



[Pamela Collins, seated on the left, is an African American woman wearing a green blazer over a green camisole. Her dark, box-braided hair is neatly in a bun on top of her head. She is wearing small hoop earrings. She has a small, black microphone clipped to the top of her camisole.

Behind her is a white wall that has a brown horizontal stripe running through the middle of the wall. On the far-left side of the video, part of a white lampshade is visible. Along the back wall behind this woman is a green plant growing out of a square white pot that is being illuminated by a yellow light. At the top of the pot is the same brown horizontal stripe that can be seen on the wall. The plant is growing up to the stripe on the wall as well as beyond that and out of view of the uppermost part of the video.

Melissa Smith, seated on the right, is a Caucasian woman with short, gray hair. She is wearing a black shirt underneath a dark blue collared long-sleeve shirt. Along the opposite wall behind the woman is a small brown square surrounded by a larger white square, which is hanging in a thin black frame.

When either woman is talking, a second video of an American Sign Language interpreter appears. The interpreter is a man with long, dark hair slicked back into a ponytail. He is wearing circular wire glasses. He has a thin, dark gray mustache. He is wearing a black button-down, long-sleeve shirt. He is standing in front of a dark gray backdrop.]

Melissa Smith: Hello.

Pamela Collins: Hi.

Melissa Smith: Thank you for joining me today.

Pamela Collins: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

Melissa Smith: Absolutely. We're going to talk about interpreter education, but to get started if you would please introduce yourself a little bit about your academic background and current employment.

Pamela Collins: Absolutely. I am Pamela Collins from was born in Washington DC raised in Columbia, Maryland, later moved to Atlanta, Georgia, with my now husband,

uh, where I got involved with interpreting at a church, a local church. Uh, thank goodness the ministry leader there said you don't just do this you have to go to school, and after the first class I fell in love with the language, the culture, the people and then they pushed me. They being the community that I learned with the Black Deaf community in Georgia, as well as the white Deaf community in Georgia, encouraged me to take the next step to becoming an interpreter so I just didn't stop after that I completed an interpreter training program. Uh, moved back to the Maryland area, went to Catonsville community college or CCBC and got my AA there in interpreting still wanted more. Uh, moved to Gallaudet University, and got my degree in ASL there. I had to convince MJ that I was not getting that degree to teach deaf students, not my idea but I did want to know what teachers were teaching uh, interpreter teachers, what what did they want these teachers to teach students, that's what I wanted to know. Uhm, and then after that I got my Master's in Administrative-, in Administration and Supervision, and I'm currently pursuing my doctorate at Gallaudet University.

Melissa Smith: Wonderful.

Pamela Collins: Mhm.

Melissa Smith: What are your current research interests?

Pamela Collins: Uhm, Institutional ethnographic exploration of getting scheduled. So, in days of old not to glorify those days because you know they have some problems of their own but uhm, scheduling, or this idea of a Deaf person somewhere needing an interpreter or some service company, needing an interpreter uh, started with, I need an interpreter, and usually in the community a Deaf person would say 'hey Pam are you available for this thing, I have a meeting on Monday' and I'd say, 'what is it?' and they tell me what it was I look at my calendar and we'd agree that was scheduling, nowadays, scheduling is taken, taken up into a larger institutional system that involves more than just the Deaf consumer and the interpreter and it involves a whole host of people, and I'm trying to shed a light on in terms of decision making. Um, so now when someone says, I need an interpreter, what happens, what happens, what happens, what happens, what happens, an interpreter is provided. We make a lot of assumptions about what we think that is uh, the farther we- the further we are removed from the interpreting field uhm, the more problematic things become in terms of decision making. So, I am trying to shed a light, make visible what's happening with scheduling, so that we can make some decisions about what happens next. I think the uh, primary focus is on uhm, the people that are involved because we typically blame it's become this them and us between schedulers and interpreters they don't know what we're doing. We've got to get

these schedules filled and so it's this contentious uhm, battle between valuable stakeholders in the community. I just think we grew so fast that we forgot to include schedulers who are not just administ- uh, administrative assistants or admin assistants or if you look at the job descriptions uhm, you know, good with people, customer service savvy. And yes, they check all of those boxes, but they are also now positioned to make decisions on our behalf, and me, questioning some of those con- uh, decisions then looks like I'm questioning the person so institutional eth- uh, ethnography moves past people and into the systems that have people do what they do. So I, you know, if we really want to know how a vacuum cleaner works, we're going to move past just saying it sucks dirt. Right? We're going to open up the machine and look at it and see. . . why it sucks up dirt. How does it do that? What does each valve do? how does it. . . , you know. That way when it's broken. We don't have to get rid of the whole thing we could maybe go in and fix it or maybe we do have to get rid of the whole thing, who knows, and that's my approach to looking at scheduling impacting. . . the field,

Melissa Smith: I have- I've never thought about that really I mean I know that sometimes they'll be a person in a scheduling position who doesn't, who doesn't. . . isn't able to assess interpreters, skills, whether that be linguistic skills, the ability to adapt, uh, interpersonal skills, and then in the Deaf community with the language profiles that are so greatly diverse, having a scheduler that doesn't even know how to find and, like, what skills are you bringing and what skills are required, you're just it's. . .

Pamela Collins: And it's not their fault most times they're in positions where some manager or some, some institution that they're a part of or some system that they're embedded in, uh, requires them to face supply and demand, you have X number of interpreters and Y number of jobs and fill those, right, we have these must fill this discourse that shows up in our community must fill vetted qualified certified that all becomes institutional knowledge but if the job description of the person that we're hiring now to manage the business of interpreting is what I like to call it because we've grown so fast, it's in reaction to the need in the community, um, the individuals that we've hired do we train them? Because at one time when, when it was me, the interpreter involved in the decision making in the Deaf consumer involved in the decision making, we came together to create the RID code of ethics, we have RID, we have NAD, we have all of these organizations all centered around making sure that as we, uh, as this prof-, this. . . . What we do became a profession that we're doing all the right things. You can't stop that it's not just a one and done, we're now inviting another group of people in that are involved in more than just. . . We, we make it seem like they're secretaries or, like I said admin assistants where they're just taking a schedule, but it's more than that because they'll come to me and say 'Pam you're perfect for this.' Well, why am I perfect for this

job. And oftentimes, why they thought I was is. . . isn't right. Didn't quite line up, I get where you were going. But I'm not Ethiopian so. . .

Melissa Smith [laughs]

Pamela Collins: That job you just put me on. . .

Melissa Smith: Hmm

Pamela Collins: Yes I look like those beautiful people, and I'm honored. But. . . yeah.

Melissa Smith: Very interesting.

Pamela Collins: Mm-hmm

Melissa: Do you feel that today in your experience is interpreter education as it stands today adequate?

Pamela Collins: No, I feel it, it often feels like a little bit of a science project, for me, you know, a little bit of this and a little bit of that and, hmm, you know and who's deciding what little bit of what that we're putting into it. Um, I recently had, uh, uh, favorite teacher, one of my favorite teachers, Faith Powell, remind me that, um, in the early days we were connected to the community and so we got that organic direct, those lessons that we really can't replicate. Right? And she likened it to a, uh, copier machine where we got this great experience and now we're trying to give it to cohort, after cohort, after cohort, after cohort, but it's like a copier machine you, you. . . after a while that copy that you're trying to make it's not direct anymore. So you're trying to replicate what you experienced and every time you make a copy it loses a little something. And I feel like we're in that place of where some of what we have I don't, it doesn't even look anything like what I started with.

Melissa Smith: Right.

Pamela Collins: So. . .

Melissa Smith: Not to mention that I'm not myself Deaf. So not only it's, it's me giving you "Well, this is what I know from this community. . ."

Pamela Collins: From my experience. Yes.

Melissa Smith: As a person who's not. . .

Pamela Collins: Yes.

Melissa Smith: Deaf myself and then, however many generations away from the original source.

Pamela Collins: Yeah.

Melissa Smith: That's a, that's a wonderful analogy.

Pamela Collins: Yeah.

Melissa Smith: Why is it so important to have highly qualified interpreters and an, an adequate pool of, of highly qualified interpreters?

Pamela Collins: Well, I look at it as. . . I mean it's communication access right so oftentimes people talk about language, and access to language and why we get into this field to begin with and if we move past. Did I sign that right? Did I do that right? Do I know, no, this is the ability to be able to communicate in a way where a group of individuals are dependent upon the interpreter Deaf and hearing. . . To be clear enough to articulate, whatever it is that they, that they, um, are trying to gain access to. So, having qualified interpreters, is it's more than just why do we need them for communication to happen. If we don't have that and then we don't have- communication is not happening and so we're not interpreting. And so what are we doing. . . if, if communication is not happening?

Melissa Smith: Yes. And the impact the, the impact of that communication. . . maybe not only being. . . not native, not comfortable, but being fraught with some assumptions or some, just a little something missing so that there's a higher burden on trying to figure out the message, as well as being able to focus on the interaction itself.

Pamela Collins: Well absolutely we've created, we've created this idea that, you know, you come to an interpreter training program you matriculate to the program you graduate next steps you can become an interpreter and I'm saying it's not necessarily the case. Um, I asked some of the students how old are you, and they'll say 'six months' or 'a year' or- and I say, Do you remember when you were six months old. You know what your English sounded like at that point it was a little bit of a babble, you know, not

quite sure playing around with things, but we then think that we can take that and interpret without having the training and I think that's for deaf and hearing, you know, because I know English doesn't mean I should go teach an English class. Right. I know how to use it but do I know how to teach it? So I think that we are being reactive right now and trying to- it's almost like the schedulers X number of them and Y number, trying to address the need, but in some ways I think we need to just stop for a second. regroup with all the stakeholders involved, what are we doing, what are we missing, what's needed, what's the approach. How do we do this? Before we move forward. Because right now I just feel like I think of our footprint in the community, right now which is kind of stomping through and figuring it out. Along the way, that's what it feels like.

Melissa Smith: Yeah, some stopping. Some treadmill.

Pamela Collins: Yes.

Melissa Smith: I'm like the little hamster. Yeah. And sometimes I feel like as an educator, sometimes I feel like I'm, I'm barely keeping my head above the water.

Pamela Collins: Well yeah, where does creativity come into it when you are- we feel overloaded with just making sure you're managing, you know, there's not enough teachers or, um, in my experience right now I feel like, um. . . I wish I feel like someone should have thought it was a good idea when we started to see our pain points in the community with scheduling with RID and NAD with- We didn't get in front of it. Some of some of the interpreter training programs you would think there would have been some type of meeting as to okay what happens now, how do we approach this, how do we address this, how's this gonna show up in the classroom, how is this going to show up in our curriculum, how's this going to show up in our teaching, what are we going to do different nothing, um, seems- even here at the conference like I would have liked to have had a workshop on really what's happening out here. And what are we doing in our classrooms and how are we, you know, addressing some of the issues that we find ourselves in this, it's not- can't just smile and keep teaching. It's not. It's not working.

Melissa Smith: Yeah, I would love to have the opportunity to sit down and do some more. Let's, let's come, let's, let's bring some strategies into this. I think it's pretty clear there's a problem. For me personally, it's much larger than me. Which is why I decided to do this video project, um, with some people that I know and love and trust and I'm honored to work with.

Pamela Collins: Nice.

Melissa Smith: And then through this process of interviewing, I see. . . you share my story. And I feel like this, this is, this is it. We all have ideas or we all have an expertise and in my little institution where I worked alone as a full time instructor for 18 years.

Pamela Collins: Wow.

Melissa Smith: I'm like, I don't know how I, I feel like I made some changes in the institution.

Pamela Collins: Yeah.

Melissa Smith: And now that I've been there for 20 years I'm like, huh, it's still not enough.

Pamela Collins: It's almost like spitting on an inferno [laughs] sorry, but that's what it feels like. At this point. Um, you know, or big forest fire and we're kind of, you know, we need something bigger. We need something with teeth. We need to stop talking about what we need to talk about or meeting, about the meeting, about the meeting, about-what we should do, and do something and, and I don't care if it's something that doesn't quite work out at first. Let's come together and do something we fail at, we learned from that, let's keep doing all the stakeholders involved, um, until we see the change.

Melissa Smith: It's beautiful. I'm very happy to have the honor to sit down and chat with you and get to know you a little bit more and hear your thoughts. Thank you so much for your time.

Pamela Collins: Absolutely, I want to add one more thing.

Melissa Smith: Oh please, please.

Pamela Collins: I look out and I see a number of issues showing up in the community. Um, a lot of Latino, African American, and Asian students often come deaf and hearing, um, expressing a need to feel engaged and seen and supported. And while we're thinking about all this that we're talking about. Let's really do something about the students that are sitting in our classrooms that feel like our curriculum, the curriculum currently is not designed for them. Let's connect with the organizations, Deaf organizations that are out there who've been around for some time NBDA I know

Hokulea, DCA, BDA, um, connect with them and find out how to really get to, um, even that element of teaching that I feel like has been missing in the profession for a while.

Melissa Smith: I would like to ask you to clarify for me please. For those who are not familiar with NBDA.

Pamela Collins: I'm sorry, sorry. National Black Deaf Advocates.

Melissa Smith: So National Black De- Deaf Advocates Tell me about the strength. Tell me about what this agency, what this organization can provide and must provide, um, as an integral part of curriculum development.

Pamela Collins: So, National Black- Black Deaf Advocates is a member of an organization of black individuals, uh, from various parts of the community who came together at a time, you know, to talk about issues that they felt impacted them, that they did not feel were being addressed and other organizations right. Um, and they looked around and noticed that there weren't very many, uh, Black interpreters, Latino interpreters, Asian interpreters, they started this idea of growing their own and connecting, uh, interpreters, new interpreter students, anyone who's interested with the experience of the community. And I think that's what we're all lacking is the connection back to the community, instead of the mom and pop store, we have Costco and Walmart. So, can- they are able to, A, talk about their history, um, of being Black and Deaf in the larger Deaf community what that experience was like, capturing some of their lived experience using that to show students today who still feel invisible to show how they were able to matriculate through and use those as teaching tools, because what happens when you have diverse experiences, it's just going to be an organic experience it doesn't have to be 'Oh is black history month we're going to do it just for this month.' They are just included into the curriculum, not as a one off, not as a special program, not as a- but just period, if, if we look, and we see anyone's voice or story is missing, we have to make sure that we include those stories back into the story, because the story includes all of us.

Melissa Smith: Mm-hmm.

Pamela Collins: And if we look and we just see one group of people then there are a lot of voices that are missing from the story.

Melissa Smith: And we're talking a lot in our profession we're talking about power and privilege in social justice, and you can talk about the Deaf community. And you can also



talk about the history of- of immigrants and people of color in our country and the, and the horrible oppression of- of Native people in our country.

Pamela Collins: Well, yes.

Melissa Smith: And then you, on top of that you've had the, the deafness component in the piece that they were not even provided access, and that was okay. And how many decades, how many generations will it take to catch up with no resources. I don't. . . [SS]. . .

Pamela Collins: Ever a catch up yeah it's, it's, it's, it's- Do we ever, but imagine that in the classroom.

Melissa Smith: Yeah.

Pamela Collins: Imagine having those discussions in the classroom, that's rich. It's rich, and it's missing.

Melissa Smith: Yes.

Pamela Collins: Thank you.

Melissa Smith: Thank you, I appreciate your time.

Pamela Collins: Absolutely.