A META-VIEW ON LANGUAGE FACILITATION: THE WHAT AND WHY

WHITE PAPER

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December 2023

ABSTRACT

The concept of Language Facilitation and the use of Language Facilitators are imperative for mitigating language deprivation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students. For students with language deprivation, the use of Educational Interpreters without targeting language development with appropriate practices and services, arguably provides an education that is de minimis (Caselli, et al, 2020). This paper discusses current literature and practices in Language facilitation. It then brings to light the necessity of Language Facilitation for developmental language acquisition of DHH students and defines important terms and processes related to the Carter Hears! Language Facilitator Model. The paper ends with discussing the idea of using Educational Interpreters in the role of Language Facilitators, emphasizing the importance of a structured, explicit, and developmental approach to language acquisition, supported by current literature.

Introduction

Interpreters are trained to go into a setting prepared to interpret accordingly to that setting. This is true for work in a traditional pre-K through 12th grade setting. The ideal situation is when an interpreter reviews the week's academic content to be interpreted for a student on grade level and whose language is readily available to absorb the academic content within a social setting generally expected of students in that grade. Interpreters must also be prepared for the possible additional challenges that come with interpreting in educational settings with adolescents, in that the interpreter may navigate occasional gaps directly or indirectly caused by adolescent development and other common factors that impact them. So, what happens when the interpreter finds that the student is not on grade level academically, socially, and/or linguistically and is not able to simply interpret? The research indicates the need for students with language deprivation to receive direct and targeted language development based on the progression of natural language acquisition. In the mainstream setting, where concentrated programs for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are not available, this is done through the role of a Language Facilitator.

Definitions and Background of Commonly Used Vocabulary

In frequent conversations centering on the education of the DHH child (or the population as a whole), language deprivation inevitably comes to the forefront of many issues regarding the ongoing development of language, or significant lack thereof. In these conversations, language deprivation can be used to mean different things, which can lead to ambiguity or confusion. On that note, the definitions below will be used throughout this paper and the subsequent paper on Language Facilitation.

Language Deprivation ([link to ASL translation)](#)

How should one define language deprivation? Generally, in an empirical sense, language deprivation in Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing persons can be defined as:

Language deprivation occurs due to a chronic lack of full access to a natural language during the critical period of language acquisition (when there is an elevated neurological sensitivity for language development), approximately the first five years of a child's life (Hall et al., 2017).

To expand on this, whether within the first five years or the natural existence of 'wiggle room' in the language acquisition window, the brain develops foundational neural interconnectivity and processes that will be built upon for years to come. Without full access and exposure to natural language during this window, the brain is not getting the connections it needs to build the framework for processing and producing language. Language deprivation during this critical period can have permanent impact for long-term neurological development. Altogether, access to language is crucial to the overall functioning of the DHH child.

Tethering	Tethering is the process of linking new information, concepts, and content to background knowledge and experiences of students. This allows pathways to be developed through a language processing hierarchy to include functions, associations, categories, synonyms, and antonyms (Richard, 2016). This ability to find ways to tether connections in the student requires efficiently meeting them in their zone of proximal development and guiding them to the learning goal with a meaningful route. Language Facilitators are specially trained to source their world knowledge and view within the possible learning perspectives of the student to determine the best tethering opportunity.
Educational Interpreter	The National Association of the Deaf states, "A qualified interpreter is one who can, both receptively and expressively, interpret accurately, effectively, and impartially, using any necessary specialized vocabulary."
	"The National Association of Interpreters in Education is an organization of **interpreters who provide services to support the communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing students in educational settings."**
	Job titles such as **assistant, aide, language facilitator, and paraprofessional** do not accurately reflect an educational interpreter's distinctive qualifications and professional position, which can lead to misunderstandings regarding appropriate roles and responsibilities.
	According to the National Association of Interpreters in Education (NAIE), because educational interpreters serve as language-accessible adult role models, appropriate roles and responsibilities can potentially be far-reaching. It is important to emphasize, however, that this should not be misconstrued to indicate that educational interpreters can fulfill roles or take on responsibilities beyond the scope of their professional qualifications.
Deaf Interpreters	D/deaf or hard of hearing interpreters who demonstrate knowledge and understanding of interpreting, deafness, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture, at times working in tandem with hearing interpreters.
	In addition to the above, they will also offer phenomenological insight (DELK) on natural learning as a deaf student and tethering strategies for overcoming gaps and challenges as well as offer language consulting to the full team.
Deafness and Deaf	In this paper, Deafness refers to the essence of a person who for whatever reason does not hear. In the same vein, Deaf refers to all of those that may or may not identify as Deaf but experience some degree of deafness and some may or may not include culture. Identity is a personal choice and often comes with the person's own idea of what the label means. For that reason, in this paper, Deaf is used as welcoming all identities including a degree of deafness.

Language Facilitator

An individual who works with a DHH student with language deprivation in the school environment, in partnership with a teacher of the deaf (or other professional with expertise in language development for DHH students) to facilitate language development directly and explicitly across the school environment, using natural language acquisition as the model.

The role of a Language Facilitator includes, but is not limited to:

1. Targeting Language Development
2. Documenting language progress including samples and data. Data includes quantitative and qualitative information.
3. Incorporating whole child development and making connections in the areas of pragmatics, Theory of Mind, Social/Emotional Skills, Self-Concept, and Self-Advocacy

Theory of Mind (ToM)

Theory of Mind refers to the ability to understand another person's point of view. It also means when a child can distinguish between true and false beliefs (see **Sally-Anne test**). In addition, ToM is having an understanding that another person's thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings may differ from one's own. Lastly, ToM can also be described as the ability to interpret that a person's intentions and feelings can affect their eventual behavior or actions.

Executive Functioning (EF)

Executive functioning refers to a conglomerate of cognitive processes (and skills) for the purpose of organizing one's thoughts and activities such as in a first and then action. As cited by Figueras et al. (2008) an expanded meaning of EF includes organizational and self-regulatory skills required for goal-directed, non-automatic behavior. Furthermore, some examples would be actions such as planning, initiating, monitoring, and flexibly correcting actions according to feedback; sustaining as well as shifting attention; selecting goals and performing actions that may not lead to an immediate reward, holding information in mind whilst performing a task (working memory); and creatively reacting to novel situations with non-habitual responses (Figueras et al., 2008).

Natural Language Acquisition

For the purposes of this paper, natural language acquisition refers to the process of acquiring language in a typical developmental sequence and environment. This can be applied to any language being acquired. This paper supports the innate language theory- that all people have the ability to learn and use language based on stimuli.

Acronyms

- LF – Language Facilitator
- TOD – Teacher of the Deaf
- EI – Educational Interpreter
- NAIE – National Association of Interpreters in Education
- RID – Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
- BEI – Board for Evaluation of Interpreters
- EIPA: WT – Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment: Written Test
- EIPA: PT – Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment: Performance Test
- ASL – American Sign Language
- IEP – Individualized Education Plan
- IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- FAPE – Free Appropriate Public Education
- L1 – Language 1 or first language, also known as a native language
- L2 – Language 2 or second language

Current Research, Challenges, and Practices Addressing Language Deprivation in Mainstream Schools

LRE as Least Restrictive Environment and Language-Rich Environment

In the world of Special Education, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) teams must consider the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). For the general population of students with disabilities, this means with the least amount of time outside of the general education classroom or the least amount of support services possible for the student to access and make educational progress and receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). However, with Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, this could be counterintuitive. We must consider the Least Restrictive Environment for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing as the Language Rich Environment, which means that the student has access to direct instruction through his/her mode of communication such as Visual and Tactile ASL.

Listening and Spoken Language. In theory, LRE is suppose to focus on program more than place, and this order of priority often does not align with developmentally appropriate communication practices for the Deaf student. Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Educational Service Guide published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2018) addresses LRE in the context of Least-Restrictive Environment and Language Rich Environment. It states:

"The LRE is driven by a student's language, communication, academic and social needs. An environment is restrictive unless it provides full, direct, and clear access to meaningful language, communication, instruction, and social opportunities designed to meet the individual educational needs of the student. "Full inclusion" may not be the LRE for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Each local education agency (LEA) must ensure that a continuum of educational placements is available. Consequently, decision makers must be knowledgeable about the full continuum, including state schools for the deaf, special schools, charter schools and other unique placement options in a specific area or state, including collaboration with other LEAs to share services and resources. (p. 3) "

Ideally, a Language-Rich Environment fully develops the child's language, cognition, and social/emotional skills. One must also consider the student's opportunity to access teachers who use their primary mode of communication as well as adult DHH role models (NASDSE, 2018). However, the Least Restrictive Environment continuum for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students typically entails consultative, itinerant, resource, and concentrated program models. Typically, only the resource and concentrated program models provide Language-Rich Environments where Deaf students have peers and adults that can communicate directly with them if ASL is the primary language used.

Challenges of Addressing Language Deprivation within Mainstream Schools

Upon entering school, when students have no language or emerging language, the schools must use specialized resources to try to bring them to grade level academically, socially, and linguistically. Schools often have limited understanding about Deafness, addressing language deprivation, and the level of resources needed to address it. Educators are keen on the knowledge that the optimal window for language development, often referred to as the first five years of life (Hall, 2017), is constantly narrowing for the developing learner. The lack of resources for making informed decisions creates missed learning opportunities outside of the school environment as well.

Compounding the difficulties that language deprivation brings about, many Deaf/Hard of Hearing children do not have access to peers and/or teachers with whom they can directly communicate. They are often isolated and the only Deaf student in the school or even the district where the idea of inclusion is often a false dichotomy using Educational Interpreters. While the job of the Educational Interpreter is an important one, addressing the needs of DHH students with language deprivation is not that simple. Pirone and Mayo (2021) explain that "The presence of sign language interpreters in the classroom does not automatically render equality because there are reported problems with interpreters' language skills, professionalism, and intercultural competence" (p. 20). It is also important to note that the use of Educational Interpreters does not resolve the fact that instruction in public schools is geared towards English Speakers and leaves little room for linguistic diversity (Pirone & Mayo, 2021).

Background on Educational Interpreters as Language Models and the Need for Language Facilitators

Research indicates that the general use of educational interpreters can exacerbate language deprivation. Foundational language is needed to

access the classroom whether it is through listening or interpreting. Deaf students need explicit instruction in language, executive functioning, Social/Emotional Development, and Theory of Mind because they miss out on incidental learning opportunities in their environments. "Many people think that, by providing children with interpreters, we are exposing those children to language. However, language acquisition requires interaction and direct communication. Interaction that occurs through an interpreter is, at best, incomplete. Interpreters who use English signing systems provide only a rough reflection of English. Our deaf children deserve better. Our deaf children deserve real language." (Monikowski, 2004, p. 58)

Cerney (n.d.) addresses the use of Educational Interpreters as a language input model. He indicates, "that interpreters cannot be a language model by only interpreting. Language acquisition requires meaningful communication between people. A language cannot be acquired just by listening to a radio or watching television (although a few amazing stories do circulate once in a while)" (p. 9). Cerney further explains that the problem persists that individuals qualified to teach are not always natively fluent in the primary mode of communication of the student, and those who are natively fluent are not qualified to teach.

The use of Educational Interpreters alone to combat language deprivation is addressed by Caselli et al. (2020) who indicates that this intervention prolongs and perpetuates language deprivation. Rather, DHH students need appropriate research and evidence-based practices for the development of their first language. In the case of ASL development, having a solid L1 (ASL) is crucial in developing an L2 (English) (Cerney, n.d.; Monikowski, 2004). Monikowski (2004) provides a great reminder that language acquisition is most successful when it is done through natural and spontaneous use. In the general education classroom, whether through listening and speaking or

through ASL, language usage is not happening within the student's zone of proximal development, and thus is incomprehensible. Therefore, language deprivation can be mitigated through direct and explicit instruction and carry over within the educational environment with the support of a Teacher of the Deaf and Language Facilitator.

A Novel Method for Addressing Language Deprivation through Language Facilitators

When DHH students cannot access a classroom with direct communication to implement direct and explicit language development, what is the alternative? Regardless of the placement of the student, if language deprivation is at play, the concepts and practices of language facilitation are needed. This requires those who work with DHH students, such as Teachers of the Deaf or Speech/Language Pathologists, to be well-versed in the natural language acquisition process, standardized and norm-referenced developmental language charts, and best practices in developing language to guide the process (NASDSE, 2018).

To address the need for a structured approach to language acquisition for Deaf students, Carter Hears! has developed a systematic process for the use of a Language Facilitator (LF) in partnership with a Teacher of the Deaf or other qualified individual such as an interpreter who is skilled in the process of language acquisition for DHH students. The goal of Language Facilitators is to escort/mentor/guide/tether students to natural language acquisition pathways so they can communicate, connect with others, learn the academic content being taught and be engaged in their own learning and classroom. The Language Facilitator leads DHH students to be independent critical thinkers that can articulate and receive shared information through an Interpreter or through Listening and Spoken Language. Language Facilitators are a catering service, customized to the world view of the student.

The Carter Hears! Language Facilitator Model utilizes developmental language targets in the sequence of natural language acquisition to meet the student in their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) to build their language. It does not focus on mere comprehension of a concept at hand. Rather, it focuses the mastery and generalization of language and cognitive development beyond the classroom. It is integrative, innovative, and effective. Furthermore, the model fosters human connections in the lives of Deaf students, which is at the heart of the mission of Carter Hears!.

As a point of clarification, the job title "Language Facilitator" is often used interchangeably with Educational Interpreters. This paper explains Language Facilitation as a practice and describes the tasks of an individual who might provide such services and practices within their role. A Google search indicates that the use of this title as described or similarly described by this paper is used in several states. Job descriptions or references to facilitation can be found in Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Kansas, Vermont, and Virginia. The tasks of Educational Interpreting and Language Facilitation are separate. One that fulfills these tasks can include screened and qualified Deaf adults, family members of Deaf adults, highly qualified Educational Interpreters, and/or trained oral language facilitators with evidence of language fluency. The process of Language Facilitators and role requirements are further outlined in the subsequent paper, "A Meta-View on Language Facilitation: The Carter Hears! Model of Language Acquisition through Developmental Connections."

Conclusion

Understanding the what and why on the role of the Language Facilitator requires a meta-view, one that transcends beyond the aspects of what we see on the outside of the learner and teacher and delves into the minds, tethering that learner-teacher relationship. The current practices of addressing Language Deprivation include concentrated programs for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, services from a Teacher of the Deaf and/or Speech Language Pathologist, and implementation of Educational Interpreters. However, current practices are shown to be ineffective as evidenced by peer-reviewed research. Therefore, Carter Hears! has developed a novel method of addressing language deprivation through Language Facilitators. For as long as language deprivation exists, so shall Language Facilitators. The implementation of this model is discussed in a subsequent paper.

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