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1-24-2020

## Personal and Professional Ethics: The Impact on Decision-Making in Elementary Education

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**Personal and Professional Ethics:  
The Impact on Decision-Making in Elementary Education**

Danielle R. Kenoyer  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process of completing this action research project has challenged me more than I could have ever imagined possible. I have grown significantly through this journey and the reward of completing this research is indescribable.

First, I want to thank my family and friends for your continued support and for always believing in me. I could not have persevered through the hard times without you all and my love for you is infinite. I want to specifically thank my dad, stepmom, mom, brother, grandma, and grandpa for going the extra mile to make sure that I was able to complete this research at all costs; I truly cannot thank you enough. To my friends, thank you for your everlasting bonds that have endured through this journey of completing my education, I promise to catch up on all those rain checks!

I want to take a moment to also show appreciation to those that have toughed through this educational journey with me. Steph and Makenna, you two have been amazing. I want to thank you both for keeping me on my toes and holding me accountable throughout this whole process. There are many due dates I would have missed and mental breakdowns that have been avoided because of you two. I couldn't have asked for better friends to not only have graduated our Interpreter Training Program (ITP) together, but complete Graduate school as well. We did it!

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Western Oregon University (WOU) and the wonderful faculty that have supported me in many ways through this process. Elisa, I want to specifically say thank you for being so patient with me and being a sounding board whenever I needed it. To the rest of the faculty, you all are amazing and I am beyond fortunate to have worked with and learned from you all!

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... 2**

**ABSTRACT..... 4**

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION..... 4**

    Statement of the problem ..... 6

    Purpose of the Study ..... 7

    Theoretical Framework ..... 7

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 10**

    Ethics Explained..... 10

    DC-S/ Supervision..... 12

    K-12 Aspects ..... 15

**CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ..... 20**

    Data Collection..... 20

    Data Analysis ..... 22

**CHAPTER 4: RESULTS ..... 24**

    Discussion ..... 26

**CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION..... 30**

    Future Research..... 31

    In Closing ..... 32

**REFERENCES..... 34**

**ABSTRACT**

This action research focuses on decision-making regarding professional and personal ethics in a K-12 educational setting for American Sign Language (ASL)/English Interpreters. The data collected for this research is specific to elementary education in a K-12 setting. In the field of interpreting there are professional organizations that present professional guidelines that must be considered in order to uphold best employment practices. Different employers may also have their own code of ethics and guidelines they expect employees to follow. In addition, each interpreter should have their own personal ethics that they carry with them as well. The goal of this research is to consider how these professional, organizational, and personal ethics and guidelines that are expected of interpreters impact decision-making while working.

**Key words:** Ethics, demand control schema, interpreting, empathy, decision-making

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As a recent graduate from an Interpreter Training Program (ITP) that focused on American Sign Language (ASL) and English, I had the opportunity to work in a K-12 setting before stepping out into the real world of interpreting. During my internship I found that the majority of my curiosity and questioning circled around decision-making that occurred while interpreting in relation to ethics. I found myself questioning why my mentors and colleagues were making the decisions that they were making, why I was making the decisions that I did, and why I did or did not feel good about any of those decisions made by myself or others.

This continuous curiosity and questioning turned into discussions with other experienced interpreters and I received a large variety of similarities as well as differences within their responses. The similarities I believe came from the guidelines of professional conduct for educational interpreters that have been established by leading organizations such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) center, and the National Association of Interpreters in Education (NAIE) (RID, 2005; NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007). The differences that I was hearing within the responses, however, I believe to be due to the personal ethics that each of these professionals held. I started to analyze myself and my feelings toward decisions that I have seen, or even made myself, that I was deeming ethical or unethical while working and realized how much of an impact personal and professional ethics can have when making decisions while interpreting. This led to the foundational research question of how my personal and professional ethics can, and do, impact my decision-making while interpreting in a K-12 setting.

### **Statement of the problem**

Signed language interpreters are more than just people that know multiple languages. In the matter of seconds an interpreter processes through a wide variety of environmental, interpersonal, paralinguistic, and intrapersonal demands all while conducting meaning transfer from ASL to English, or English to ASL (Dean & Pollard, 2013). Within this process, an interpreter has to make decisions as to what to do with all of this incoming information. These decisions should be made in compliance with the guidelines of professional conduct established by leading organizations.

In a K-12 educational setting, the interpreter's role looks very different than other settings that interpreters work in involving Deaf adults verses children. The guidelines for professional conduct that are provided for educational interpreters supports and guides ethical expectations in a classroom, but the everyday factors that occur in a classroom leave room for questioning if a decision was made with ethical reasoning. Ethics specifically is a subject that can seem risky for some to discuss and although ethics courses are typically offered and required during an ITP, real life does not come with a book of answers. My research and experience so far have brought to light how the decision-making process involving ethics is an unspoken, yet expected, action that occurs in the field of interpreting.

As I started to collect data for this research, I was doing so with a general mindset of K-12 education. This quickly led to my awareness of how broad of a topic K-12 is and that I needed to narrow my research to one of the three different levels within this setting. Those three levels being: elementary, middle school, and high school and they all require a variety of different skill sets. These skills that vary include decision-making involving the interpreting process and behavior conducted in each level. The specific year that I was collecting the data for my

research, I was full-time at an elementary school, with occasional middle school and high school work, so I decided to focus my research on elementary education instead. This decision was made due to the fact that I would not have enough data to accurately discuss the decision-making process of an interpreter in the middle school and high school settings.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As a current K-12 interpreter, the lack of research on the impact of personal and professional ethical conflicts that an interpreter may have in this setting has led to a large grey area of unknown for me and, perhaps, other interpreters that work in this setting. The Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) as well as the guidelines for professional conduct written by NAIE and the developers of the EIPA all give direction to educational interpreters for professional decision-making. The professional conduct written in these guidelines, however, lacks specifics for individual grade levels as well as students that interpreters work with every day. This research is intended to provide raw, authentic, and accurate data from my own experience, specifically in an elementary educational setting, regarding decisions that are being made in my everyday work. This is being done for the purpose of providing evidence as to how personal and professional ethics can, and do, impact decision-making. In this research, I will be analyzing the “grey area” discussed previously regarding decision-making based upon my own actions and experience to provide evidence as to what conflicts can potentially arise with personal and professional ethics while interpreting in elementary education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The topic of my research is centered around ethics. Ethics has been studied for many years in an attempt to understand the moral reasoning behind decision-making in efforts to determine “right” and “wrong” behavior (Clowney, 1992). Ethics for interpreters involves an



established set of guidelines for the profession as a whole, but also the natural presence of one's personal ethics that we as humans possess individually. I believe that interpreter's personal and professional ethics may result in conflicts relating to this notion of potentially making "right" or "wrong" decisions on an everyday basis while working. I believe that these conflicts stem from a lack of clarity of professional ethics for this specific setting and, for myself, an instinctual understanding of my personal ethics. This directly impacts decision-making on the job, whether we are aware of it or not. When it comes to ethics, personal or professional, there are always some that stand out more than others, and each individual person prioritizes and processes each of them differently.

Research has shown that ethical systems have been generally broken down into three categorized theories: deontological, teleological, and virtue-based (Cline, 2018). These theories look at decision-making and categorizes the process itself by the reasoning behind the decision being made. According to Cline (2018), these categories consist of correct moral decisions made in an effort to abide by rules and duties (deontological), making moral decisions with a full understanding and willingness to accept consequences (teleological), and putting rules aside in order to actively support the development of another's positive characteristic traits (virtue-based).

All three of these theories have potential in application to decision-making for interpreters in a variety of settings, whether that be in support of one's personal or professional ethics. Dean and Pollard (2013) explain these theories when they apply the deontological and teleological theories to the concept of using the Demand Control Schema (DCS) framework to our profession as a whole with the emphasis that interpreting is a practice profession. The theories are applied to the possible controls that can be implemented in an interpreted situation

and categorized accordingly. In a separate article relating to the same topic, Dean and Pollard differentiate these theories in a sense that teleology is centered around the consumer-focused outcome, and deontology is focused more on the rules that must be abided by as a professional (Dean & Pollard, 2011). Within this article it is also strongly emphasized that with interpreting being a practice profession, it follows in suit with the teleological approach. It is argued within their work that the deontological approach actually leads to more feelings of “ethical dilemmas” when used over the teleological approach due to the concept of ethical decisions needing to be deemed “right or wrong” (Dean & Pollard, 2011).

The teleological approach I believe was used more often throughout the stages of my ITP to begin the process of making ethical decisions in relation to interpreting. When there are no consumers that are impacted by your actions, one is able to make mistakes and process possible controls and the outcomes of those controls in a safe space. In an ITP, it is crucial to gain the understanding and knowledge of the impacts of decision-making; however, when actually working in the field, holding the skill to use the teleological or deontological approach does not always mean one will always be used over the other. These three theories will be considered throughout this research to support analysis that is being done on the data that was collected from my everyday work in an elementary educational setting.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research is intended to focus on the ethical conflicts that impact decision-making while working in elementary education as an ASL/English interpreter. A large amount of this research though, pre-data collection, is really focused on ethics itself. Although there is no specific research regarding the conflicts between personal and professional ethics in elementary education, specifically for ASL/English interpreters, there is a wide variety of research on ethics as a whole. As interpreters, we have ethical guidelines that we are given and expected to follow as professionals that consist of general guidelines as well as setting specific guidelines. The general guidelines of ethics are referred to as the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) and were formed by two organizations: RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) and NAD (National Association of Interpreters for the Deaf) (RID, 2005). For educational interpreters, the guidelines for professional conduct and best practice were formed by the National Association of Interpreters in Education (NAIE) and the developers of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) (NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007).

### **Ethics Explained**

Ethics have been around and studied for millennia involving different aspects as to what they mean and how they impact humans as the individuals that we are (Ruggiero, 2004; White, n.d.). The impacts that ethics have on humans has led to situations referred to as ethical dilemmas that leave one challenged to make an ethically “good or bad” decision (White, n.d.). One famous example was written by a British philosopher named Phillipa Foot in 1967 and is referred to as the “trolley problem.” This ethical dilemma in simple terms asked what you would do if you were on a runaway trolley and you had to pick between a track that would kill one person, or the other track that would kill five people, what would you chose (Dhavale, 2018)?

The dilemma being faced in this problem is explained to be that it goes against moral principles to kill; however, when given the problem the responses steered toward killing the single person over the five. Dhavale (2018) continued further and realized that when other philosophers started to change the dilemma slightly, the responses would vary depending upon the stigma that was given to the hypothetical people in danger.

Interpreting is a practice profession and whether one is an interpreting student, intern, working professional, or any other participant to the interpreting field; there is a common phrase stated when asked about decision-making, and that is “it depends” (Dean & Pollard, 2011). This, like ethical dilemmas such as the trolley problem above, seems to be due to the variety of factors and demands that are taken into consideration with every given situation. When interpreters are faced with ethical dilemmas while working, they are also held with a great deal of responsibility when it comes to the lives of the consumers with whom they work. Every ethical decision that is made can directly impact the consumer(s) and participant(s) no matter if they are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or hearing, and has potential to impact their lives.

Humphrey and Alcorn (2007) write that the process of making ethical decisions for interpreters requires a level of open mindedness called critical thinking. This goal of critical thinking for interpreters is to allow the exploration of options before making an ethical decision. When exploring options, the variety of factors and demands that could potentially lead to an “it depends” answer, can instead lead to an intentionally thought out ethical decision whether it be deemed a “good or bad” one (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; White, n.d.). Some researchers, however, would claim that ethical decisions fall more into the category of “right or wrong” versus “good or bad” (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Clowney, 1992). The difference in the terminology is very clear within specific researcher’s claims; yet, the emerging pattern of the

importance of personal life experience and exposure for ethical decision-making is evident.

Humphrey and Alcorn (2007) state that the motivation behind 80% of decisions made are due to instinctual factors from personal life experiences.

Ethics as a whole is a concept that seems to be difficult to put into simple and definitive words that fits every individual's same perception and understanding; however, ethics has been seen to be related to values and morals (Clowney, 1992). One interpreter conducted research on a small sample size of ASL/English interpreters and interpreting students regarding their value types (Ramirez-Loudenback, 2015). Through a series of data collection, it was discovered that the three top ranked value types held within these interpreters and students were self-direction, benevolence, and universalism. These three values were described to be represented by a variety of corresponding values such as freedom, honesty, equality, creativity, and much more (Ramirez-Loudenback, 2015). Although this sample size is not specific to K-12 interpreters, this kind of data is crucial to beginning to understand the different kinds of personal ethics that people in this profession possess.

### **DC-S/ Supervision**

The seven tenets within the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) were established for specific reasons and each hold their own importance regarding the work that ASL/English interpreters do. Tenet one though seems to be the most often addressed tenet. This tenet states, "Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication" (RID, 2005). Any interpreted situation between a Deaf/Hard of Hearing person that uses signed language and a hearing person that does not, there is information that is being shared within that conversation. The information shared can range anywhere from extremely private, to a very simple grocery list, but regardless it is expected of an interpreter that it will not be shared. Holding onto confidential information at

times can cause a heavy range of stress on interpreters. Karasek (1979) introduced the demand-control theory to discuss occupational stress while analyzing the demands and controls of a situation. This theory was researched and applied to the interpreting profession and led to the connection of interpreter stress and burnout throughout the profession (Dean & Pollard 2001, 2011). As research continued to stem from the demand-control theory, Dean and Pollard started to apply this to a variety of settings and interpreters throughout the profession and created a framework called the Demand Control-Schema (DC-S) (Dean & Pollard, 2013). DC-S is currently used by interpreters and is being used in Interpreter Training Programs (ITP), such as the one at Western Oregon University, to discuss our work through the process of supervision (Dean & Pollard, 2011, 2013).

Supervision is a type of reflective practice that allows for one to gain support and improve their professional practice by discussing the events of an interpreted situation while maintaining confidentiality (Dean & Pollard, 2011, 2013; Hetherington, 2012). Dean and Pollard (2013) claim that the term “confidentiality” has been interpreted throughout the profession to mean that an interpreter must not talk about their work or assignments in any way. They argue though that the term is constructed from the act of “confiding” which is the action of telling someone information in an understood agreement of confidence (Dean & Pollard, 2013). Research conducted by Dean and Pollard (2013) used DC-S to assess how interpreters can be involved in reflective practice to discuss and improve their work. They did this by discussing within their research how to hold supervision sessions, what they might look like, and the intended purpose (Dean & Pollard, 2013). In 2017, there was research conducted on a sample size of 113 signed language interpreters regarding their personal experiences with supervision sessions. The researcher found that due to supervision, of those 113 interpreters 96.12% were

more aware of their decision-making process, 98.10% felt that they can think through situations more clearly, and 91.35% felt that they were able to emotionally cope with difficult situations (Curtis, 2017). The results above were outcomes of the supervision process and provide evidence for the positive impact and overall occupational health benefit that discussing confidential information of our everyday work can have on an interpreter.

Supervision sessions can be held as group, peer, or one-on-one sessions and can vary depending upon the interpreters needs and experience (Hetherington, 2012). The sessions have an intended goal of reflective practice and due to that are structured to fit each interpreter's needs for that particular session (Dean & Pollard, 2013; Hetherington, 2012). One way to hold a supervision session is to use DC-S to breakdown the demands and controls of interpreted situations to provide effective analysis. The demands of a situation are defined by Dean and Pollard (2013) as salient aspects of our work that can and do impact decision-making. These demands are broken down into four categories: *environmental*, *interpersonal*, *paralinguistic*, and *intrapersonal* (Dean & Pollard, 2013; Hetherington, 2012). *Environmental demands* consist of aspects of the setting in which the communication is taking place; *interpersonal demands* pertain to factors related to the interaction between individuals, Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or hearing, as well as the individual thought worlds of the interpreter that can or should impact their interpretation; *paralinguistic demands* refer to how messages in a given situation are being said as well as possible physical and cognitive limitations of the situation; and *intrapersonal demands* pertain to the cognitive, physiological, and psychological limitations, thoughts, and experiences of only the interpreter (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2013; Hetherington, 2012).

The controls consist of three categories: *pre-assignment*, *during assignment*, and *post-assignment*. They are presented and discussed in supervision to be used as resources that an

interpreter can choose to implement, or not, in response to demands of a situation (Dean & Pollard, 2013). The *pre-assignment controls* are what the interpreter brings with them to the assignment; *during assignment controls* are what the interpreter chooses to do once they are at the assignment, until the time they leave; and *post-assignment controls* consist of the actions that the interpreter decides to take after the assignment is over (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011, 2013).

Unlike the ethical theories that have been discussed facing a “right or wrong” decision, controls are possible options of actions that an interpreter could implement in response to a demand at any given time in either of the three categories, no matter how conservative or liberal that may seem (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2013).

Interpreters, whether they are aware of the framework of DC-S or have participated in supervision or not, are faced with demands and implement controls on a daily basis. When interpreters make a decision, regardless of the theoretical approach that was taken prior to the decision, it is done and the consequences or *resulting demand* of that control is left to be assessed. The resulting demand has been defined as “observable demands that emerge as a direct result of the interpreter’s control choice” and can be negative or positive (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 115). In discussing the demands, controls, and resulting demands, Dean and Pollard (2013) emphasize throughout their research that the teleological approach is a more suitable fit for the practice profession of interpreting.

### **K-12 Aspects**

School districts themselves establish their own set of educational policies that they must follow. These policies, due to the tenth amendment, are not decided in large parts by the federal government, rather by state and local levels instead (DOE, 1980). When conducting work in K-12 schools, there are a variety of laws, policies, and guidelines that all employees must abide by,



including interpreters. Along with school district policies, individual school policies, and varied professional guidelines for different job titles; there are also specific laws when it comes to working with children that are to be adhered to. These laws include, but are not limited to, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and much more (Congress, 2001; DOE, 1980; IDEA, 2004; NAIE, 2019). The laws and acts listed above are only a small handful that were created for K-12 education and, for this research, I decided to focus more on the laws and acts that focus on special education in K-12 (i.e., Rehabilitation Act of 1973; IDEA) for this action research project.

When a Deaf or Hard of Hearing student enters a school district, there are specific placement meetings that happen to determine what their educational needs are and an Individual Education Program (IEP) is established for the student (DOE, 1980). An IEP is required under IDEA and is intended to allow all teachers, schools administrators, and support staff working with the student to improve the student's educational results (DOE, 1980; IDEA, 2004; NAIE, 2019). The interpreter is a part of the educational team for the student(s) with whom they work and the interpreter may be given the opportunity to join these meetings at the discretion of the Teacher of the Deaf and/or the Case Manager for the student(s) (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; IDEA, 2004; Schick, 2007). On this IEP, it will have the students personalized goals for the school year and will state how many hours the student will have an interpreter throughout their day. An interpreter decides how to interpret for a particular student under consideration of the IEP goals for that student. The goals may be related to academics, language needs,

social/functional, behavioral, physical limitations, or other educational needs. (DOE, 1980; NAIE, 2019).

Along with the previously discussed school district policies, individual school policies, variety of laws and acts, and educational guidelines that an interpreter must adhere to for working in K-12, interpreters also have their own guidelines that they should comply with and implement that are specific to the profession. As an interpreter, there are established guidelines that should be followed when entering the profession, no matter the specific setting that they work in. These guidelines, as previously stated, are referred to as the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) and are as follows:

**Tenets**

1. Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication.
2. Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation.
3. Interpreters conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the specific interpreting situation.
4. Interpreters demonstrate respect for consumers.
5. Interpreters demonstrate respect for colleagues, interns, and students of the profession.
6. Interpreters maintain ethical business practices.
7. Interpreters engage in professional development  
(Code of professional conduct, 2005, [www.RID.org](http://www.RID.org)).

The tenets listed above are not the sole description available for the ethical guidelines for interpreters. Within each tenet listed, on RID’s website, there is also an expanded list of general guiding principles as well as a broad list of illustrated behaviors for each tenet. With this set of ethical guidelines being so generalized for the profession, other organizations such as NAIE and the developers of the EIPA decided to create guidelines for professional conduct and best practice specific for K-12 educational interpreters (NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007).

The guidelines of professional practice written by NAIE are as follows: Section 1: Standards of Professional Practice; Section 2: Scope of Professional Practice; Section 3: Educational Interpreter Roles and Responsibilities; Section 4: Interpreting-Related Consideration; Section 5: Preparation and Provisions; Section 6: Considerations for Hiring, Placement, and Promotion (NAIE, 2019). The EIPA's guidelines for professional conduct are divided into the following six categories: General expectations; Legal requirements for individuals working in public schools; Working with a student whose education is protected under federal IDEA, which is any student who has an IEP; The educational interpreter is a member of the educational team; Guidelines for interpreters who work with students; and Tutoring (Schick, 2007). While both of these guidelines refer back to the CPC for a general set of ethical guidelines for interpreters, the EIPA provides more specific guidelines in relation to K-12 work, and the NAIE focuses more on best practices for interpreters while working in K-12 educational settings (NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007).

These additional guidelines were established and are beneficial for K-12 educational interpreters, as well as other professionals who work with interpreters in K-12 settings. Interpreters, along with other staff who work in K-12 schools, are mandatory reporters; however, this does not mean that interpreters are also to be perceived as another set of eyes or as an additional supervising adult in the room for general educational or behavioral support (NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007). Mandated by FERPA, the privacy rights of students are protected and interpreters are only to share information regarding the students on a need-to-know basis (NAIE, 2019). With the exception of important information regarding the student being shared with the educational team, this leads to interpreters referring back to upholding confidentiality when

asked about information regarding the student or events that occur within the classroom (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; NAIE, 2019).

In addition to being a language facilitator for academic support in a classroom, interpreters in educational settings are the student's supportive access to social interactions throughout their school day. Under the protection of FERPA, as well as organizations such as RID, the interpreter is given the opportunity to create a consistent level of neutrality and confidentiality within their role in order to build the trust and rapport with other students in the classroom as well as the Deaf/Hard of Hearing student(s) so that these social interactions can happen (NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007). This part of a K-12 interpreter's role, among all other aspects of their role, is important information to be shared with all staff working at the school to provide a clear understanding of the work that an interpreter does for the benefit of the interpreter and the Deaf/Hard of Hearing student(s) (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; NAIE, 2019).

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The data collection for this research started in August of 2018 when I started working full time at as a K-12 interpreter and ended June of 2019 when the school year ended. My work for that year was primarily at an elementary school with a variety of grades from Kindergarten to 4<sup>th</sup> grade throughout my everyday work schedule. All data that has been collected for this research was done using a qualitative approach. The following methods were chosen for this action research.

#### **Data Collection**

The most frequently used data collection conducted for this research was journaling. Journaling has been said to be a questioned method for qualitative research due to the extent of the researcher's influence; however, because of this action research, this method was administered most often (Ortlipp, 2008). For action research specifically, journaling has shown to be a beneficial way to collect data for qualitative research and later to recall distinct emotions, feelings, and details that occurred in specific situations (Chin, 2019; Lovercheck, 2018). This ability to recollect distinct emotions, feelings, and details was a crucial resource when it came time to analyze my data months after the data had been collected. Journaling for myself was an everyday practice that was done through an online google document as I went about my workday. I also kept a handwritten journal with me at all times while working to document specific emotions, thoughts, feelings, specific details of a situation that occurred, or controls that were implemented throughout the day. Similar to Chin (2019) and Lovercheck (2019), I was able to hold a better recollection of data from this method and had the ability to later code my notes into identifiable patterns for my research.

The other methods that I utilized for this research included Think Aloud Protocols (TAPs) and participating in supervision sessions. The use of TAPs for data collection has been stated to be beneficial to an interpreter's professional, or otherwise known as ethical, decision-making process and to analyze the interpreter's mental process itself (Smith, 2014). The TAPs that I conducted were a process that consisted of me recording myself discussing the details of a situation that occurred and any possible thoughts that I had in relation to all demands and controls that were present, whether addressed or not, during my workday. In relation to action research, TAPs, although conducted with a different approach, have been used for data collection by other researchers. Hamilton (2018) used TAPs for her qualitative research as a way to create an avenue of greater awareness to her interpreting process. For this research, TAPs were a method that I utilized post-assignments that I would leave questioning any aspect of decisions made, lingering feelings about what occurred during the assignment, or if I was in need of processing the situation more in-depth. This method has allowed for me to reflect on my raw feelings coming straight from an assignment and use for a later, yet still accurate, assessment.

In the process of collecting data for this research, supervision turned out to be an important method that was used. Supervision is an opportunity to utilize the perceptions of an outsider to reflect on and analyze a situation that had occurred in an attempt to process through an ethical dilemma, or specific feeling when leaving an assignment; whether that be a negative or positive feeling. During supervision, the DC-S framework was utilized in order to breakdown the main demand that occurred in the situation that led to the supervision session being necessary, as well as the controls that could have and were implemented (Dean & Pollard, 2013). The goal of using the DC-S framework within the supervision sessions was due to my personal needs for narrowing down the demands of the situation to identify where my conflicts were arising. The

controls that stemmed from the supervision sessions were valuable for my future work; however, the identification of specific demands proved to be essential for the data collection of this research. Supervision ended up being the least used method for my data collection, but it proved to be the most beneficial.

The data that was collected for this action research project was focused around my own personal ethics and how I conducted my ethical decision-making while I worked in a variety of situations that arose in elementary classrooms. I want to emphasize the fact that ethics for every individual will vary and that this research will not indicate how all interpreters should make decisions.

### **Data Analysis**

After I finished collecting data in June of 2019, I decided to analyze my data from the beginning. I sorted through every single note I took, TAP I recorded, notes from supervision sessions, and everything leading up to the process of analyzing my data from this last year.

Throughout this analytical process, I color coded my data into three categories consisting of: decision-making involving ethics (whether personal or professional, appropriate or not), questions that arose from reviewing my data, and arising patterns. Once I had this data categorized, I looked at each category individually and decided where they fit within this research, if at all. Within the data analysis process, I realized that some of my data does not apply for the specific research at hand and is best suited for future research instead. I found that the questions that arose from reviewing my data were the most beneficial in the analyzing process; however, finding connecting patterns that arose within my data led to the realization and discovery of patterns within my ethics and how they relate to my decision-making. Once this process started, I was able to look at my decision-making and ethics, professional and personal,

## DECISION-MAKING IN K-12 ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

as a whole during the time of this research. This allowed me to find important patterns within my data that directly applied to my research question regarding the conflicts that I felt were related to my personal and professional ethics in my everyday work.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to recognize my own personal ethics, as well as my professional ethics, and analyze how the two impact my decision-making while working in elementary education as an ASL/English interpreter. My original goal was to identify my personal ethics and find patterns within my everyday work that show how the generalized Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) conflicts with my personal ethics and impacts the decisions that I make while on the job. The data that I collected, however, shows that the conflicts of intrapersonal demands are more impactful on my overall decision-making than my ethics.

The data that I collected reflects all of my emotions, thoughts, feelings, decision-making, curiosities, and an overall raw reflection of my work as a whole from August 2018- June 2019 while working in elementary education. While looking at my data I was noticing that my decision-making was consistently occurring with a general sense of confidence and trust within myself. The notes that I would write down every day in my journals, as well as the TAPs that I recorded, were not focused on my personal ethics or the CPC, but instead were related to my emotions and feelings. When I reflected on my notes from supervision sessions, I was noticing the identified demand was always intrapersonal. Intrapersonal demands are defined as thoughts and feelings that “might include concerns about one’s safety, interpreting performance, liability, or the people and environment they are dealing with during an assignment” (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 9). As I continued to analyze my data, this intrapersonal demand continued to be the most prevalent pattern within my work.

The data that I collected shows that the teleological theory was applied the most to the decision-making that was occurring in my everyday work; however, the deontological theory showed within my data to be occasionally present as well. While using the teleological approach,

I was making decisions with a consumer-focused outcome; however, I was using this approach with colleagues and other staff as well (Dean & Pollard, 2011). When this approach was not used, and even times when it was, I was documenting words to describe my feelings and emotions such as: *uncomfortable*, *invasive*, *saddened*, and *unsettling*. The situations that these feelings were arising from all led me to a singular identifiable intrapersonal demand; the feeling of empathy.

Empathy has been described by some researchers as a cognitive process (Decety & Yoder, 2016; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hodges & Wegner, 1997). This cognitive process is said to be due to the perceptive and indirect cues that individuals pick up on from one another (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Hodges and Wegner (1997) recognize empathy as taking place in two forms: either *automatic*; otherwise known as emotional empathy that naturally begins development as an infant learning emotional expressions and extends through adulthood leading to the ability to read facial expressions and non-verbal cues of other individuals; or *controlled*, the purposeful concentration and attempt to find cues in order to attain an empathetic mentality. The feeling of empathy that was present in my data was automatic empathy and was shown through constant unconscious empathetic feelings that were present post-assignment in reaction to controls that were made during an assignment (Hodges & Wegner, 1997). The empathy present in my data was directly stemming from the decision-making that I was trusting myself to make while on the job; however, I was not feeling conflicts with the actual decisions that I made.

The guidelines that this research has been centered around are the ethical guidelines of the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC), guidelines for professional conduct by the EIPA, and guidelines for professional practice by NAIE (NAIE, 2019; RID, 2005; Schick, 2007). As stated previously in this research, the CPC is intended to be generalized for the profession, and the

NAIE and EIPA were written specifically for K-12 educational interpreting. I originally thought that these guidelines were causing conflict with my personal ethics while working, but my data is in fact showing that the conflict arose from my intrapersonal demands post-assignments. My data shows that my decision-making was consistently conducted in a manner that professionally followed guidelines and personally felt ethically appropriate. The intrapersonal demand that I am labeling as the feeling of empathy, was arising after I applied my trusted controls and was left as a resulting demand due to the controls that I was implementing throughout my workday (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2013).

### **Discussion**

The research question at hand is: How do personal and professional ethics impact decision-making while working in K-12 elementary education? From conducting this research, I am discovering that my personal and professional ethics do have an impact on my work in elementary education and are brought with me to my everyday work; however, they are not causing conflicts with my decision-making process itself. Instead I discovered that the real conflict is the resulting demand of the intrapersonal feeling of empathy that is happening after the decisions are made; no matter how ethically appropriate they felt for that given situation. I am identifying this intrapersonal feeling of empathy as different than my personal ethics for a few reasons for this research specifically. My personal ethics involve my own life experiences and are continuously shown to be a part of who I am as a being and act as an instinctual response in decision-making (Clowney, 1992; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). The feeling of empathy; however, is caused by the controls implemented in my decision-making that is being influenced by the demands of the situation, as well as the cognitive, uncontrolled feelings that immerge from my own personal primitive empathetic responses (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). The conflict

that is occurring in order for this research to be possible is being shown through my data to be directly related to the feeling of empathy that is stemming from my own intrapersonal demands due to the controls being implemented in compliance with professional guidelines.

In connection with the stronger relation to the teleology theory, my data shows that my decisions were also varied depending upon the demands in K-12 that arose within the four categories: *environmental*, *interpersonal*, *paralinguistic*, and *intrapersonal* (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011, 2013). The following are a few examples within each demand that were shown in my data to have impact on my decision-making in K-12 elementary education:

1. Environmental:
  - a. The difference between a field trip and being on campus. Working in K-12, the interpreter also holds the role of another adult when it comes to field trips that are off school grounds. This means stepping outside of my role that is conducted and established for inside the classroom
  - b. Other adults in the classroom; ex: classroom teacher, substitute teachers, student teacher, educational assistants, school staff, or other colleagues
  - c. Student(s) IEP educational goals
  - d. Teacher's goals for the classroom as well as learning objectives
  - e. Class content for each subject: Key vocabulary, new/key concepts, etc.
  - f. How the teacher has the classroom set up; how will this accommodate the interpreter and Deaf or Hard of Hearing student(s)?
  - g. Amount of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and hearing students in the classroom
2. Interpersonal:
  - a. Rapport with classroom teacher and other school staff

- b. Rapport with Deaf or Hard of Hearing student as well as hearing students
  - c. Student(s) IEP goals for language and communication
  - d. Student(s) willingness or ability to learn/focus on a daily basis
  - e. Cultural and background understanding of student(s) that one is working with
  - f. Possible behavioral issues that arise from Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or hearing students in the classroom; interpreter does not handle this, but are also an adult in the classroom that might be expected to if the interpreter's role is unclear
  - g. Attitude of classroom teacher or other staff
  - h. Teachers or other school staff whispering or making side comments to the interpreter in front of the class with the intent of students not hearing
3. Paralinguistic:
- a. Specific seating placement
  - b. Individual teaching styles; K-12 interpreters are typically in multiple classrooms with a variety of teachers throughout the day
  - c. Students learning how to speak in class; this can look like students talking over one another, speaking too quietly, or not knowing how to articulate their thoughts yet
4. Intrapersonal:
- a. Personal connection and rapport with the students that have been built up through the school year; K-12 interpreters typically work with the same educational team and students throughout a school year
  - b. Having patience

- c. Empathy for others regarding restrictions due to the interpreter's role; ex: not watching the class for the teacher so they can go to the bathroom, not correcting a teacher when they punishes a student due to their own misunderstanding, knowing an interpreter needs a team for a surprise movie but you need to take your lunch break or you won't eat, etc.

Every single classroom, student, teacher, subject, and day will hold different demands and decisions that will be required to be made. The guidelines that are established, including the Code of Professional Conduct and the guidelines from NAIE and the developers of the EIPA, are intended to guide interpreters with best practices and conduct (NAIE, 2019; RID, 2005; Schick, 2007). Due to individual life experiences leading to a variety of personal ethics, decision-making can be seen to vary among educational interpreters. Interpreting is not black and white, and neither are ethics. This research has provided evidence that ethics do influence decision-making; however, the impact that demands of an interpreted situation can have on the interpreter and their work can be significant. For this specific research focusing on K-12 elementary education, the impact that intrapersonal demands had on my work proved to influence a variety of thoughts, feelings, and future control options regarding my work.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this action research, I started by asking the research question of how personal and professional ethics impact decision-making while working in K-12 elementary education. Through extensive data collection and analysis of my work in elementary education, I have come to the realization that professional, organizational, and personal ethics do impact my decision-making, but the conflicts that stem from my decision-making are actually related to my intrapersonal demands.

The research conducted for this project has shown me that the Code of Professional Conduct and guidelines that are established by NAIE and EIPA for K-12 educational interpreters are intended to support best practice and professionalism to empower interpreters; not cause conflict (NAIE, 2019; RID, 2005; Schick, 2007). They offer protection and privacy to not only interpreters, but the students with whom interpreters work as well (NAIE, 2019; Schick, 2007). This has supported my findings that conclude to, for myself, a lack of ethical conflict and the presence of intrapersonal conflict stemming from feeling empathy.

After conducting this action research project, I foresee an increase in supervision sessions within my work. Now understanding the difference between my ethics and intrapersonal demands, the opportunity to conduct a more in-depth self-analysis can occur. Through my data collection, supervision sessions showed to be the most effective way to analyze intrapersonal demands in direct reflection of my work. Future research regarding decision-making for K-12 educational interpreters is suggested and recommended after the findings of this action research project.

## **Future Research**

The findings from the data collected for this study cannot and will not provide an answer for an interpreter's decision-making in a classroom. This research, however, does show that from a single interpreter's experience in an elementary educational setting, there are many demands and controls that impact not only decision-making, but also the consequences of decisions being made.

An interpreter's ability to assess the demands of a situation to apply best practice control options is a growing skill and continued practice (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2013). An opportunity for future research would be to analyze how the assessment of demands are occurring in K-12 elementary classrooms and how they are being prioritized with the goal of continuing best practice. The findings from my research showed me that the strong impact of intrapersonal demands on my work is significant. Regardless of the training through an ITP, this specific demand was not in the forefront of my mind as having such a significant impact until this action research. When working in K-12, the additional demands that are present for interpreters in a classroom can vary significantly; however, from this research it is clear that all variations are beneficial data that can be utilized for future work.

In relation to the varied demands that are present in a K-12 classroom, the impact that those demands have on an interpreter can vary notably as well. As this research discovered, the intrapersonal demand of feeling empathy showed a definite impact on my work in elementary education. An opportunity for future research for K-12 educational interpreters would be to analyze empathy further and study how it relates to the work that interpreter's do, specifically when working with children in K-12. What specific demands on average are causing empathetic feelings? Is there a pattern that can be discovered to assist interpreters that are dealing with the



conflict of feeling empathy post-assignment due to controls that were employed during? Further research on this specific intrapersonal demand would provide an opportunity for K-12 educational interpreters to improve best practice, future work, and create a more positive impact on their overall occupational health benefit.

Another opportunity for future research would be to study interpreters that work in a K-12 setting and analyze the intrapersonal demands that they face in their everyday work. This action research was solely focused on my experience, thoughts, and feelings. After identifying the significance of the specific feeling of empathy being shown through the intrapersonal demands of my work, I started paying closer attention to my colleagues and listening to the demands of their specific work within the classrooms and student(s) that they work with as well. I do not have data on this, but from informal observation I would suggest that the research related to the intrapersonal demands of interpreters in K-12 education would be of strong benefit to other interpreters working in this setting. One suggestion for how to conduct this research would be through the use of the DC-S framework in supervision sessions. This process would allow for specific analysis of the demands and controls that K-12 educational interpreters are facing and implementing on an everyday basis and allow for clear patterns to arise through the variety of experiences that interpreters face in K-12 education.

### **In Closing**

The purpose of this research is to provide insight on the possible impacts that can influence decision-making of ASL/English interpreters in K-12 elementary education. The impact of professional, organizational, and personal ethics on decision-making is apparent; however, the demands of elementary education proved to provide significant impacts as well. Interpreting is a practice profession and is continuously growing. The understanding of the

## DECISION-MAKING IN K-12 ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

possible impacts that can influence decision-making should be analyzed by interpreters individually, and as a profession. The hope for this research is the awareness of the additional demands that are specific to K-12 educational interpreting leading to further analysis of the influence that those demands have on decision-making in classrooms. I also hope this research will provide insight to those feeling conflicts with demands of their jobs in K-12 education, as well as encourage colleagues working in K-12 to analyze and be perceptive to possible individual influences of decision-making in their everyday work.

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