USD Language and Communication Policy

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1. Purpose and Background

1.1. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for clear, respectful communication among co-workers and colleagues at USD. The need for employees to maintain professional standards is imperative to the overall morale of the staff as well as the growth and learning of our students.

1.2. This policy recognizes the historical conflict between communication ideologies in deaf education as well as unintentional perceptions of divisiveness between various groups.

1.3. This policy describes cultural norms and addresses inherent difficulties that arise with intercultural communication.

1.4. This policy is intended to help to reduce communication barriers and common misconceptions.

1.5. It is necessary that USD employees maintain professional standards and assume positive intentions from others regardless of their fluency or choice of language.

1.6. This policy is intended to help USD employees recognize that differing perspectives and lack of acceptance can contribute to feelings of isolation, oppression, and misunderstanding for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

1.7. USD employees have the responsibility and opportunity to model appropriate behaviors (social, interpersonal, cultural, etc.) for their students and others, in supporting learning and shared understanding of ways to bridge communication barriers and close gaps in understanding.

2. Definitions

2.1. "American Sign Language" (ASL) is defined as a visual-spatial language with its own grammar and structure, independent of English, and is used by the majority of Deaf people in the United States.

2.2. "ASL/English" is defined as the bilingual approach to utilizing signed ASL and written/read English text and, when accessible and desired spoken English.

2.3. "Communication" is defined as the shared process communicators use to express information, ideas, needs, and wants.

2.4. "English" is defined as the primary language used in the United States. There are two forms of English used to communicate: the spoken form and the written form.

2.5. "Language" is defined as a system, governed by rules, for communicating meaning by means of a shared code of symbols. All languages evolve through time.

2.6. "Listening and Spoken Language" (LSL) approach is a communication option consistently utilizing hearing technology with the purpose of attaining spoken language.

2.7. "Public Space or Common Area" is defined as any time or space when a third party (staff, students, visitors, etc.) can see/hear you and gain access to your conversation.

2.8. "Sign Supported Speech" is when an individual is primarily speaking and adds a few signs to augment what is spoken.

2.9. "Simultaneous Communication" (SimCom) is defined as talking and signing simultaneously in an attempt to share the same information in both spoken language and sign language at a functional level.

3. Philosophy

3.1. The Utah School for the Deaf celebrates, embraces, and authorizes all communication modalities and allows students to find the education that works best for them.

3.2. The philosophies for individual programs are outlined below:

3.2.1. Elizabeth Delong School (Springville Campus)

3.2.1.1. EDS provides ASL/English and LSL instruction with the option for instruction in both. Services are determined by the individual needs of the student using state core standards.

3.2.2. Jean Massieu School (Salt Lake Campus)

3.2.2.1. JMS provides a bilingual education using both ASL and English to educate students according to the state core standards. JMS students become "dynamic bilinguals," which refers to their ability to access and use both languages as they achieve proficiency and adapt to multilingual, multimodal, multicultural interactions at home, at

work, in public, at school, and throughout their lives.

3.2.3. Kenneth Burdett School (Ogden Campus)

 3.2.3.1. KBS provides a bilingual education using both ASL and English to educate students according to the state core standards. KBS students become "dynamic bilinguals," which refers to their ability to access and use both languages as they achieve proficiency and adapt to multilingual, multimodal, multicultural interactions at home, at work, in public, at school, and throughout their lives.

3.2.4. Listening and Spoken Language programs (Each Campus)

 3.2.4.1. LSL Students consistently use hearing technology to develop spoken language through auditory training, parent coaching, language experiences, and self-advocacy skills. Educational professionals support and guide families to make their home language natural and fully accessible.

3.2.5. Online program (Statewide)

 3.2.5.1. The online division of USD seeks to provide individualized, personalized learning pathways for each deaf and hard-of-hearing student, including flexibility in self-pacing and learning in a variety of locations with access to technology that is conducive to their respective learning styles and academic needs. Instruction is provided using ASL and both written and spoken English.

3.2.6. Outreach program (Statewide)

 3.2.6.1. Utilize technology and collaboration with districts and families to provide Deaf and Hard of Hearing students with quality education and communication skills, as defined by the students' instructional needs and the Individual Education Plan (IEP). These services are provided through specialized professionals, regardless of student location or chosen language modality.

3.2.7. Parent-Infant Program (Statewide)

 3.2.7.1. PIP-DHH empowers and supports the family as an unbiased guide to help their D/HH child reach developmentally-appropriate milestones by providing resources, information, and expertise in the field of deaf education emphasizing the importance of the early acquisition of language. All language modalities are fully supported.

4.   Common Deaf Culture Norms
  4.1.   Getting attention
    4.1.1.   In a formal setting (meeting, class, presentation, etc.), it is most appropriate to get someone's attention by raising a hand or by standing near them and waiting to be acknowledged.
    4.1.2.   Gently tap a person on the shoulder.
    4.1.3.   Waving at a person if they are within the line of sight.
    4.1.4.   Flicking a light switch a few times to gain the attention of a group of people in a room.
    4.1.5.   Tapping, banging, or slapping on a table.
    4.1.6.   Stomping on a floor where vibrations can be felt.
    4.1.7.   Throwing objects to get a person's attention is not appropriate.
  4.2.   Walking between two signers conversing
    4.2.1.   If two individuals are standing in the hallway conversing in ASL and another individual needs to pass through, that person should not call attention to themself by asking to be excused. Instead, the individual should continue walking at a steady pace to minimize the distraction of walking between them.
  4.3.   Tactfulness and Giving Feedback
    4.3.1.   Deaf people are typically direct and blunt when they give feedback, but it's rarely with the intention of being harsh or mean about it. In their mind, they are simply pointing out something that needs fixing.
  4.4.   Multi-tasking (seeing different events/conversations/etc.)
    4.4.1.   It is difficult for a deaf person to be able to watch an interpreter anda dialogue or conversation while remaining focused on another task.
    4.4.2.   It is difficult for a deaf person to be able to take notes, while a person is signing (as in a meeting, classroom, etc.), because of the need for eye gaze to receive information.
  4.5.   Perception of Deafness and Hearing Loss
    4.5.1.   Many Deaf individuals involved in the Deaf Community and Deaf Culture do not view themselves as disabled in any way. Instead of having a "hearing loss," they may view themselves as having a "deaf gain."
  4.6.   Eye contact
    4.6.1.   Consistent eye contact and visual attention during a conversation is expected.
    4.6.2.   While in a conversation, a signing individual "has the floor" until they provide a visual indicator (pause, facial expression, etc.) that

they are finished.
- 4.7. Use of technology instead of in-person communication
  - 4.7.1. Text-based communication, email messages, instant messaging, the use of videophones, and other internet-based technologies have become widely used among Deaf people.
  - 4.7.2. Deaf people generally expect a reasonably quick reply to a text, email message, instant message, and a message left through a videophone. Generally, they need frequent contact and value that connection with other people. Even a quick response that you will provide a better response later is sufficient.
- 4.8. Making Introductions
  - 4.8.1. When a new participant joins a conversation, it is appropriate to have one of the communication partners introduce the newcomer and talk about their connections with all group members.
  - 4.8.2. Upon meeting for the first time, Deaf people tend to exchange biographical information in some detail and describe social circles in considerable depth.
- 4.9. Communicating in Public (in small conversations, groups, informal settings, etc.)
  - 4.9.1. Deaf individuals prefer to sit across from each other, rather than side by side. In larger groups, Deaf prefer to sit in a circle where everybody can see each other.
  - 4.9.2. Acknowledging others
    - 4.9.2.1. Newcomers are acknowledged by a shift in body positioning sto be inclusive with the existing group.
    - 4.9.2.2. When a Deaf person is in a conversation and someone wishes to interrupt, the person speaking may acknowledge the newcomer by lifting a finger to indicate "one minute" or "hold on" and may maintain that sign until the current conversation is completed before turning to the newcomer.
  - 4.9.3. Chatting while walking
    - 4.9.3.1. Deaf individuals keep sightlines in order to maintain conversations while still alerting each other to upcoming obstacles. When Deaf people walk and talk, they will engage in a type of "dance." For example, going through a doorway, one person will spin in place and walk backwards to keep talking.
- 4.10. Communicating in Private (whispering, private conversations, etc.)
  - 4.10.1. Minimal or no facial expressions, small signs are indicated lower,

near the stomach or waist area; brief eye contact is made to bring the viewers' attention to the signing.After establishing that contact, the signer might look in a different direction to maintain discretion.

4.11. Exiting conversations

    4.11.1. Deaf individuals will announce to the rest of the group when they need to leave to go to the restroom, or for other reasons.

    4.11.2. Deaf individuals will ensure they inform the majority if not all of the group they are leaving. This will add extra time. This is commonly known as "the long goodbye."

5. Common Hearing Culture Norms

5.1. Getting attention

    5.1.1. In a formal setting (meeting, class, presentation, etc.), it is most appropriate to get someone's attention by raising a hand and waiting to be acknowledged.

    5.1.2. In an informal setting (game, social event, recess), it is okay to wave or call out someone's name, or to approach a person to get their attention.

5.2. Walking between two hearing people who are conversing

    5.2.1. If you can, walk behind one of the individuals and "around" rather than "through" the conversation.

    5.2.2. If you must pass between the two persons, politely state "excuse me" while discreetly passing through.

5.3. Tactfulness and Giving Feedback

    5.3.1. A common approach when being tactful and giving feedback is to "sandwich" your constructive criticism between two positive comments about a person.

    5.3.2. Rather than commenting on negative or unappealing aspects about a person, typically positive comments are given on something else (e.g., commenting about someone's clothing rather than their weight gain).

    5.3.3. Generally, sharing or asking about personal information (e.g., how much you paid for a car, a detailed explanation of your health, etc.) is considered inappropriate.

    5.3.4. Except in close circles with trusted colleagues, friends, or family, it is not typical to use open or blunt commentary with each other.

5.4. Multi-tasking (hearing and seeing different events, conversations, etc.)

    5.4.1. It is typical for a hearing person to be able to listen to a dialogue or conversation in a nearby location while remaining focused on

another task.

5.4.2. It is also common for a hearing person to be able to take notes while listening to a person speak, even if the two are entirely unrelated, and to track each train of thought.

5.5. Perception of Deafness and Hearing Loss

5.5.1. Legally, individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing are classified with a disability. Typically the larger society views deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals as disabled and may unintentionally view them as being less capable.

5.6. Eye contact

5.6.1. Eye contact is a way to show interest and attention to a communication partner. Some individuals, however, are uncomfortable with continuous eye contact for more than a few seconds at a time.

5.7. Use of technology instead of in-person communication

5.7.1. Generally, when sending email messages, text messages, instant messages, etc., it is expected that some delay may occur before a response is given. It is not necessary to have instantaneous, ongoing communication through technology except in emergency situations.

5.8. Making introductions

5.8.1. When new participants join a conversation, it is appropriate to have one of the communication partners allow them to introduce themselves.

5.9. Communicating in Public (in groups, hallways, informal settings)

5.9.1. Joining conversations already in progress

5.9.1.1. It is appropriate to stand to the side of a group conversation and wait to be acknowledged.

5.9.1.2. In other circumstances, it is appropriate to approach those engaged in a conversation and make a comment, thereby joining the conversation.

5.9.1.3. In certain settings, especially when with familiar communication partners, one may simply comment to be acknowledged and join in, without being "formally invited" into the conversation.

5.9.2. Acknowledging others without initiating communication

5.9.2.1. It is appropriate to simply wave, offer a verbal expression, smile, or offer other gestures such as a head nod.

5.9.3. Chatting while walking

          5.9.3.1.   Offer periodic eye contact when you are able, but it is not expected. One or both persons may be scanning the area, while in the conversation to be mindful of the surroundings.

5.10.   Communicating in Private (whispering, private conversations, etc.)

    5.10.1.   During a private conversation, it is often evident by having communication partners in close proximity with each other, and perhaps faced away from a crowd, focusing more on each other than the surroundings.

    5.10.2.   It is inappropriate to acknowledge others in the nearby surrounding area. However, when the private conversation is finished, one may invite others into the conversation.

    5.10.3.   If a third party is aware that a private conversation is taking place, it is most appropriate to not request to join or to expect acknowledgement.

5.11.   Exiting conversations

    5.11.1.   Depending on the setting, it is rarely expected to announce to others in the room that you need to be excused.

    5.11.2.   In most settings, conversations end with a brief, direct, leave-taking comment.

6.   Shared Means of Communication

6.1.   General USDB locations

    6.1.1.   When possible or comfortable, use whatever communication mode that will allow others to participate.

    6.1.2.   Regardless of participants' background, communication modality, or choice, we should always assume positive intentions from those with whom we work.

6.2.   ASL/English Setting

    6.2.1.   American Sign Language should be used whenever possible as a shared communication modality.

    6.2.2.   Sign-supported speech is allowed when at least one of the users is not fluent in American Sign Language. It should be used only as a last resort, during an unplanned, spontaneous, momentary communication.

    6.2.3.   If a verbal conversation is in public, it should also be accessible to those that sign whenever possible. Willingness to be overheard also means willingness to be seen in ASL.

    6.2.4.   If a conversation is private, wait until the third party is outside of public view to continue the conversation.

6.3. LSL setting

    6.3.1. Spoken English should be used as a shared communication modality.

    6.3.2. Sign-supported speech is allowed when at least one of the users is not fluent in spoken English. It should be used only as a last resort, during an unplanned, spontaneous, momentary communication.

    6.3.3. If an ASL conversation is in public, those signing understand their conversation is not considered private and may be voiced for access by others.

    6.3.4. If a conversation is private, wait until others leave the area to continue.

6.4. In a formal setting (e.g. a presentation or training event)

    6.4.1. Keep spoken or signed side comments brief and short. Wait until the presentation is finished or leave the room to continue.

    6.4.2. In a mixed setting of fluent and non-fluent ASL users:

        6.4.2.1. Be aware of others and if they can access the information. Make adjustments as necessary.

        6.4.2.2. Request an interpreter in advance.

        6.4.2.3. Inform others in the group if you are not fluent in the primary communication mode being used and offer a suggestion for how to communicate.

        6.4.2.4. If an interpreter is not available, the facilitator should ask the users of the minority language in the room if they would prefer to proceed with SimCom or wait for an interpreter.

        6.4.2.5. Briefly using SimCom between participants may be acceptable when an interpreter is not available and individuals are not fluent in one of the languages.

        6.4.2.6. When possible, use one modality and then share the same message in the second modality to allow the greatest level of access. This requires allowing additional time for the message to be shared with the entire group.

6.5. In an informal setting

    6.5.1. In a mixed setting of fluent and non-fluent ASL users:

        6.5.1.1. Be aware of others in the room,and if they can access the information. Make adjustments as necessary.

        6.5.1.2. Inform others if you do not know the primary communication mode being used in the group, and offer a suggestion for how to communicate.

        6.5.1.3. Ask others in the group how best to proceed with an informal

conversation, respect other communication preferences, and ensure equitable access to the information.

    6.5.1.4.   When an individual is not fluent in the primary mode of communication, others may attempt to include them by using words and phrases from a secondary language (e.g., a form of sign-supported speech or SimCom).

6.6.   Communication Strategies Among Non-Fluent Partners

    6.6.1.   Using SimCom

        6.6.1.1.   SimCom is generally not a non-preferred communication approach due to the inherent difficulties of talking and signing simultaneously and the potential difficulties of mixing two grammatically dissimilar languages. SimCom is considered the lowest priority for communication at USDB.

        6.6.1.2.   SimCom may occasionally be necessary for an unplanned, informal, incidental, and brief communication between three parties that use different modalities, where calling for an interpreter is unrealistic given the nature, the time frame, or the content of the meeting.

        6.6.1.3.   An individual using SimCom should be comfortable in both language modalities and should ensure that reasonable communication is given in both languages among all parties. The other parties should be aware that this is not an interpreted conversation and some subtleties and depth may be lost from the conversation.

    6.6.2.   Written Communication

        6.6.2.1.   Written communication is a sufficient way to communicate, especially when direct communication or interpreted communication is not viable.

        6.6.2.2.   Individuals offered a writing tool should be aware this means the conversation will be written and should not attempt to change the modality.

        6.6.2.3.   Those who desire a written conversation should be sensitive to the time constraints of others.

        6.6.2.4.   Useful tools for written conversations include but are not limited to iPads, cell phone text or other writing apps, email, paper, dry erase tools, etc.

    6.6.3.   VideoPhones

        6.6.3.1.   Persons using ASL have access to VideoPhones (VPs) while on campus and often have a personal VP at home or on a

mobile device. This communication service is funded by the federal government and provides an interpreter for ASL-to-English communication and vice versa, via the telephone system. These are known as Video Relay Service (VRS) calls.

      6.6.3.2.   VRS calls to connect to someone with a VP are made in the same manner as making any telephone call.

      6.6.3.3.   Per federal regulations, VRS-interpreted calls are not to be used in place of an interpreter when two parties are in the same room, even if the two parties use different languages (e.g., English and ASL).

7.   Interpreter Etiquette

7.1.   USDB [Interpreter Scheduling Policy](#)

7.2.   Interpreters exist as a neutral means to facilitate communication; this is their sole role. Personal interactions with interpreters should be kept to a minimum while they are facilitating communication.

7.3.   Address another party directly in speech, body language, and eye contact - not the interpreter.

7.4.   There is no need to modify natural communication styles and syntax for the sake of interpretation. Interpreters are fully equipped to provide access to all parties.

8.   References and Additional Resources

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