



[Dr. Melissa Smith and JV Featherstone sit across from each other on oversized beige chairs. Smith, on the right, is a woman with short hair and a fair complexion, wearing a light blue, long-sleeve buttoned dress shirt, a darker blue undershirt, and black pants. Featherstone, on the left, is a light-skinned man with very short, light brown hair. He is wearing a long-sleeve dress shirt with white, crimson and blue lines in a grid pattern, and dark blue pants.]

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Hello! Thank you for joining me today. We will be talking about interpreter education in general. To get started, if you would please introduce yourself, tell me about your academic and employment background.

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Sure! My name is Joseph Featherstone, or JV for short. I'm from Utah, born and raised. I earned my BA from Brigham Young University in recreational therapy. I went on to earn my MA from the University of Northern Florida in interpreting pedagogy. And now I work at GoReact—it's a software program for interpreters and ASL teachers where they can receive videos from students and provide feedback. I work with about five thousand teachers around the world—all sign language-related. We have over five hundred programs we work with. And sometimes, it's a lot of work, but it is what it is. I've taught at colleges and universities, everything from ASL to interpreting and linguistics, for the past 12 years now, and that's me.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Okay, great. Now, I'd like to look at interpreter education in general and ask, do you feel like we are doing an adequate job? Are you satisfied with the outcome of interpreter education programs?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: No. Well, I mean, if I could change anything and create an interpreting program in my dream world, I would love if we could first focus on a

four-year ASL program and then a master's program for interpreting. That's my dream, because I feel like we expect a lot from students after they've finished only two years of ASL. Some of the students do take ASL in high school, but most of them start ASL classes in college. Then they're expected to learn ASL and two years later, start an interpreting program—that's awfully fast. It'd be nice if we could do better. If the students want to get a BA in ASL, that's fine. Then to become interpreters, they can enroll in a master's program. That's what I would want.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Yeah. Well, it could happen. Sometimes dreams come true. Martin Luther King had a big dream. We're still working on that and maybe not doing so well sometimes. Progress and change is slow. In your experience, when you work with students or maybe students go to an interpreting program, they study hard, they work hard, often for four years, maybe they'll get a bachelor's degree or an associate's degree. After they graduate, do you feel that they're ready to work as interpreters?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Sometimes. Most of the time, no. But some of the programs I've seen are good. The teachers expect a lot out of their students, and they become certified while they're in their program so that when they graduate, they can start with small jobs to gain experience. I feel like we could do, and I could be wrong, but I feel that sometimes experience is the best teacher. So the question is, how do we provide students with experience in real situations?

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Can you envision a program where maybe 70, 75 or even 80% of the people who graduate are actually ready to work? Can you think of one?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: 70, 75, hmm. I'm not sure the statistics, but one program that comes to mind that tends to have a good reputation is San Antonio College. They tend to have good, quality interpreters. I find myself taking a look at their program and wondering what exactly it is that they're doing. Cause I like to do my research to see what some programs are doing right. I work with many programs all over, and I've seen a few that really need to step it up. I see work from some programs and it is, ugh, wow,

just dreadful. San Antonio College is a good example. The program's department chair is really committed to hiring good teachers, good interpreting teachers who themselves have good interpreting skills. She makes sure they're hiring the best of the best for the cream of the crop, and I've noticed that the better the teachers are, the better the students will be. But again, I'm not sure the numbers.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: In your experience here in your state, when students graduate, do you feel confident that they're ready to interpret?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Oh no. Here in Utah, in Salt Lake City, so Utah Valley University, which is close to my home, I have some interns come and practice interpreting with me, and some of them could get by. I ask them what they're doing differently, and they've told me that they're more involved in the Deaf community. They've put in more hours practicing.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Why do they need,

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Well, they seem motivated. During college, they were going to a lot more Deaf events. Their teachers would require two, but these students were going to events weekly. They weren't satisfied with just meeting the minimum requirements. BYU has an ASL house that students can reserve to get together and sign, so they have more opportunities to practice. It's that type of student who can start practicing interpreting, because if students are just getting by with the minimum requirements, they won't be ready. For example, for some work meetings, I'll bring in student interpreters. Some of my meetings are not really high-risk. They're more like work trainings, so I feel comfortable having students interpret them. Plus, I'm a CDI. I can figure out what they're saying and I'm more forgiving. I feel like these are good places for beginning interpreters to practice. In medical or legal scenarios, I would hold off on that and wait until they're more experienced before they interpret there. But for beginning interpreters, low-risk situations are good places for them to practice so they can learn what it takes.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: In your own school experiences, did you depend on interpreters?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Yep. Through high school and college, I depended on interpreters.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Were you satisfied with the interpreters you had?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: High school? Yeah. I had good interpreters.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: All the way through?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: I worked with a CODA, as a strong interpreter. All through high school, I had the same interpreter. It was nice because I knew his signing style and I trusted him. So we had good communication with one another, and I liked that. Most of my interpreters at BYU were good.

One or two were, eh. I feel like in some of my classes, I'd be okay with less-skilled interpreters. Ones who needed more experience in practice, and that was fine, but in some classes that just wouldn't cut it. For example, I had this one professor, she was amazing. All the exams were based solely on her lectures. There was no course book, nothing. She would come in, lecture, and then leave. So I needed a good interpreter, someone who could keep up with her, but I kept getting interpreters who were just not good enough. They leave out information in order to keep up with the lecture. So I noticed on the tests, I didn't remember any of the information at all, and I studied everything, but it didn't matter because I was missing too much information in class. So, if I had a better interpreter who could keep up with a lecture, it would've been a better fit for that class. Some classes, for example, my recreational therapy class, that was an easy major. We would ride horses sometimes, we would cave dive, we would just do a lot of light social activity where a highly skilled interpreter wasn't necessary, mostly just someone who could sign.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Okay, great. Do you feel that it is important that there are plenty of good, highly qualified interpreters available, and why does it matter?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: I feel like if, for example, interpreters starting in K-12 educational interpreting, if we have good strong interpreters, I imagine that, in the future, we will have a lot more Deaf leaders. A lot more Deaf people would be capable, because right now, interpreters in K-12 are just starting out and aren't as experienced, which means that these new, inexperienced interpreters are essentially language models to these Deaf children, and I feel like that's not fair to them. Now, even though the risk is low, students at that age won't complain that the interpreter is underqualified. They just accept it and deal with it. That's tough. And the pay is low. Freelance interpreters, VRS interpreters, they make a lot more money than K-12 interpreters do. Some people start there and then move on to higher-paying jobs. I feel like if we had students graduating from programs qualified and ready to interpret, then K-12 would be a good place for them.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Yeah.

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: It would create a domino effect. Good, K-12 interpreters mean that students would better understand their course material, resulting in higher graduation rates, and the domino effect would continue.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: You said low-risk, that K-12 settings would be low-risk. What do you mean by that?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Not really low-risk, but rather less accountability. That's what I mean, less accountability, because K-12 interpreters can go into a classroom, and they tend to work alone. There is no quality control: no one is holding them accountable for the accuracy of their interpretation. Most interpreters get hired once the school sees that they can sign, and then they just leave it at that: go interpret for these

seven-year-olds, and seven-year-olds don't really know how to fight for their rights, how to fight for a good interpreter or what a good interpreter even is. I feel the accountability lies on K-12, or really any administration, to better screen their interpreters. It's hard. If we want a way to give more accountability or more high quality, then we could.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Do you think that most states have requirements for K-12 interpreters now?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Yeah, they do. Right, they do, but I feel like they need more. The standards must be raised. The EIPA, do you remember the percentage of information the interpreter has to interpret for them to receive a 4.0?

DR. MELISSA SMITH: I don't know. I think 3.5 would be that they, an interpreter catches maybe 70% of the message, or.

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: So that means they've lost 30% of the message: they still lost something.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: And, also, Dr. Schick says that the omissions are not principled, so they might be missing information, but not necessarily purposeful or deliberate as far as what is missed. That's what I think a 3.5 is, but I'm not sure. I would have to look that up.

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: So, if we had a way to, with more purpose, I don't know. I just feel like experience is good. This is just coming from me, but I've met a lot of K-12 interpreters who've been working for 20, 30 years, and their progress is just plateaued. And I want to say to them, "Come on, grow, get better." But again, freelance interpreters work in a lot of different settings and learn from that, but it's hard to say.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: You said you have children?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Yeah, two children, both hearing.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: If they were Deaf and mainstreamed, do you feel that an interpreter who scored 3.5 would be sufficient?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Mm, I would want a higher qualified interpreter. I would want to personally meet their interpreter, so I could assess their skills myself, because I know ASL, and I have a lot more experience recognizing interpreting proficiency. And because I'm a CDI, too. I think a 4.5 would be awesome, but it's hard to find interpreters with that score. A 4.5 would be my hope and desire for my children.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: What's your vision for future interpreter education? What do you think that could be like?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: Well, I feel like first, I feel like interpreter education will be more like virtual reality. You'll be able to go inside a doctor's office and, through VR goggles, you'll see where the interpreter or the doctor and the patient are, and then you'll interpret. I think that would be great. And to provide students with immersive experiences without a negative impact would be great. Second, hm, more self-recording and self-critiquing. And third, more high quality. More high enthusiasm and encouragement. Because we have a great profession. We're interpreters. That's one of the best things you can do. I love it.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Me too.

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: We just have to get better. I predict the quality of interpreters will get better if there's more excitement and motivation, because sometimes I feel like we focus too much on the fear of messing up in interpretation. And yes, this fear is valid, but we also need to recognize the excitement of becoming an interpreter. I am an interpreter. I would love that.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Okay. Well, I really appreciate your time. Thank you for coming.

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: CDI, interpreter. What I would qualify, oh, go ahead.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Okay, so let me add to what he said. What is required of a CDI, and what does a CDI provide?

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: A qualified CDI must be bilingual. Someone could have beautiful ASL signing skills, but if they don't know English or how to interact in the language, the profession might not be the right one for them. Or they could be great in some situations, but not all. I do a lot of document translation from English to ASL. We're a bilingual, bicultural group. You must be able to work well with the hearing culture and community as well as with the Deaf culture and community, much like a cultural mediator. And this is the same for hearing interpreters. But a qualified CDI, well, you also have to be a good team player because sometimes I'll see CDIs or hearing interpreters looking down or judging one another. I mean, come on. We're there to work as a team, feeding information from one to another. Just work, get the job done, and move on.

And there shouldn't be this power control dynamic. The focus should be on "we." And again, maybe this is something that can apply to the interpreting field as a whole, but sometimes I feel like it can be so cutthroat. I mean, come on. We work better as a team. We work better when we build each other up. We're not comparing ourselves to one another. It'd be nice to see that. Also, I just saw a conversation upstairs that really stuck with me. They said, "It would be nice if we could start teaching kids in Deaf schools how to be CDIs while they're young." And this made me think, because we tell kids that they can become doctors and nurses, everything, firefighters, and this makes kids get excited to join those professions. So why not CDI?

DR. MELISSA SMITH: Yeah.



JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE: If we start early, that would be so cool.

DR. MELISSA SMITH: That's wonderful. Again, thank you for your time.