

Chapter 2

Differing Opinions for One Student: Dual Modality Collaborations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind has sought to create collaboration between the traditionally opposing language philosophies of ASL/English and Listening and Spoken Language through partnering teachers together to educate students whose families want instruction in both modalities, but not simultaneous instruction in both languages. This collaboration was tested in preschool/early childhood grades and brought opposing viewpoints together and partnerships were not always successful. Through this process of collaboration, teachers learned a great deal about how to professionally work with people who may believe very different things when working toward the common goal of student success. Lessons from the struggles and successes of the collaboration are shared in the story of a Deaf teacher, Natalie, and the teachers she partnered with.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

In schools and programs for the deaf¹, decisions made by previous administrations even decades ago have long-term impacts on the current setting, structures, and programming of the school. Like many schools for the deaf, the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB) has experienced a range of communication philosophies as a school, often aligning with the prevailing Deaf Education theories of the time. USDB was founded in 1884 as a program under the University of Deseret (now the University of Utah) and was guided by the existing expertise of teachers at the school. After USDB became independent from the university and moved to its permanent home in Ogden, Utah, an administrator and two graduates headed to Gallaudet College to gain official training in Deaf education. Due to the time of its founding, USDB was influenced by the decisions of the Milan Conference, which stated that the best approach to the education of deaf students was an oral approach over the “manual” approach of using sign language (Brill, 1985). Thus, the educational and language approaches of USDB followed what was considered the best practices of the field as understood at that time.

Looking at the language philosophy history of the school, USDB initially had both sign language and oral classes in the 1880s, presumably with a heavier focus on the oral classes. However, by the 1950s, USDB had focused on an oral/aural only approach. In the 1960s, USDB incorporated a “dual track” program that used the Total Communication philosophy, claiming to be one of the first schools in the nation to use this dual track. From the 1960s to the late 1990s, these two tracks were kept fairly separate. Over time, multiple campuses across the state were organized, either as separate buildings or housed within mainstream school districts. In 1999, the Deaf Community of Salt Lake City wanted a Bilingual-Bicultural program and established the Jean Massieu School of the Deaf charter school. In 2005, this charter school merged with USDB and over the next several years the Total Communication program was phased out in favor of Bilingual-Bicultural education. The two language philosophies continued to be separate and parents were expected to choose one path for the education of their child (Kinner, 2021). In 2015, now serving students using both ASL/English and Listening and Spoken Language philosophies, USDB leadership decided to end the “or” approach and allow parents to choose one or both language modalities for their child. After a long history of separation, these two programs began to work together, but the philosophical divides of the teachers expected to collaborate may have seemed insurmountable, at first.

At the time of this case study, ASL/English and Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) programs had been separated by physical location and programmatically with each division having their own administration. Each division hired staff independent of the other and, while very friendly and professional with each other, did not have

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