

ALL VOICES ARE VALUABLE IN UNDERSTANDING the complexities of deaf students' experiences in integrated settings. For this reason, I interviewed deaf students, interpreters, deaf education teachers, and regular education teachers. In this and the following chapters, I have included all quotes relating to each specific category, as well as an interpretation of the emerging themes. Each participant created a new name for himself or herself. These names are used throughout the chapters so readers may follow the path of a single participant. It is important to note that not all students responded to each topic. The participants were allowed to guide the conversation and, therefore, were treated as conversational partners instead of objects of research. By asking probing questions aligned with the research questions, I was able to narrow the focus. Overall, it seemed that this approach was extremely effective, giving the participants more comfort in sharing liberally on topics that interested them.

The deaf student participants range in age from 10 to 18 years, and they reside in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio. All of them have hearing parents. They share a common experience of being educated in integrated classrooms that are located in larger suburban school districts. All deaf student participants also share the common experience of receiving an interpreted education through a sign language interpreter. At the time of the interviews three of the students were experiencing their first year at a school for the deaf, after spending years in integrated classrooms. Though all the students can communicate through ASL, two of them communicate in the integrated classroom through voice only, but they still use an interpreter to receive and to clarify information.

As I analyzed the responses of the students, a dividing line seemed to emerge between the students that exhibit some ability to hear and speak and the students who are profoundly deaf and only communicate through sign language. This dividing line is so prevalent throughout this data that

I will refer to the first group as the signing deaf students (those students using *only* sign language to communicate) and the second group as the speaking deaf students (even though they may use signs to some extent). The participants in each group are listed below.

Signing deaf students	Speaking deaf students
Zack	Tyler
Kyle	Kaitlyn
Jasmine	Leslie
Julie	Patrick
Ashley	Sam

It is important to note that these categorical references are based on the students' *preferred* method of communicating, not on an enforced teaching philosophy. Also it is important to note that the speaking abilities of these speaking deaf students represent a wide range of intelligibility. Most of these speaking students vocalize with a "deaf voice," which is markedly different from that of a hearing student's voice. Also, all speaking deaf students know ASL and use it to some extent to communicate.

Four of the student participants have cochlear implants. However, the experience of having a cochlear implant did not seem to directly lead to a common communication strategy or perspective. One of the students with a cochlear implant uses only signs to communicate, and therefore is considered in the deaf signing group, while the others are considered speaking deaf students. Table 7.1 provides further information about the student participants.

### Presentation of Themes From Deaf Student Interviews

The students' responses have been organized by topics: After each topic, an interpretive section discusses the themes emerging within these responses. The final interpretive section presents a collective discussion of the major themes found throughout the deaf student interviews. In the presentation of the themes, the responses have been organized in the following manner: general feelings about school, about interpreters, and about building relationships in a hearing school, as well as unexpected findings.

### Narrative Sketches of the Deaf Students

*Zack:* Zack loves to play tag and tell jokes. Though he is profoundly deaf, he often chooses to not wear hearing aids. Instead, he prefers to be identified

Table 7.1 Characteristics of Deaf Student Participants

	Age	Grade	Cochlear implant	Primary mode of communication	Experienced both hearing schools and deaf schools
Zack	10	4		ASL	X
Kyle	10	4		ASL	X
Tyler	11	5	X	ASL/Voice	
Kaitlyn	13	7		ASL/Voice	
Leslie	14	8	X	Voice	
Jasmine	15	9		ASL	X
Julie	15	9	X	ASL	X
Patrick	15	9		ASL/Voice	
Ashley	18	10		ASL	
Sam	18	10	X	Voice	

with the deaf community and communicate solely through his native language of ASL. During the interview in his home, he seemed comfortable and relaxed but was anxious to resume his game of Nintendo. His mother shared that he had been placed in a deaf preschool program and then moved to an integrated school for first through fourth grade. This year, he chose to go back to the school for the deaf for fifth grade. His mother explained that while Zack was in preschool, he had been considered a leader, but after moving to an integrated classroom, he became quiet and withdrawn. In fact, the teachers often claimed that he “didn’t say a word.” This year, after he went back to the school for the deaf, Zack’s mother has seen a complete change in his personality. He is back to being talkative at school and home. Once again, he is a leader among his peers, and seems more self-confident.

*Kyle:* Kyle clearly enjoys playing with his friends at the school for the deaf. He was diagnosed at age 2 with a profound hearing loss in both ears and soon after began his education at an oral school for the deaf. He attended 4 years there before being enrolled in the public school system’s mainstream program. During the first year, Kyle learned sign language and was mainstreamed for two classes. In second and third grade, he was in the hearing classroom with an interpreter most of the day. Kyle lives with his grandmother, who describes him as a very social child and a leader. She explains that most of the time he is friendly and fun, though he can be

manipulative and have a short temper. She also shares that he has a very low frustration level and a high energy level. Even though she encourages him to learn to use his voice, she also encourages him to learn sign language and to explore deaf culture. Overall, Kyle is a caring and loving child who has many interests. According to his grandmother, “He is basically a very happy little boy.”

*Tyler:* With self-confidence, Tyler approached the interview process with anticipation. His ability to easily interact with both deaf and hearing students makes him a popular friend among both groups. Tyler has a cochlear implant and is able to speak intelligibly. His parents learned sign language when Tyler was young, and they still use it at times for clarification.

*Kaitlyn:* Kaitlyn loves to go shopping. Though she is quiet and somewhat withdrawn in school, she is friendly and bouncy when at home or with deaf friends. Kaitlyn uses her voice to communicate both at school and at home. Her speech is fairly intelligible, especially for those who know her well.

*Leslie:* Leslie functions very much like a hearing student. Her increasing ability to identify sounds through her cochlear implant has led her to being able to use the phone and to speak clearly. Though others may think of her as “hearing” or perhaps “hard of hearing,” she again and again refers to herself as “deaf.” Leslie has grown up in mainstream programs and now requires very little assistance to succeed in the classroom. Leslie is exuberant, confident, and friendly, and she seems to enjoy being involved in school and interacting with her friends. Leslie used her voice to respond to questions in the interview. While doing so, she gives an interesting view of what it is like to be considered a successful cochlear implant recipient in a hearing school.

*Jasmine:* Jasmine is a high-school freshman at a school for the deaf. Her delicate and pretty features are in contrast to the strong views and emotion that she portrays. Jasmine’s deaf education began at a school for the deaf, where she was educated from age 5 to age 7. She then was transferred to an integrated school, where she completed first through eighth grade. This year was her first year back in a school for the deaf. Her mother talked of the growing loneliness that Jasmine faced while being educated in a mainstream program until she was nearly suicidal. During her years in mainstream classes, Jasmine often wrote stories and poems with themes

of isolation, alienation, and death. By the eighth grade, not only were her parents worried about her mental stability, but they also saw a nosedive in her motivation to learn. As a last resort, they sent her back to a school for the deaf. Her mother reports that in the past few months, Jasmine has transformed into a motivated student, a social butterfly, and a girl that is in love with life. "She makes us laugh every day. It is good to see her smile."

*Julie:* Julie was interviewed in her home, where she was open and friendly. She seemed to look forward to the interview and had thought of several ideas she wanted to share. According to her mother, Julie is very outgoing and has a take-charge attitude. Her athletic success in soccer has earned her a great deal of respect from the student body. During the interview, Julie seemed confident and relaxed while giving a very poignant view of life as the only deaf student in a regular education high school. Julie attended a school for the deaf for first grade, but moved to an integrated program for second through fifth grade. In sixth grade, she again tried the school for the deaf but felt that she had become the subject of harassment by the other deaf students. She again transferred back into a public school for middle school and high school. At the time of this interview, she was the only deaf student in a very large high school. Julie chose to have a cochlear implant when she was 13, and she now says that she loves it. She explains that she mostly likes the fact that it helps her to hear environmental sounds, such as the phone ringing, the bell at school, and a car coming down the street. But recently, she has started to enjoy music and is able to differentiate between voices of people she knows.

*Patrick:* Patrick is well known for his friendly personality and his sparkling sense of humor. Patrick's positive outlook is noted throughout the interview as he frames difficult issues in a positive light and follows them with a quick smile. Patrick communicates through a combined approach of speech and signing. Patrick lives with his mother who has learned to sign and is active in advocating for the rights of deaf children in the community. Patrick has grown up in the mainstream setting of a large suburban school district. He seems content with his educational environment. Patrick is fully mainstreamed in a high school where two other deaf students also attend.

*Sam:* Sam is anxiously awaiting her high school graduation, which is scheduled to take place 5 days after her interview. Sam seems independent

and highly confident and is excited about her plans to attend a state university in the fall. Her hopes are to succeed in the medical program and become a nurse, following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother. Although Sam was born profoundly deaf, she had a cochlear implant at the age of 3 years. She explained that the cochlear implant failed at age 8, but she recently had another cochlear implant. She has grown up identifying herself as a hard of hearing individual. Sam's speech is intelligible, and she feels this has helped her to succeed in the hearing world.

*Ashley:* Ashley is the only deaf student in a large suburban high school. She prefers to use American Sign Language to communicate, but she is also fluent in cued speech. She describes her independent streak as being expressed by living on her own. It seems the pierced tongue may also be an extension of this independence. Her demeanor is confident and friendly, and she stops several times during the interview to chat with friends who are frequently calling her on her Sidekick pager. Ashley has been in an integrated public school from kindergarten through twelfth grade, but she mentions that she has moved from school to school, particularly in her younger years.

## General Feelings About School

### *Loneliness and Isolation*

*What is it like to be a deaf student in a hearing school? What does it feel like?*

*Zack*

It was only so-so . . . I didn't really like it. I remember being embarrassed and a little frightened in the hearing school.

*Kyle*

I didn't really like the hearing school because I couldn't communicate with the hearing kids. I'd try to talk with them sometimes, but mostly I was just shy. I felt lower than them, so I usually didn't even try.

*Kaitlyn*

I'm just friends with the deaf kids. Well, I'm not the only deaf kid in the school, so I'm not so lonely as those who can't talk. Learn to speak. If you can talk, it is much better.

*Tyler*

I feel OK and comfortable about going to a hearing school.

*Leslie*

Sometimes I feel lonely, like if people talk a million miles an hour. I just sit there and listen to them. I just like to listen a lot.

But, I think it is fun going to school now. I have a lot of friends, and I just feel normal. It is just that when I was little I didn't really have many friends and I really didn't want to go to school. Just being myself helped, I guess.

*Jasmine*

I know it was a good school for the hearing kids, but it is hard for deaf people to understand and learn there. I feel left out because I'm deaf . . . where's my culture? I'm closed in, contained, but not in my own culture. I never experienced [socializing] at the hearing school. That's why I never learned.

If you don't have anyone to talk with at school and you come home and you don't have anyone to talk to at home, then you can get real lonely and just give up. You'll feel like you're not learning anything.

*Julie*

I think it's the environment. It's just a cold, less-friendly environment. The school seems cold, not too friendly. I look forward to getting home.

Sometimes, I'm lonely. I'm on my own, the only deaf kid in the school so I have to live with that. I'm lonely when I feel I am struggling in school. When I feel all alone, then I lose my motivation—it just kind of bottoms out.

*Ashley*

When I was younger, I felt I could join and interact with any group, but as I got older, I felt more distance, more isolation from hearing kids. At the time, it didn't really bother me; I got used to it as it happened. I really thought it was just the environment I was in, that it really wasn't anything important.

*Sam*

I like going to a hearing school. I feel I have gotten a good education there. And I've learned how to live in the hearing culture. But I want to learn more about the deaf culture.

When deaf students were asked about school, they exclusively answered from a social perspective, rather than from an academic perspective. Interestingly, this differed from the adult participants, who answered almost exclusively from an academic perspective.

When reflecting on their feelings about school, the speaking deaf students tended to respond somewhat positively. However, the comments from the signing deaf students revealed deeper negative feelings. The younger signing students gave short, but insightful answers that told of their misery in school. Zack and Kyle both seemed to feel that the communication barrier

was so intense that they could not glean any enjoyment in being there. Julie also revealed very negative feelings toward school. She linked these negative feelings to a cold school climate. Looking beyond individuals, Julie saw the problem as a school-wide problem, a general lack of friendliness.

With insight, Jasmine acknowledges the value of her school for hearing students, but she also recognizes its limitations as a place for her to learn. Jasmine's comments demonstrate a difference in how the hearing students might benefit, in comparison to how she sees herself benefiting. These comments show a deeper perception of the divide between the school's ability to provide a good education for hearing students and its ability to provide a good education for deaf students. Jasmine's viewpoint that her school is a "good school for hearing kids" seems to be a sharp contrast to her inward view of a lack of success for herself.

This alarming consensus of negative feelings among the signing deaf students is a stark comparison to the more positive positions of speaking deaf students. But even within speaking students' comments you see a hint of being unsettled, either in a longing to connect with the deaf community or a memory of not being accepted. It is interesting that Leslie has seen a change in the way she views school from her early years, when she did not have many friends and did not want to go to school, to now, when she is older and is having fun in school. Perhaps this change was prompted by her increasing ability to produce and understand speech with her cochlear implant. However, Leslie attributes the change to feeling comfortable with herself. Sam also expressed general positive feelings for her school but reveals a need to connect with deaf culture. She seems to be searching for her cultural roots while still supporting her integrated past.

When one reflects on the responses concerning general feelings about school, it does not seem surprising that a divide exists between the signing deaf students and the speaking deaf students. The signing deaf students experience a stronger communication barrier than those who can communicate directly with others in their environment. The signing deaf students may also experience a greater feeling of alienation. Kaitlyn grasps the core of this underlying phenomenon when she emphasizes that "if you can talk, it is much better." Overall, the responses from this interview question suggest that signing deaf students hold significantly more negative feelings toward their hearing schools than their speaking deaf counterparts.



Loneliness and isolation were haunting themes that emerged in the interviews again and again. Though this theme was found in the responses of students from both the signing and the speaking group, it seemed much stronger among the signing deaf students. Kaitlyn seemed to understand this increased depth of loneliness for the students who could not speak when she said, "I'm not so lonely as those who can't talk."

In each interview of signing deaf students, a glimpse of the loneliness was revealed. In Zack's interview, he repeatedly shared the embarrassment that he felt in his elementary hearing classroom. He mentioned several times that he felt "different" and that it was embarrassing to him. Perhaps this is why his mother described him as being very quiet in school. Though Kyle doesn't use the term *embarrassing*, he does say that he was *shy* because of his lack of ability to communicate with the other students. He also shares that he felt *lower* than the other students, making him less enthusiastic to communicate. This feeling of being inferior is echoed in the responses of several other students in the signing group. Ashley talks about the isolation enveloping her as she grew older. At the time, she felt this was normal, but now she looks back and realizes it was significant.

Julie and Jasmine both acknowledge the devastating link between loneliness and the ability to learn. Their combined viewpoint seems to suggest that students who feel lonely are unable to maintain the motivation to learn, which leads to lower academic achievement. In recognizing this link, they confirm the critical need to support the social side of learning.

Jasmine links her loneliness and lack of academic success to the larger issue of being detached from her culture. Therefore, it seems that loneliness can be expressed both from an individual perspective and from a cultural perspective. Sam also confirmed this when she expressed a longing to know more of deaf culture.

In contrast, Tyler and Patrick (both speaking deaf students) did not mention loneliness or isolation in their interviews. Interestingly, they spoke quite positively about their school environments and told me of their "many friends." However, when I interviewed the teacher of one of the boys who gave a glowing report of many positive relationships with peers and teachers, she described him as quiet, withdrawn, and lonely in school, and she said he rarely interacted with anyone. It is possible that the student's

definition of positive relationships is based on actions less rich than normal hearing peer relationships.

Leslie is a speaking deaf student, and yet she did experience loneliness and feeling different. Though hearing through her cochlear implant and her ability to lipread usually served her well, she still felt left out when people were talking quickly, and she couldn't understand. Interestingly, she chose to just enjoy the passive stance of listening, instead of trying to join a conversation she was not understanding.

With loneliness and isolation a major theme among the deaf student participants, it is important to explore the ramifications of these deeply felt emotions. What are the consequences of long-term loneliness? An abundance of research has been conducted on the topic of loneliness. Though much of the research has focused extensively on the reasons for loneliness, more recent research has looked closer at the outcomes of loneliness, clearly linking loneliness to other behavioral and emotional problems (Kupersmidt, Sigda, Sedikides, and Voegler, 1999). The range of emotional problems associated with loneliness includes low self-esteem, depression, and social anxiety. Certain social problems, such as peer rejection, victimization, and lack of high-quality friendships, are closely identified with loneliness. Additional behavioral problems such as shyness, social withdrawal, spending more time alone, lack of dating relationships, and decreased participation in religious and extracurricular school activities have also been linked to loneliness (Kupersmidt et al., 1999). Perlman and Landolt (1999) also reported links between loneliness and other problems such as physical illness, suicide, alcohol use, poor psychological adjustment, aggression, low grades in school, stealing, and vandalism. An online survey of 353 self-described lonely participants revealed even greater consequences, including a fascination with death, feelings of hate, and cold and empty feelings void of emotion (Seepersad, 1997). The dangers of feeling lonely may be even greater among adolescents, who may use ineffective coping strategies to try and dispel these feelings. Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) reported that adolescents were the loneliest of all of the age groups and often coped with their loneliness through sad passivity (sleeping, taking tranquilizers, eating, and doing nothing). Other researchers have found that loneliness can cause medical problems (Harms, 2000) and

other serious problems such as turning to crime, self-induced isolation, and exaggerated consumption of medication (Rokach, 1998).

Deaf students may be particularly vulnerable to loneliness, which can be elicited by isolation, not having close friends, and not identifying with or not being accepted by valued social groups (Cacioppo, 1999), treating loneliness as an objective state brought about by objective circumstances, rather than a subjective state brought about by other subjective states. Since all three experiences were distinctly described by the deaf students interviewed, it is reasonable to conclude that deaf students in hearing schools are strongly susceptible to loneliness and the associated conditions that might be related to it.

In fact, several of these symptoms were noted by the parents of deaf students. For example, Jasmine's mother expressed her concern that Jasmine would sleep for hours and had become obsessed with death. The fear of Jasmine's suicidal tendencies led her parents to find another educational program for her. When she was placed in the deaf school, these symptoms vanished, and now her parents describe her as "in love with life."

Zack's mother spoke of his intense quietness both at school and at home during his years in a mainstream program. She also described an intense personality change (from being a leader to being withdrawn), as he entered the mainstream school, and another change (from a quiet child to an outgoing and talkative child) later, as he returned to a deaf school.

Overcoming loneliness is not so much dependent on the number of relationships one makes as it is on the quality and depth of the relationships (Tucker-Ladd, 1996). Based on this perspective, it is vital for deaf students to develop relationships with several other students to ward off the possible consequences of loneliness. While some students may not experience loneliness in a hearing educational environment, educators and parents should carefully monitor deaf children for these possible indicators while finding ways to expose them to meaningful quality relationships.

### *Struggling With Inferiority and Lack of Power*

#### *How do you feel in your hearing school?*

Themes of inferiority and a lack of power run through many of the responses to the questions. Though the students used different terms to

describe it, many of them identified it as a major frustration of an integrated education.

*Kyle*

I'd try to talk with them sometimes, but mostly I was just shy. I felt lower than them, so I usually didn't even try.

*Jasmine*

Some hearing people think deaf people can't do anything. But I put up with them. I feel like uniforms at school. Uniforms, meaning all the hearing people control the deaf people.

Hearing people try to make deaf interested in hearing things . . . come on with us, we'll teach you to talk, use your hearing aid and try to hear us. I don't have patience for that. What about my culture?

*Julie*

Yeah . . . I mean some of the hearing students are idiots. They prove themselves by their actions . . . they don't understand what it means to be deaf. I mean, some of them are just plain stupid, but I don't let them get to me.

*Ashley*

Being deaf in a hearing school, I found that sometimes the other kids thought less of me. For example they might be sitting around a table and whispering to each other and I'd actually catch what they had said to each other by lipreading them. They thought I couldn't lipread, and some deaf people can, other deaf people can't. Really, they just kept showing their surprise that deaf people can do so many things . . . which means that they thought deaf people can't do them in the first place. I say the only thing a deaf person can't do is hear, that's all.



These feelings of inferiority and lack of power were evident in most of the deaf student's comments, whether they were in the signing or the speaking group. Some of the inferiority came embedded within the students themselves. Kyle shared that he felt "lower" than the other students, so he was shy. Zack spoke often of his feelings of embarrassment and shyness. He explained that these feelings were intensified when he felt "stuck" in the communication process.

Some of the feelings of inferiority originated from outside sources, such as the hearing teachers' lower expectations for the deaf students than for their other students. Sam specifically spoke of this happening in her school. Even with her mother's determination in repeatedly addressing this

issue, Sam still felt the teachers held lower expectations for her. Julie also alluded to this problem when she stated that she did not always answer the teacher's questions because she did not have to.

A perception of inferiority came from the hearing students, as well. They seemed to think that deaf students were not capable. Ashley's comments in particular expressed a frustration in the hearing students' *surprise* that she could do things. Julie's comments alluded to the harassment that she had endured due to other students treating her as if she were inferior.

Some of the deaf students blamed their inferior treatment on cultural oppression. Jasmine's thoughts revealed a sense that she has been forced to assimilate and others do not respect her language and culture. This need for a culturally competent educational approach is echoed in the comments of other students, as well.

A few deaf students felt a lack of power in dealing with interpreters. Clearly, they did not see the interpreters as allies. For example, one deaf student remarked, "They earn money. They just take advantage of deaf people by earning money working with them." If deaf students do not see the interpreter as an ally, they may tend to believe the interpreter is either aligned the teacher or is working for self-interest. Interpreters who are not involved with the deaf community outside of school walls may perpetuate this kind of viewpoint. Jasmine's litmus test for interpreters seems to be "if you align yourself with hearing culture, you can't really be my ally."

Most students, especially adolescents, feel powerless in school. They cannot choose their teachers, classmates, curriculum, or school. And all students are involved in numerous relationships in which they are the one with less power. However, for deaf students, this lack of power is more intense. While hearing students can choose their friends, deaf students are often stuck with whoever chooses to learn sign language. While hearing students can exercise some control over their interaction with others, deaf students are severely limited and must rely heavily on the interpreter. Though hearing students often can work harder to achieve a better education, deaf students are limited by many factors, such as the effectiveness of their interpreters, their ability to interact with the curriculum, and the level of support services available. While most hearing students can gain support and advice on addressing their struggles at home, deaf students rarely have anyone at home who can communicate with them at that level.

The lack of power for deaf students seems to extend far beyond that of other groups of students with disabilities or from those from culturally diverse backgrounds because it is inherently connected to communication access.

Deaf people have long been subjected to a lack of power. But the long history of forced oralism seems to now have turned into a new history of forced assimilation in hearing schools—without the tools to support success. Some deaf students seem so accustomed to this situation that they do not notice. But the deaf students who have experienced the language-rich environments of deaf schools show a sense of empowerment. A prevalent theme throughout Zack, Kyle, and Jasmine’s interviews involves multiple comparisons of the lack of power felt in hearing schools and the sense of empowerment gained through their experiences at the deaf school. These three students are highly aware of the oppressive nature of the language deprivation at hearing schools and highly supportive of the increase in power that is afforded them in the language-rich environment found in deaf schools.

### *Change*

#### *How have you experienced social change as you’ve gotten older?*

Several of the students experienced a change in their level of satisfaction as they grew older. Julie and Ashley, both deaf signing students, seemed to experience more alienation as they grew older. However, Leslie, a speaking deaf student, felt more acceptance.

#### *Leslie*

I think it is fun going to school now. I have a lot of friends, and I just feel normal.

It is just that when I was little I didn’t really have many friends and I really didn’t want to go to school. Just being myself helped, I guess.

#### *Julie*

I went to hearing schools. In elementary school I had good friends, and I enjoyed my social interaction at school. The teachers were learning some sign language and fingerspelling. Then later in middle school I was even more motivated to work hard. . . . I felt close and connected there. The people at the school seemed to have an understanding of deaf culture, such as making things more visual, and the struggles we have with written language. Middle school was no problem, everything was fine. In high school they are more strict, less flexible; more cold, less friendly.

*Ashley*

When I was growing up I had a very positive attitude toward hearing people. I could basically get along with anyone. As I got older, I felt more distance, more isolation from hearing kids. At the time, it didn't really bother me; I got used to it as it happened. I really thought it was just the environment I was in, that it really wasn't anything important. But then, about the time I got into sixth grade, I began to become interested in the Deaf community and started to have less patience for hearing people. . . . My feelings started to change. Once I understood the ease of communication among deaf people, I sensed a change in my personality . . . at least regarding hearing people. I wasn't able to be as active or involved with hearing people, and I didn't enjoy just being passive and quiet, so I don't bother with hearing people so much anymore. I will say, however, that it did provide a good challenge for me to go to a hearing school because it forced me to interact with hearing people and that has its benefits, like for my future employment, for example.



Some deaf students may experience more frustration as they mature in the school system, while others might find more acceptance. For signing deaf students, though, the change in the way students socialize may affect the level of interaction they have with that social circle. While hearing students are moving away from playground games and toward intricate social systems of “who likes who,” the deaf students may feel more and more alienated. In Ashley's experience, the isolation began when she discovered the deaf community—a group of people with whom she shared a language and could easily identify herself. However, it seems possible that the isolation had been a part of her life before that time, and it was only at that time that she discovered what she had been missing. This sense of awareness has not yet reached the other deaf students. If you do not know anything could be different, than you may be less likely to be frustrated with the system and more likely to believe that your feelings of alienation are normal.

From Julie and Ashley's comments, one might assume that younger deaf children have a more positive social experience. However, the youngest participants, Zack and Kyle, both described in vivid detail their misery and frustrations in social relationships at the elementary level.

While Julie and Ashley's social experiences became worse as they grew older, Leslie felt her social experiences were improving. However, it was during this time that Leslie became increasingly more capable of

communicating clearly through speech and listening. Again, perhaps this is indicative of the benefit of being able to speak and communicate directly with others within the school environment.

## Interpreters

### *The Qualities of a Good Interpreter*

#### *What makes an interpreter good?*

During the conversational interviews with deaf students, the students spoke freely of their relationships with interpreters and the interpreter qualities that they felt were most important to them.

*Kyle*

I had a good interpreter . . . Karen . . . I really liked her. I thought of her as a friend.

*Tyler*

It's really important to me to have a good relationship with my interpreter. [It's also important] for the interpreter to translate every word, so I can understand clearly.

*Leslie*

I know in elementary school, I had [an interpreter] and she was like my friend. We just really connected, and we got along very well. She knew what I needed, and I knew what she needed. So I think basically it is key that you talk to each other.

I don't think interpreters should just strictly be professional and never talk to the kids, and I think the kids should be able to talk to the interpreter without feeling uncomfortable.

*Jasmine*

Interpreters should do their work their way. Some interpreters are friends with the deaf students, I don't know, but I don't think it makes it any more enjoyable.

*Julie*

They can't be stuck up or be such a nit-picking professional. They need to have a normal body type, not way over weight. They need to have a cool personality, not strict or overbearing, telling me what I can and can't do. They need to be emotionally stable—I mean, not really shy or embarrassed to speak up and comfortable in their surroundings—not nervous or obsessive about everything being perfect.

For example, my interpreter got hit by a ball once in gym class and she didn't blow up or get mad about it. My interpreter and I are pretty close. She and I talk a lot. Actually the three of us, including the deaf education teacher, are really close and work well together. We do a lot of fun things together, maybe more than we really should, but I really enjoy being able to work so well together with them.



*Patrick*

My interpreter is pretty cool. She likes to joke around a lot, so I like that kind of interpreter. She is pretty good.

*Ashley*

I had a different interpreter nearly every school year. Sometimes they were flexible and friendly and easy to get along with; other interpreters were more strict and reserved . . . they were more difficult to work with. The perfect interpreter would be one that was flexible, aware of different ways to communicate, and knowledgeable about deaf culture. Not just a signer, but someone who knows about deaf culture.



In the field of interpreting, the focus has been on interpreter skill. It is generally assumed that the skill level of the interpreter is the indicator of what makes someone a good interpreter. However, in these interviews a very different theme emerges. Interestingly, nearly all of the students interviewed identified social skills as an important factor. They also mentioned personality, physical appearance, skill, and cultural competency.

Do the majority of deaf students not regard skill as important? While it seems highly unlikely, their emphasis on the interpreter's social skills may represent their ability to survive in the highly charged social environment of school. It also would support the theory that the deaf students see the interpreter as an extension of themselves. This extension theory contends that the extent to which the interpreter is accepted socially by the hearing peers and by the hearing teacher directly influences the extent to which the deaf student will be accepted. The deaf students may develop very strong opinions about the mannerisms, personality, and clothes of their interpreter because they feel these factors directly reflect on their social acceptance within the school. This extension theory is discussed further in the next section.

The collective opinion of the students interviewed also suggests a friendship relationship with their interpreter as being most effective. In fact, not one student shared a concern that the interpreter maintain a more distant professional relationship. In contrast, the students described *good* interpreters as those who were fun, friendly, and approachable. Julie, in particular, seemed to revel in the fun working and playing relationship she has with both her interpreter and her deaf education teacher. She found joy in their closeness and mentioned that they do lots of fun things

together, but curiously, she adds, “more than we probably should.” In the interview, Julie seemed particularly upbeat when speaking of her relationship with her interpreter and deaf education teacher. She directly attributes her success in high school to their close relationship. Jasmine, however, insisted that even friendly interpreters did not make an integrated education enjoyable.

Ashley expressed the need for interpreters to be more than just signers. She insisted that interpreters need to know and understand deaf culture in order to be effective. To her, it is this cultural understanding and competency that serves as the basis for not only effective communication but also effective relationship building.

This call for friendship harkens back to the themes that emerged from the 1995 New Orleans Allies Conference, held in Nashua, New Hampshire. The conference brought together facets of the deaf community and the interpreters who served them. The issue of power was expressed through a perspective of allies. The deaf community seemed to say, “Either you are our ally, or you are an ally to the hearing person. But it is impossible for you to be neutral.” From this conference, a resulting discussion was sparked in the interpreting field, a sociopolitical discussion of whose side the interpreter is on.

The deaf students in the study are saying to interpreters, “Be our allies. We need you on our side.” Clearly, the interpreters who were seen as allies were also seen as most effective.

*Describe your favorite kind of interpreter.*

The deaf students had a strong understanding of the social impact of their interpreter. When asked to describe the perfect interpreter, they answered as follows:

*Zack*

Well, there aren't any men interpreters . . . they are all women, so it's kind of embarrassing.

*Kyle*

I guess I liked the ones that were younger.

*Kaitlyn*

She would be young and *fun!*

*Jasmine*

It's important that the interpreter sign what people are saying. . . . I don't care what the interpreter looks like. Interpreters can't be stuck up; they should teach people signs and about the right ways to interact with Deaf people.

*Julie*

Who the interpreter is determines how much social interaction I get. If the other kids don't feel comfortable around her, they aren't going to talk to me. My interpreter is good. She's cool, I like her personality. She's very fluent, doesn't wear fancy professional clothes, just normal comfortable clothes, you know normal stuff for the adults in the building. I mean it is still appropriate. One day she wore this annoying patterned shirt and that was funny, I thought it was funny, anyway. But she's very good, skilled, and fluent. She's not the most advanced interpreter on the planet, but I think she's very good.

My interpreter needs to have a similar personality, to kind of act like me. That's real important. Like I enjoy teasing and joking with my interpreter and she can dish it back to me as good as I can give it. I enjoy that.

*Patrick*

I like interpreters who have a good sense of humor. That is really important to me! I guess I prefer interpreters who are younger. Not those that are heading for retirement and have lost their motivation.



When asked to describe the perfect interpreter, the students noted characteristics that they themselves had. Zack wanted a male interpreter because he found it embarrassing to have a woman interpreter. Kaitlyn and Zack both wanted an interpreter who was young. Julie went into much detail about the desired personality and physical appearance of an interpreter. Interestingly, she insisted that her interpreter have a “similar personality” and “kind of act like me.” This desire for an interpreter to “be like me” may suggest the extent to which the students see the interpreter as an extension of themselves—the extension theory. When asked how the interpreter affected their experience in school, several students noted that the interpreter’s physical appearance and personality directly affected the extent to which their peers included them.

The flip side of this perspective is that interpreters who are older, less enthusiastic, and do not fit into the student culture serve as a barrier to the social integration of deaf students. As one student protested, “On the first

day of school I worry about who my interpreter will be. Yuk . . . if she is ugly and fat, no one will *ever* talk to me!”

And yet some students still recognize that it is important for the interpreter to be skilled in the interpreting process. Tyler wanted his interpreter to thoroughly interpret the message and not leave anything out. He understands that this is the only way for him to succeed academically in the classroom. Jasmine felt strongly that interpreter skill was important, as was the ability to serve as an advocate for deaf people. However, from her cultural perspective, she thought that some interpreters were stuck up—perhaps implying that they did not serve her as an ally. The unexpected finding of the deaf students’ interviews is their emphasis on the social considerations of age, clothing, and personality, rather than skill.

### *Extension Theory*

A normal characteristic of adolescence is the development of an enhanced awareness of self and the ability to reflect on one’s own being. Because of the many noticeable physical changes of adolescence, this self-awareness often turns into self-consciousness, with an accompanying feeling of awkwardness. Adolescent children often develop a preoccupation with physical appearance and attractiveness, with a heightened sensitivity to differences from peers (Merk, 2003) This self concept of body becomes influential in how adolescents relate to themselves and to each other. This internal representation or body image is intimately linked to the relationships that the adolescent maintains (Cordeiro, 2005).

Hearing students may notice the unattractive physical characteristics of their teachers, doctors, parents, and other adults, but they do not seem personally affected by them. Deaf students, however, have a unique relationship with their interpreters. The interpreter serves as a social representative, and, therefore, the interpreter’s image is directly tied to the deaf adolescents’ physical self image. Since the physical image of the interpreter merges with the student’s own preoccupation with his or her self-image, the student has a heightened awareness of and may be embarrassed by the interpreter’s physical appearance.

Interestingly, deaf students noticed that when they were served by less attractive interpreters, their social interactions were more limited.

Therefore, it seems that hearing students also merged the identities of the student with the interpreter.

### An Interpreted Education

What is it like to learn through an interpreted education? Who do you ask if you don't understand? How does it make you feel to have an interpreter in the classroom signing to you, while everyone else is learning directly? The students shared interesting insights into these questions, which are at the core of learning in an integrated setting.

*Zack*

What would you do if you didn't understand? I'd ask the interpreter. But a lot of the times with the interpreter I still didn't understand what I was supposed to do. I got embarrassed if everyone was looking at me. I prefer it when people aren't looking at me. So I don't know. At the deaf school I ask the teacher and the teacher can explain it, so I know what to do. I think it was hard to understand the interpreter. People would speak fast, but the interpreter was slow. All the other kids would be finished first; I'd always be last. I had to finish writing before I went to lunch or outside to play.

*Kyle*

If I didn't understand the work we were doing, like if I didn't understand the directions, I'd sometimes ask the interpreter, and if the interpreter didn't know what to do, then I'd ask the teacher. I had an interpreter in the classroom, but I didn't like having to look back and forth between the interpreter and the other stuff happening in the classroom.

*Tyler*

If I don't understand a question in class, the interpreter will explain it to me. But a hearing school needs a strong hearing support teacher to teach deaf students.

*Jasmine*

Hearing teachers try to explain, they lecture . . . but at the deaf school they make eye contact. We will learn by doing first and then write about it, which is easy because we just experienced it. Hearing people can just talk about it and then start writing. In deaf school we know what to write because first we see, touch, and manipulate things. Deaf people are visual learners, and we need to touch and manipulate to learn, and if you have questions you can ask and get immediate responses. Hearing people are more auditory learners and can learn just by hearing. It's hard for deaf people in hearing schools. They don't give many visual examples in hearing schools. You just get a paper and you are left wondering how to answer . . . so either you copy from someone else or you fail.

If I had my way, I wouldn't want to have an interpreter. Just teach me directly in ASL.

*Julie*

I struggle to understand some of the teachers. The hearing students do OK with the teachers, but for a deaf student, it is different; it is harder. The homework is based on written paragraphs, and I don't always understand. The teacher doesn't use many physical examples; instead, it is mostly writing on the board and lecturing. I struggle with that.

Middle school was more laid back. We had games and activities. It seemed we had more time to learn things. But in high school, class time is only lectures and reading. I can't understand it as well. It's really tedious and boring. I prefer seeing physical demonstrations. I don't like being limited to lectures and notes, and so I am looking forward to attending a deaf school next year. I think I've had my fill of mainstreaming in hearing schools.

If I don't understand something, I'll ask the interpreter to help explain things. Like the teacher hands out the homework, and if I don't understand the written directions on the homework, I ask the interpreter, and she explains it. That way I know which part of the book to use to find the answers. If I don't understand, then I don't ask the teacher; I'll ask the interpreter.

*Sam*

I like going to a hearing school. I feel I have gotten a good education there. And, I've learned how to live in the hearing culture.



The experience of receiving an interpreted education seems to be significantly different from the experience of receiving a direct education. Zack's frustration with the pace of interpreting suggests a negative impact on his ability to finish his work on time. Not only does he miss recess, but he also feels singled out, which increases his feelings of embarrassment. Zack experiences "exposure embarrassment," a feeling that comes when children are aware that they have become the object of other peoples' attention. For Zack, the pain of embarrassment is constant while in the hearing classroom. In fact, the themes of embarrassment, feeling different, and feeling alienated are strong throughout Zack's interview.

Kyle emphasized another frustration of trying to learn through an interpreter. He explains that he didn't like looking between the interpreter and the "other stuff happening in the classroom." Other students also voiced this frustration, noting a desire on their part to read the teacher's expression and body language, while having access to the message. Jasmine also

understands this frustration and declares that direct instruction is better because “if you have questions you can ask and get immediate responses.”

Jasmine and Julie both commented that the way deaf students learn is not conducive to the way hearing students are taught. Jasmine speaks of the need for deaf students to see, touch, and manipulate things before writing about them. Without this support, she feels her only alternative is to copy from someone else or to fail. Julie also insists that deaf students are more visual learners and benefit from visual demonstrations, rather than lectures and notes. She directly links her declining success in the classroom between middle school and high school to the change in teaching methods—from visual and tactile learning to lectures and copying notes.

Several of the students mentioned they had difficulty with written instructions. Julie confesses that she does not understand the homework, which is often based on written paragraphs. Kyle and Tyler also mentioned not understanding directions. In order to appropriately accommodate deaf students, the deaf education teachers need to be active in adapting homework, tests, and projects to make them accessible to the deaf student. Tyler acknowledged this need for a strong deaf education teacher, as well.

When asked “Who do you ask when you don’t understand?” some deaf students explained that they turn to the interpreter to find out what to do, but if the interpreter does not know, they might ask the teacher. Perhaps their reluctance to ask the teacher stems from their embarrassment at having a low reading level and not understanding. However, it may also reflect their view of the interpreter as the intermediary between them and the hearing world.

Again, there seems to be a great divide between the perspective of the signing deaf students and the speaking deaf students. Overall, the speaking deaf students feel more confident in their education. Perhaps because they do not rely solely on their interpreter, they are able to gain more direct information from the teacher. Sam explained that the benefit went beyond getting a good education to learning how to live in the hearing culture. She is confident in her ability to succeed in this environment and feels she is able to glean valuable skills for future use in interacting with hearing people.

#### *Does an interpreter provide full access?*

The question of “What is interpreted?” was often initially answered by a list of subjects—math, science, and art. But when I asked more probing

questions, the students began to think deeper about their daily experiences in school. They discussed their awareness of conversations and sounds that occur in their environment, most of which they can not access.

*Zack*

She tells me what the teacher says . . . that's all. And, she tells me what to do.

*Leslie*

I have an interpreter in school. She interprets when I'm a little confused. Sometimes she is not there for my rotations—you know, my nine-week classes—or like gym. She uses sign. She used to use C-Print [a speech to text technology system developed at NTID], but she doesn't use it anymore.

*Julie*

Sometimes my friend interprets things that are going on in the classroom. The interpreter interprets conversations, sounds in the hallways, conversations between the teacher and other students. If we are walking down the hallway and I see friends, we communicate directly, so she doesn't need to interpret that, but if somebody really wants to talk with me, then she'll interpret.

*Ashley*

Some interpreters only focus on what the teacher says, while others with more skill let me know about the conversations around me and environmental sounds, like noises in the hallway. As long as she interprets clearly what the teacher says, I'm all right.



Schools are filled with sounds and conversations. The direct instruction of the teacher may represent only a fragment of the auditory input from the school. What gets interpreted? What gets left out? These are important questions, and the answers vary from school to school, interpreter to interpreter.

Julie's comments give us a glimpse of the magnitude of the interpreter's role in attempting to provide full access for the deaf student. Her interpreter provided interpretation for everything happening in the classroom, as well as "conversations, sounds in the hallways, and conversations between the teacher and other students." Ashley, though, resisted the idea of using an interpreter in the hall with her. She emphasized only a need for the interpreter to provide a clear interpretation of the teacher's message. Leslie and Sam do not use an interpreter to the same extent as the other deaf students



interviewed, but they did voice a need to have an interpreter available to clarify information when needed.

The needs and desires of this group of deaf students vary. While some want access to voices in the hall and environmental sounds, others only need the support of an interpretation of the teacher's voice. The responses indicate that a delicate balance exists between wanting access to the auditory environment and the possible social stigma of being followed around by an adult. The next section directly focuses on this second issue.

*How does it feel to have an adult follow you around?*

When asked about the availability of interaction and sounds outside of the classroom, some students shared the dilemma of choosing between access and having an adult follow them throughout the school.

*Zack*

I feel embarrassed [having an adult follow me through the school]. I like having natural direct communication without an interpreter.

*Jasmine*

I feel like I'm mentally retarded, walking around with your own adult. I feel stupid and embarrassed. But I put up with it.

*Julie*

That's fine. I don't mind. She's not with me *all* the time; sometimes she'll say she's going to check her messages and meet me in class, and I tell her that's fine. Or maybe in art class we are just working on our projects, so I don't really even need her to interpret at all for that class period.

*Patrick*

I wouldn't want her following me through the halls, or anything. But it is OK [to have her] in class.

*Ashley*

The interpreters generally don't follow me around the building all day long, and if they did, it would drive me crazy. I would feel like a little kid.

Some students are embarrassed by the idea of being connected to an adult in the school. They desperately want to be independent like the other kids, and yet they need adults to have access to their environment. Zack and Jasmine both connected their attachment to an interpreter with deep

feelings of embarrassment. This embarrassment is also indicative of feeling alienated and different.

Other deaf students seem content with their current arrangement—a balance between independence and accessibility. Ashley explained that her interpreter does not stay with her outside of the classroom. However, this suggests that she does not have full access to the conversations and sounds occurring in those environments. Julie’s comments indicate that she doesn’t mind either way, but she had previously mentioned that her interpreter looks like a student, and therefore blends into the crowd. Interestingly, this might refer back to the extension theory. If your interpreter is capable of blending into your social circle, then you might not mind having her around. But if your interpreter stands out from the crowd, it could be more embarrassing.

By choosing independence over access, students reveal the depth of their need to feel independent. However, it is difficult to know whether this need for separation is based on their desire to be independent or on the social constraints imposed by their interpreter. Regardless, many deaf students freely give up access to the voices in the hall to walk alone.

*What happens when your interpreter is sick or not at school?*

When asked to share their experiences with substitute interpreters, several students moaned. One student even grabbed his hair and pretended to be pulling it out, in a “Yikes!” kind of pose.

*Zack*

[If the interpreter was sick,] I’d have other interpreters, but they were slow, not like natural signing from Deaf people. I just prefer having a deaf teacher.

*Kyle*

Sometimes I’d have a substitute interpreter . . . they were good, too. Some were better than others. Some interpreters would miss information.

*Kaitlyn*

My normal interpreter is good. But the sub is lousy. She makes me look stupid.

*Leslie*

When my interpreter is absent, I really don’t like subs. They just don’t know what to do. So, I tell my interpreter that I don’t want a sub. I am better off by myself.

One horror story: I have different schedules for every day, and I guess someone gave the sub the wrong schedule. So, she kept going to the wrong places. I kept

getting embarrassed. The sub always wanted to sit next to me, but I was sitting around my friends. I didn't really like that. They think that I *really* need their help, but I don't need it. So, I'm better off by myself.

*Julie*

I hate it when I have substitute interpreters. They don't read my communication very well, and I don't always understand their signs. I hate having a substitute interpreter because it just becomes a struggle.

For example, a sub interpreter might not understand some of the signs I was using, but they were regular ASL signs. I have to stop and explain each time and it gets really frustrating. Sometimes they don't understand or they just say things that don't mean the same thing that I meant and that causes problems. I've had many bad experiences with subs.

One example was last year in middle school, in art class. I had a substitute interpreter who really was not skilled enough to work. I'd had her sub for me before, so I already knew that I was likely to have problems. She interpreted the instructions from the teacher, which was fine. So I started working and the interpreter told me that I was doing it wrong and then she started doing it for me to show me how! I couldn't believe it! I told her "It's not your art project, it's mine!" I started to erase what she had done and the interpreter got mad at *me!* When the deaf education teacher found out, she really gave it to the interpreter and told her to get out and not to accept any substitute work for me again. I never really liked that interpreter, she always seemed mean to me.

If we can't get a substitute interpreter, then the deaf education teacher interprets. She's just a crazy woman, so it's a different experience and kind of fun when she does that! Actually, I'd much rather that she interpret than any other substitute.

*Patrick*

I usually take my classes without her.

*Ashley*

Sometimes I had a substitute interpreter, but usually I made it through on my own if the interpreter wasn't there. I had a regular class schedule, so I knew what to do for each class. Sometimes the class activities really required having an interpreter, and then it was hard, but at least I was there.



A disturbing trend emerged in the comments of the deaf students. The quality of interpreting and professionalism of the substitute interpreters was so poor that several deaf students would rather not have an interpreter for the day than to have a substitute. Kyle's comments reflected a concern that unqualified interpreters may miss information presented to

the class, while Zack pointed out that they were slow. Julie mentioned her frustration when the substitute interpreter did not understand her signs and incorrectly voiced her comments to the class. Ashley either chose not to have an interpreter or was not provided with one. In all cases, the consequences have an ominous impact on the academic achievement of deaf students. Having full access to classroom instruction is a primary prerequisite to the deaf students' ability to learn.

The behavior of substitute interpreters also had a negative impact on the perceived social status of the deaf students. Julie and Leslie each related a personal social crisis that occurred because the substitute interpreter's behavior embarrassed them—another possible indicator of the interpreter extension theory. Julie's horror story recounted the substitute interpreter's attempt to micromanage Julie's activities in class. Leslie's horror story was a result of inappropriate support in that someone gave the interpreter the incorrect schedule. In Leslie's experience, the real tragedy went beyond the substitute's pattern of appearing in the wrong place at the wrong time. The substitute also did not understand Leslie's social habits in the classroom or her typical method of using the interpreter for clarification purposes. In both Julie's and Leslie's stories, perceived social harm occurred because the substitutes were not aware of the students' social needs in the classroom. In all, it is clear that most deaf students have a negative opinion of substitute interpreters.