



Utilizing Hispanic Interpreting Students in Service Learning Opportunities in the Hispanic Community

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Abstract:

Service learning has been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach of providing students with an authentic learning experience that complements their learning in the classroom (Moreno & MacGregor-Mendoza, 2016). Previous studies indicate that students in Deaf studies related courses enhanced their language proficiency in American Sign Language (ASL) and increased their appreciation of the deaf community and Deaf culture (Cooper, Cripps, & Reisman, 2013; Shaw & Roberson, 2009). Few studies have examined how students in service learning programs may contribute to deaf community-based agencies and their constituents. Agencies that provide services in the form of home visits, such as with early intervention services for deaf children may often struggle to serve an increasingly diverse population. For example, in the western and southern United States, the Hispanic community has become the largest minority group and many speak Spanish and have limited English proficiency. This presents both challenges and opportunities for interpreting training programs. Many deaf community agencies can struggle to provide services to the Hispanic population because many families speak Spanish primarily in the home (Narr & Kemmerly, 2015; Steinberg, Bain, Li, Delgado, & Ruperto, 2003) and there is a great need for individuals who are uniquely qualified to provide the appropriate forms of support. Similarly, an increasing number of students who are Hispanic are enrolling in interpreting training programs and are ideally suited to serve the unique needs of deaf Hispanic individuals and their families. The purpose of this study was to examine the benefits the service learning experiences on the interpreting students, Hispanic families, and the staff of deaf community service agency. The qualitative study was conducted with interpreter training program students who attended a large public university in the western United States. The university partnered with a deaf community service agency who provided early intervention services to Hispanic families with deaf children. There was a total of eight families that participated in the study. A total of 12 Hispanic interpreting students were provided with three reflection prompts about their initial, ongoing, and concluding experiences. Both the Hispanic

families and deaf community agency staff were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The results indicated that the interpreting students were instrumental in supporting communication between the agency staff and the families, resulting in a greater sharing of information about ways to support the needs of deaf children. Moreover, agency staff revealed the students provided other support in terms of developing games and communication aides to support families and their goals to support their deaf children. Furthermore, students felt a greater sense of agency and a means to provide an authentic level of support in both the deaf and Hispanic community. The study was beneficial in terms of showing how service learning can provide an authentic learning opportunity for students as well provide genuine experiences for students to serve the deaf community by promoting understanding in an underserved community.