but also the students with developmental disabilities. The second form of communication added within the classroom gives students a different way to grasp and interpret what is being said. Also, the students gain all of the benefits

of learning a new language such as “developing cultural perspectives of people from different backgrounds” as well as increases in “cognitive abilities, positively influences achievement in other disciplines, and results in higher achievement test scores” (2006, 182).

Universal Design

The term Universal Design (UD) was first introduced by Ronald Mace, who was an architect and the director of the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University (Jiminez, Graft, & Rose, 2017). The term UD refers to the “concept of simplifying life for everyone by making products, communication systems, and the ‘built environment’ more usable by more people at little or no extra cost” (Jiminez, Graft, & Rose, 2017). Mace strove to make environments accessible for everyone. There are several principles of UD (Design, 2006). The first is the Equitable Use. This means all users will obtain the same means of use, no users will be segregated, there will be equal provisions for privacy, safety, and security and the design will be appealing to all users equally (Vouchilas, 2017). An example of this could be different types of technology such as ATMs which include voice commands to assist those who have trouble seeing (Vouchilas, 2017). The second principle is Flexibility in Use. This refers to the user’s ability to have choices in the method of use, accommodations for left-and right-handed people, the facilitation of the user’s accuracy and precision and providing adaptability to the user’s pace (Design, 2006). An example of this principle is a pair of scissors which is designed for both right-and left-handed users (2006). The third principle of UD is Simple and Intuitive Use. Simple and Intuitive Use eliminates the unnecessary complexity of a design (2006). It also makes sure a design is consistent with user expectations and intuition, accommodates a variety of literacy and language skills and it also makes sure information is listed in order of importance and provides effective prompting and feedback during and after the user’s completion of a task (2006). An

example of the third principle is an instruction manual which includes multiple languages in it. The fourth UD principle is Perceptible Information. This refers to a design's ability to provide users with different modes of presentation of essential information, maximizes the user's ability to decipher information, and provides compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices that can be used by people who have sensory limitations (2006). An example of this principle is the feature of the newer Apple iPhone which allows users to be made aware of a notification by a flashing light or vibration on the phone. This allows people who have hearing and visual impairments to be made aware of their phone's notifications. The fifth principle is Tolerance for Error. This is a design ability to arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors provide the user with warnings of said hazards and errors and provide fail-safe features and discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance (2006). An example of this is your computer providing a notification to a user asking if they would really like to delete an item they have selected to delete and warns them they will not be able to access it after they delete it. The sixth UD principle is Low Physical Effort. Low Physical Effort allows users to maintain a neutral body position, use reasonable operating forces, minimize repetitive actions and minimize sustained physical effort (2006). An example of this is touch lamps that do not operate with a switch (2006). The final principle of UD is Size and Space for Approach and Use. This refers to the design in which there is a clear line of sight to important elements for all users, makes access to components comfortable for all users, accommodates variations in grip sizes and provides adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance (2006). An example of this principle is train cars which allow a space for people who use wheelchairs to easily navigate, or a space to sit within the train car.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design Learning (UDL) is an extension of UD that helps students within the classroom because it is a platform for teachers to deliver content in many different and accessible ways. The definition of UDL is “a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn” (CAST, 2018). UDL is used in classrooms to make learning more accessible for all students. UDL stems from UD. UD refers to spaces and objects throughout the entirety of society, rather than limited to within the classroom while UDL brings the practices and ideas of UD, and adds to them for use in within the classroom. There are three principles of UDL: Engagement, Representation and Action and Expression (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018). According to the UDL Center, each of these three principals, engagement, expression and representation, has three guidelines that go along with them (CAST, 2018).

Engagement. Engagement relates to the “why” of learning. The principle Engagement refers to providing students with multiple ways to become engaged in their learning and motivated to learn (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018). The guidelines that go along with this principle are provided options for reoccurring interest, provide options for sustaining effort and persistence and providing options for self-regulation (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018). This is an important principle because engaging with students is one of the most important aspects of being a teacher. Creating engaging content for student’s helps students make connections to the content being discussed which can lead to an increase in the comprehension and remembrance of the content.

Representation. The second principle is representation which relates to the “what” of learning. Representation refers to providing students with multiple ways of perceiving and comprehending the information which is being presented to them (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines,

2018). The three guidelines for this principle are providing options for perception, providing options for language and symbols and providing options for comprehension (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018).

Action and Expression. The third principle is Action and Expression. Action and Expression relate to the “how” of learning (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018). This principle means providing students with multiple ways to show action and expression and emphasizes there is no single form of action and expression that will accommodate all learners equally (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018). The three guidelines for this principle include providing multiple options for physical action, providing multiple options for expression and communication and providing multiple options for executive functions (Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, 2018). An example of putting this principle into effect in a classroom could be a “project menu”. This is a way for students to have multiple options to choose from to express their knowledge and understanding of content. Some options on a project menu may include creating a play, writing a research paper, making a song, drawing, or writing an essay. These principles advocate for teachers to have multiple ways of presenting content in their classroom. This can be done by including different types of media in the classroom such as videos, cartoons, and music as well as having different ways for students to consume information such as verbally or written.

Least Restrictive Environment

The best classroom setting for a child is one that is the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The term LRE is used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The original name for this act was the Education of Handicapped Children Act, which was passed in 1975 (University of Washington, 2019). The name was changed to IDEA in 1990 (2019). IDEA states services are guaranteed to all students with disabilities from pre-k to age 21 (Education).

This act does not only grant students the right to be educated in the LRE but it also gives them the opportunity to be granted a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (2019).

The two main components of the concept of LRE are “[A] child should be with kids in general education to the ‘maximum extent that is appropriate’” and

Special classes, separate schools or removal from the general education class should only happen when [a] child’s learning or attention issue—his [/her] ‘disability’ under IDEA—is so severe that supplementary aids and services can’t provide him with an appropriate education. (Morin, 2016, p. 1)

The LRE for a student is determined in the creation of the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). It is up to the student, parents, teachers, administration, and members of the special education department to decide what resources and accommodations the student needs to be successful in their education. Furthermore, the LRE is not a specific location and it is different for every student. For example, some students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing may be more successful in a residential school while other students may be more successful in an inclusion classroom with assistance with an interpreter. Some of the more common forms of LRE include general education classroom with support, partial mainstream/inclusion classroom, special education class and a specialized program outside of the student’s school district (2016). The general education classroom with support method is a setting where the student remains in their general education classroom for the entirety of the class, but they receive some forms of support such as assistive technology, an aide, a sign language interpreter, accommodations and modifications (2016). Research shows this setting does not have a negative impact on the performance of students with disabilities (Cramer, 2015). The partial inclusion classroom is an environment where the student spends a majority of the day in the classroom but is pulled out for

services such as individual or small group instruction in a special education class or working with a speech teacher or a teacher who is certified in teaching the Deaf or Hard of Hearing (2016). A special education class is a classroom that contains specialized instruction for students with similar learning needs (2016). Many schools are beginning to move away from separate special education classrooms and move towards inclusion classrooms. There are also specialized programs outside of the student's school district. These are programs that include private schools, residential schools as well as hospital programs (2016). For students who are Deaf, this is typically a residential school for the deaf.

Residential Schools

There are five residential schools for the Deaf in New York. They are Saint Mary's School for the Deaf, Lexington School for the Deaf, Rochester School for the Deaf, New York School for the Deaf and the New York State School for the Deaf (Educational Enhancement for the field of Deaf Education, 2012). Rather than separating students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing into a separate day or residential schools, students with disabilities began to be mainstreamed into classrooms. These programs began to mainstream around 1975 when public law 92-142 (IDEA) was passed (Knopf, 1983). In 1973, approximately 10% of all hard of hearing students were mainstreamed into classrooms with students who have normal hearing (Kluwin, Moores, & Gaustad, 1992, p. 83). Only five years later, 37% of deaf or hard of hearing students were partially mainstreamed into classrooms (1992, p. 83). By 1984, that number rose to one-half of students (1992, p. 83). However, only 56% of these students had educational translators in their educational classroom settings (1992, p. 83). In most residential schools, there are teachers who are fluent in ASL and use it to teach their classes. Thus, this is a big shift in the way deaf and hard of hearing students are receiving their education. If a student requires an interpreter in order to be in the LRE then the school should be providing them with one. This is

because IDEA grants all students with an “identified disability receive special education and related services to address their individual needs” (University of Washington, 2019, p. 1).

Inclusion

This is one of the reasons why the Deaf Community pushes back on mainstreaming students and taking them out of residential schools. Students do not receive the same sense of community in residential schools when they are mainstreamed. In residential schools, the students are surrounded by a community who speaks their same language and are going through similar things. This is one of the ways Deaf culture was able to flourish. People from all over the state would attend their states residential school and bond over similarities they have. However, in an inclusion class, a deaf or hard of hearing student may be the only student in the class or even the whole school that uses ASL or relies on lip reading.

Alternatively, some educators believe integrating students can benefit their social skills (Chander, 2016). Inclusive education is a teaching method where all students, regardless of their capabilities, are taught together in a regular classroom “based on the interest of the children by making learning meaningful” (Hankebo, 2018). Inclusive education is said to benefit the other students in the classroom gain a better acceptance of students who have disabilities (Chander, 2016). True inclusion puts an end to the segregation of students with disabilities and those without disabilities. It creates a more inclusive classroom for all. The inclusive classroom is intended to help students with disabilities have a better sense of belonging and meaningful participation within their school’s community while also providing them with the necessary support they may need in the classroom. Students who require an interpreter should be granted one in the inclusive classroom. The act of teachers integrating ASL into the inclusive classroom is just one small gesture to make the students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing feel more

empowered and give the classroom as a whole a more multisensory communication approach (Hankebo, 2018).

Teachers want to make sure their students to have the most favorable learning environment as possible. Creating a UDL classroom and a classroom that is the LRE for your students will help them be able to focus and learn. Other simple ways to make sure students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing have the best chance at understanding the teacher is to make sure the teacher is not turning their back to the board when speaking (Olivia, 2004). Making sure their mouth is visible to the D/deaf or hard of hearing student, not talking too fast, placing the student in the front of the classroom are ways to help the student succeed (2014). The teacher can also make sure there is good lighting in the classroom, nothing that is destructing the visibility of their mouth (such as a mustache) and is aware if they are mumbling (2014). Teachers may not think of all of these things that inhibit their D/deaf or hard of hearing students from being able to try to understand what the teacher is saying to the students. Little changes such as these make a huge difference in a student's life that has trouble hearing. Another way to help students who are deaf or hard of hearing thrive in an inclusion classroom is by making sure the student can see the other student's faces. A lot of teachers will use different practices to make sure students are engaged in reading such as popcorn reading. This strategy is when students randomly call on their peers to read sections of the text. However, if a classmate calls out a peer's name that has a hearing disability while they are reading or cannot see the classmates face, they will not be made aware that it is their turn to read. Teachers should not use practices such as these in the classroom because they can inhibit their D/deaf and hard of hearing students from learning in the classroom and bonding with their peers. Teachers should always make sure the student can see the other student's faces so they can keep up with the class and understand what is happening.

Benefits of Integrating American Sign Language into an Inclusive Classroom
Increased Vocabulary. There are many benefits to integrating ASL into an inclusive classroom.

As previously described, it allows for students to have the vocabulary to be given to them in a variety of ways. In a typical classroom, the teacher will present off of the content to their students orally with some visual representations such as images. In a classroom setting that has ASL integrated into it, students will no longer have to rely solely on verbal communication to understand what is happening in the classroom. Adding a new form of communication will not hinder a student's language skills, rather it will assist in the development of them. The amount of language students are exposed to will be doubled. This will not only benefit students who are D/deaf and hard of hearing but rather students of all hearing levels. Research has found academic improvements not only in vocabulary but also mathematics, science and social studies amongst students who participate in language programs (Abbott, 2018). In the 2016-2017 school year, the New York City Department of Education allotted \$980,000 of its federal funding to 38 new bilingual programs that will serve students K-12 (Abbott, 2018, p. 42). Thus, the New York City Department of Education has recognized how important these programs are. However, rather than creating programs solely for learning a second language, they can be integrated within an inclusive classroom where all students learning needs are being met.

Job Readiness. Teaching ASL in schools will not only benefit students at a developmental stage but it will also help them be better prepared for the workforce in their future. The need for bilingual employees has doubled in the United States from 2010 to 2015 (Abbott, 2018).

Integrating ASL into the curriculum for students at an early age will help students pick up the language quicker. Knowing ASL will especially help students who live in areas with a high population of people who are deaf such as Washington D.C and Rochester, New York. These areas tend to have a high population of people who are D/deaf and hard of hearing but these are

not the only places where the students ASL skills will be beneficial. They will be able to communicate with other people in society who use ASL. Studies show the rate at which one learns a new language after puberty is a lot slower (Gürsoy, 2011). The younger the child begins to learn the language, the better their language, cognitive, and social development will be (National Institution on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2019). However, this does not mean that older students cannot learn the language. Teachers will just have to set aside more time to help their students learn. The rate at which a student learns any language depends on how much time is put into practicing and studying the language (Eaton, 2011).

Help put an end to Audism. Another reason why ASL should be integrated into the inclusive classroom is it will help put an end to audism. Audism is a term that was coined in 1975 by the Deaf scholar Tom Humphries (Bauman, 2004). Humphries' original definition of the term is "the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears" (Bauman, 2004). In simpler terms, it is the discrimination against people's hearing ability and against people who are Deaf (Bauman, 2004). This term is not as popular as other names for forms of oppression such as 'racism', 'sexism', 'ableism' and 'anti-Semitism'. Examples of audism include not using sign in the presence of a person who is deaf when you know sign, ignoring people who are deaf or not providing them with reasonable accommodations, having low or negative expectations of people who do not communicate verbally, viewing people who are hearing and their culture in a superior way to people who are deaf and their culture, not providing space for input from people who are deaf and forcing children who are born deaf to be a sole member of the hearing culture (Deaf Choice, 2012). Having more people in society learn and use ASL will no longer force those who use ASL to communicate in English by writing what they want to communicate. Rather, people who are hearing will have to be the ones to switch the

language they are using in order to communicate. This will result in the decrease in value of verbal communication within our society which will result in a greater acceptance of manual communication. ASL users will no longer have to accommodate for those who only use English or communicate manually. Increasing educational programs where students are given the opportunity to not only learn ASL but also about Deaf Culture will help them learn about audism and how to prevent audism within society.

Classroom Management. Integrating ASL into an inclusive classroom will also help teachers with classroom management. While substitute teaching in many different classes and schools within the New Paltz Central School District, I witnessed a lot of students using the ASL sign for ‘bathroom’ when indicating they needed to use the restroom. This practice allowed the students to quietly state their needs without distracting the other students. ASL can be used in many ways to prevent distraction amongst other students in the classroom. One way it can be used is students can sign ‘finish’ when they have completed an assignment that needs to be collected. This can help prevent test anxiety amongst other students who have not completed the assignment yet. Using ASL in the classroom will not only help the classroom remain quiet, which is helpful for some students, but it will also allow for students to have conversations with the teacher in ASL while keeping the classroom environment quiet for others to focus. However, this method should not be used in a classroom if there is a student who is blind or visually impaired because then the classroom would no longer be inclusive.

Children of Deaf Adults. Children of Deaf adults (CODAs) will benefit greatly with the integration of ASL in inclusive classrooms. This is because ASL is typically their first language. This makes CODAs more proficient in ASL and sometimes even more proficient in ASL than English. This is a result of how much exposure to ASL they receive at home (Beal-Alvarez &

Figuroa, 2017). Using ASL will help the student feel more comfortable within the classroom because the teacher is using the language that the student and their family use. Additionally, if the teacher is proficient in ASL, they will have an easier time communicating with said student's parents. However, having a certified translator present for the teacher to communicate with the parents is always recommended because you do not want anything to get lost in translation. CODAs do not always hear spoken language in their life outside of school. They may get this opportunity from other hearing people in their family such as grandparents, aunts or uncles. Thus, their comprehension of English may be hindered. Using ASL within the classroom will help them grasp English more quickly because of their familiarity with ASL. They will be better able to comprehend what the teacher is saying in English if the teacher is using signs as he/she is also using the spoken word.

This method is also relatable to students who are deaf but whose parents do not use ASL at home. As a result, these students may not have developed sufficient ASL skills (Herzig, 2017). This can hinder a student's English language development and this shows when they enter the school system. Herzig (2017) stresses the importance of integrating ASL into all parts of the school day, rather than just having a single, specific period to use and teach the language. The increase in exposure to the language will assist the students in comprehending the language and help these students get back on track with their language development.

It is important to note, the way that people who are D/deaf and hard of hearing choose to communicate with others is completely up to their discretion. People have preferences of the way they would like to communicate and that must be respected. Some parents would rather focus on their child's ability to speak vocally rather than with ASL, SEE or PSE because they feel their child will be able to communicate better with society. The teacher in the classroom must respect

whatever the parents and child decide is the best form of communication for their child. Other parents may find it easier to use SEE with their child rather than ASL. Other parents may opt to use a total communication method with their child.

Conclusion

Integrating ASL into an inclusive classroom provides the teachers and students with many benefits. ASL is slowly becoming more popular and accepted as a language. Educators should utilize this manual language within their classroom because it can benefit all of their students. Hearing and D/deaf and hard of hearing students alike will receive an increased use of vocabulary within the class, the opportunity to become bilingual, learn about audism and how to put an end to it as well as learn in a quieter classroom environment. Integrating ASL into the classroom early on will be more beneficial for students because it is easier for younger students to learn a language. However, older students are still able to learn the language and can equally benefit from doing so. Thus, educators should take advantage of all of the positives of the language and help create a more inclusive classroom for their students. Teachers are not expected to be fluent in ASL, nor are they expected to be translators for students who are D/deaf or hard of hearing. However, by including some ASL signs into their curriculum, they can make D/deaf and hard of hearing students feel more included in the classroom while also benefiting the students who are hearing.

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