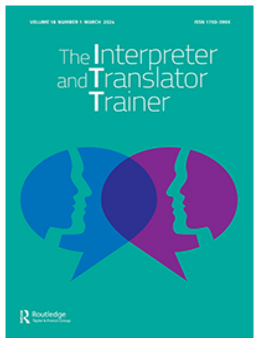

The Interpreter and Translator Trainer

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ritt20

Educators of deaf and hearing interpreting students as agents of change: challenging the curriculum

Gro Hege Saltnes Urdal, Ingeborg Skaten & Elisabet Tiselius

To cite this article: Gro Hege Saltnes Urdal, Ingeborg Skaten & Elisabet Tiselius (15 Feb 2024): Educators of deaf and hearing interpreting students as agents of change: challenging the curriculum, The Interpreter and Translator Trainer, DOI: 10.1080/1750399X.2024.2317627

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1750399X.2024.2317627

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 15 Feb 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 354

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ritt20

THE INTERPRETER AND TRANSLATOR TRAINER
https://doi.org/10.1080/1750399X.2024.2317627

Educators of deaf and hearing interpreting students as agents of change: challenging the curriculum

Gro Hege Saltnes Urdal [a], Ingeborg Skaten [a] and Elisabet Tiselius [b]

[a]Faculty of Education, Arts and Sports, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway; [b]Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Educational systems change in top-down and bottom-up processes. One example is when authorities introduce a new curriculum, but it can also be changed by agents active in the system. In education, agents of change include educators, students and institutions. In this article, we explore the narratives of educators ($n = 4$) in the bachelor's programme for signed language interpreter education (both deaf and hearing students) at Humak University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland. Data were collected through interviews conducted in 2016. We used content analysis and the theory of agency as a framework for analysis. Here, agency is understood as threefold building on the past, present and future. We explore the different dimensions of becoming an agent of change, being an agent of change and being an agent in a changing field. We find that within the context of this sign language interpreting programme, educators' previous experiences, intercultural competence and ideas about the future contribute to changes in the curriculum and possibly to social change.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 8 December 2022
Accepted 8 February 2024

KEYWORDS
Signed language interpreter; signed language interpreter education; interpreter educators; intercultural competence; theory of agency; agents of change

1. Introduction

Teaching in an interpreting programme in which deaf and hearing students are taught together[1] requires domain-specific intercultural competence. Intercultural competence can be understood as the ability to compare and contrast differences and similarities in different cultures and articulate these in discussions with other people (Howard-Hamilton et al. 1998). In this case, it relates to the cultures of signed language communities and spoken language communities. Intercultural competence is understood in our study as competence and knowledge of languages, cultures and history of signed and spoken language communities. Furthermore, educators' deaf competence[2] is a crucial factor in lowering barriers encountered by deaf students in all types of higher education (Kermit and Holiman 2018). In our study, we shed light on how interpreter educators, as agents of change, apply their deaf and intercultural competence to discuss and challenge the signed language interpreting (SLI) curriculum.

CONTACT Gro Hege Saltnes Urdal ghsu@hvl.no

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

This study is part of a project that seeks to investigate the experience of both deaf and hearing students and faculty members in the SLI programme at Humak University of Applied Sciences (Humak) in Helsinki, Finland (approved by the data protection authority for research, the Norwegian Centre for Research Data; approval number 46,794). In this article, we report on the teaching faculty and how their narratives on responding to the demands and questioning the curriculum can be interpreted as acting as a collective to achieve agency of change, which can prove beneficial for their students. The authors of this paper are all interpreters and hearing: Urdal and Skaten in signed language and Tiselius in spoken languages. They are also educators in interpreting both spoken and signed languages in Norway (Urdal and Skaten) and Sweden (Tiselius).

Deaf interpreter education in general has been described previously (Forestal 2005; McDermid 2010; Morgan and Adam 2012). Bottom-up processes, such as building on students' and teachers' experiences when improving deaf interpreter education in our case, have been pointed out to require more focus (Bontempo et al. 2014).

The project was initiated as an experience-sharing mission prior to deaf students becoming eligible for the SLI programme at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in Bergen, Norway. In our first analysis of the data collected at Humak (reported in Skaten, Urdal and Tiselius, 2020), we investigated deaf students' experiences in the SLI programme, focusing on a bottom-up perspective of change. In the article, we report on evidence of the programme contributing to social change – that is, the transformation from no recognition to recognition of deaf interpreters. However, the education of deaf interpreters per se is not the focus of this article but rather the teachers' reflections and narratives about interpreter education and the educators as possible contributors to social change.

Universities in Europe and, in our case, Finland have begun providing interpreter education for deaf students (Lindsay 2016). Previous studies on deaf interpreter education (e.g. Bontempo et al. 2014; Rogers 2018) have taken an instrumental approach to improving, for example, curricula and educational practices, both of which are important issues. However, within the context of social change, very little is known about and – to our knowledge – only a few, if any, studies have been published on integrated SLI training programmes for deaf and hearing students. Therefore, we find it important to explore this field. In this study, we analyse the narratives of four of the seven regular teaching staff members (at the time of data collection) at Humak. The teachers' experiences represent a bottom-up perspective. To understand the teacher's role, we take our starting point in the theory of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

In this study, we explore how educators describe their work as teachers in the interpreter programme and whether challenging the curriculum in the way they describe can be interpreted as them being agents of change. We argue that their actions may be one of the driving forces leading to the social change that interpreter education at Humak has contributed to (Skaten, Urdal, and Tiselius 2020). Social change has, of course, implications for education as a whole, and we will touch upon this where relevant. The main aim of our analysis is to determine whether the teachers at Humak can be described as agents of change in the interpreting programme and possibly contribute to social change for deaf and hearing students.

As we only examined one interpreting programme, this study should be seen as a qualitative case study (Quinn Patton 2002). However, the results can be applied to other SLI programmes for deaf and hearing students.

2. Background

In this section, we briefly outline SLI education in Finland, as in the case in our study, and the theory of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) that we used to analyse the narratives. In addition, we discuss intercultural competence as a way of creating social change.

2.1. SLI education in Finland

In Skaten, Urdal and Tiselius (Skaten, Urdal, and Tiselius 2020), we provided an overview of SLI education for deaf students in general and for those in Finland in particular. In the current study, we only give a short overview of our case study, namely, the SLI programme (3.5-year BA diploma) at Humak, which has been open to both deaf and hearing students since its inception in 2001 (Skaten, Urdal, and Tiselius 2020).

As is often the case in SLI education, students at Humak learn a signed language and interpreting as part of the programme. The first cohort of deaf students participated in all courses. However, as will be described in sections 2.2 and 4.2., changes in the curriculum resulted in later cohorts receiving credits for different types of existing knowledge. Because of their profile, deaf students often receive credits for their knowledge of a signed language and are therefore exempted from certain courses, sometimes courses in interpreting as well, as many of them have experience in interpreting and translation. Over the past 19 years, the programme has adapted to changes in the general university curriculum and to the demands of society.

During the start of the programme at Humak between 2001 and 2016, six deaf students graduated (Lindsay 2016). The number of hearing students varies from year to year, approximately 10–15, depending on the student cohorts at the national level.

Graduates of the SLI programme in Finland receive their interpreting assignments either from private agencies or directly from the Finnish public agency KELA (the Finnish Social Insurance Institution). KELA is nationally responsible for providing sign language interpreters and allocating funds. Thus, its needs, evaluations, norms and guidelines for sign language interpreters affect their education and work.

Historically, deaf people are considered language 1 users of their sign language, with a distinct linguistic and cultural identity (Leigh 2020). Consequently, interpreter education in Finland has been geared towards the mastery of SLI for this particular group. Recently, several factors, such as the widespread introduction of cochlear implants (CIs), devices that electrically stimulate the auditory nerve to provide a sense of sound, have made the group having the right to interpreter services more heterogeneous. This is especially true in Finland, where a majority of deaf children receive CIs in one or both ears before the age of 12 months (Rainò 2012). This has had and will continue to have a great impact on the training and market of sign language interpreters.

2.2. Theory of agency

The theory of agency implies that an agent performs intentional action in interaction with other agents. Agency can be seen as threefold (e.g. Biesta and Tedder 2007), and agency at one point in time cannot be understood without seeing the whole context, including the present, the past and the (expected or planned) future. The theory of agency is widely discussed, and it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full concept of the theory. We take the following understanding of agency as our starting point:

> [a] temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its 'iterational' or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a 'projective' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present. (as a 'practical-evaluative' capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 962)

Emirbayer and Mische's definition lends itself particularly well to different types of studies, such as ours, covering different time periods and references to experiences gathered during these different periods. Biesta and Tedder (2007) describe this threefold concept as an ecological perspective of agency achieved under certain conditions. A single action can have a primary orientation towards only one of these three aspects, depending on the emerging situation (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). This means that individual actors need to draw upon the agency they have achieved to create responses to any future situation that will need to be handled.

As far as we know, the theory of agency has not been used as a framework for analysis in studies of sign language interpreter education. However, agency as a concept has been used as a framework in the field of SLI studies as discussions about the interpreter's role have started to drive research questions. In their seminal paper on professional code and culture, Tate and Turner (Tate and Turner 2001) find that sign language interpreters, despite their own possible belief in non-involvement in the matter of the interpreted event, actually show differences in agency depending on the context. One can argue that the concept of agency plays a major role in developing important frameworks for the practice of SLI, such as the role-space model (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee 2013).

The theory of agency has been used as a framework for studying teachers and curriculum development. For example, Priestley, Edwards, Priestley and Miller (2012) argue that the degree to which teachers can achieve agency varies based on the factors described in Emirbayer and Mische's (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) quote above and on the 'beliefs, values and attributes that teachers mobilise in relation to particular situations' (Priestley et al. 2012, 192). To explore the agency of the teachers in this study, we focus on agency and actions (i.e. responding to the demands in certain contexts of students, the institution of higher education and society) perceived as possibly leading to social change – in this case, changes to the curriculum. Actions can be understood as achievements of individual or collective agency. Biesta and Tedder (2007) state that models of agency have been mostly used to understand individual agency. In our study, we regard educators as acting as a collective (albeit a small collective) to achieve agency rather than as taking individual action based on their individual experiences.

There are many theories on collective agency, such as that of Ludwig (2016), but these are not as applicable to our context because they consider large groups. As we found that

the educators expressed common beliefs, values and attitudes in their narratives, we chose the theory of agency as our framework of analysis.

One example of this type of agency and action is how the educators respond to the demand of the Finnish educational institutions that prior relevant, practical skills and knowledge should be taken into consideration when students are enrolled in a programme. The educators use their own previous experiences and knowledge (i.e. intercultural competence) to develop instruments for the necessary assessment-approved prior learning.

We also follow Van der Heijden et al. (2018, 348–349) and apply their general characteristics of agents of change: mastery, collaboration, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning. They describe these change agent characteristics as (1) mastery (giving guidance, being accessible, positive, committed, trustful and self-assured), (2) collaboration (being collegial), (3) entrepreneurship (being innovative and feeling responsible) and (4) lifelong learning (being eager to learn and reflective). After analysing the narratives of our educators, we use Van der Heijden et al'.s characteristics in the discussion section to support our interpretation of their narrative.

2.3. Intercultural competence as a means of social change

The concept of teachers' intercultural competence in this article is based on its use by Kermit and Holiman (Kermit and Holiman 2018) in their article discussing teachers' bilingual communication, which included deaf students from Norwegian higher education. Intercultural competence, as studied in this context, is the competence present in bilingual education, in which lecturers and students are equally responsible for the quality of communication (Kermit and Holiman 2018, 159; see also Spitzberg [2010] and; Howard-Hamilton et al. 1998 on students' intercultural competence).

Howard-Hamilton, Richardson and Shuford (1998, 9) show that an interculturally competent individual is regarded as having several attributes that can be categorised according to the following capacities: knowledge, skills and attitude. There is no general agreement as to what these attributes consist of. Howard-Hamilton, Richardson and Shuford (1998) describe the attributes that refer to students' intercultural competence in higher education and the meta-knowledge of intercultural communication that a counsellor (or in our case, an educator) must have. Sue and Sue (1999) categorise this meta-knowledge as follows: awareness of one's own assumptions, values, biases, limitations and world view; understanding of the world view of the other party; and ability to develop and adapt strategies to work with culturally different counterparts. Each attribute of intercultural competence can then be classified according to these capacities and categories (Howard-Hamilton et al. 1998).

One of the attributes of a culturally competent student referred to by Howard-Hamilton, Richardson and Shuford (Howard-Hamilton et al. 1998) is that of being 'knowledgeable about elements involved in social change' (11). Returning to the teachers' attributes, culturally competent teachers need not only to be knowledgeable of the elements involved in social change but also to be able to use their intercultural competence as part of their agency to initiate social change.

Based on these studies, we interpret intercultural competence as a tool for social change. In our study, we use the teachers' backgrounds and narratives of how they understand their and others' world views to establish their intercultural competence. We argue that they use this intercultural competence to develop and adapt strategies to handle the demands of different agents and thus bring about social change.

3. Method

This work is a qualitative case study. The data analysed in this article were collected through semi-structured individual interviews (Quinn Patton 2002) with the participants ($n = 4$). The interviews were transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff and Bock 2009). The theory of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) was used as a framework for the analysis.

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were four educators in the SLI programme at Humak in Finland. All four used both spoken Finnish and Finnish sign language. One participant was a child of deaf adults (CODA), and all four were experienced signers. All four were hearing, as no deaf educators were employed at the time of the study. The participants were all female and over the age of 40. They were qualified to teach at university and had extensive teaching experience in signed language and in spoken Finnish, with and without interpreters. Three of them were experienced certified signed language interpreters.

The study is relevant despite the small number of participants because, first, very few SLI programmes offer this type of training to both deaf and hearing students at the BA level (nine in Europe according to Lindsay 2016), and second, we interviewed four of the seven of the interpreting educators in the SLI programme at Humak. Furthermore, this programme is unique because it had been running for 15 years at the time of our interviews, and all of the educators interviewed had extensive teaching experience in the programme.

The educators in the SLI programme at Humak were invited to participate in the study. We contacted them through the programme team leader. Our selection criterion was experience in teaching SLI to deaf and hearing students together. Participation was voluntary. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, quotes from the interviews are labelled as 'Educator 1', 'Educator 2' and so on in the Results section.

3.2. Data

The interviews were conducted in February 2016 on-site at Humak at the participants' workplace and lasted approximately one hour each. The interviews were conducted in English, which was the foreign language shared by both the participants and researchers. The participants completed a background questionnaire comprising questions on language and demography. Afterwards, we conducted semi-structured interviews comprising questions about their experience of and perspective on teaching integrated groups of deaf and hearing students, their language choices when teaching and developing the interpreter education with

deaf and hearing students. After the interviews, follow-up questions by email were offered to the participants in which they could answer in either English or their L1, which was then translated into English.

Prior to the data collection, the questions for the semi-structured part of the interview had been developed based on previous literature on sign language interpreter education (Forestal 2005; Napier, McKee, and Goswell 2006) and our own experiences in the field. The questions were also motivated by the fact that our own institution was about to open an interpreter programme for deaf students. The questions were based on a literature review on interpreter education in general and deaf interpreter education in particular (e.g. Morgan and Adam 2012; Forestal 2005; McDermid 2010) and on our personal experience as educators. These questions were discussed in the research group, and then a final set of questions was decided for the interviews. During the discussions, it was decided not to have compound questions or leading questions but to be as open as possible while also ensuring that the formulated questions should generate answers relevant to our study.

The interviews were recorded on video. Two of the three authors of this paper, (Urdal and Skaten), participated in all the interviews and asked questions. The third author, Tiselius, participated in three of the four interviews and asked questions.

The interviews were transcribed by a research assistant. Following the qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff and Bock 2009), the three authors subsequently read the transcripts individually to obtain an inductive understanding of the data. Based on these perceptions of the data, the authors discussed possible theoretical frameworks for analysis in the first joint meeting. The discussion revealed the authors' individual inductive impressions of the teachers' actions in the data converged around topics related to 'initiatives to change', 'coping with change' and 'using previous experiences from deaf communities'. Based on these common topics, the theoretical framework of the theory of agency and intercultural competence, as described above, was chosen as the departure for analysis. The authors then individually went back to the material to further explore topics and quotes related to the theoretical framework. In their next joint meeting, the authors discussed the data once more and presented quotes that were relevant to the specific framework. The quotes were identified as being related to *agency* and perceived actions, possibly leading to *change* (see sections 4.2. and 4.3.). At this point, the researchers decided that saturation of the material was reached. In the Results section, in which we describe how the participants' narratives support the theoretical framework of agencies of change, we illustrate the main findings with representative quotes from the data.

3.3. Agency from different temporal dimensions

We used the theory of agency, as described in Section 2.2, as the framework for our analysis. In particular, we chose three temporal dimensions (i.e. past, present and future) to discuss the educators as agents of change. As we regard educators as acting as a collective to achieve change, we need to explore their experiences in the three temporal dimensions to understand the actions they perceive as possibly leading to change. Below, we describe how we used these temporal dimensions in our analysis.

3.3.1. The past

The past contributes to change in terms of the iterational or habitual aspects of the process of social engagement. In this qualitative case study, the past can be seen both as an experience from the earlier life of each educator (i.e. their background, upbringing, education and previous experience) and as the common past of the educators' collective (e.g. planning for the programme, creating course plans, admitting students, etc.). Thus, the 'past' is their past, as they describe in their narratives, which is where we find evidence to support our understanding of how the educators achieved their agency.

3.3.2. The present

Defined as practical – evaluative capacity, the present relates to what the educators do while the course is running. We understand the present in relation to how the educators describe their reactions to the demands made at different points in time during the interpreter programme. These demands can occur in a bottom-up or top-down manner and may relate to experiences that the participants had and/or initiatives that they took. In many respects, this 'present' lies in a temporal past – that is, the timespan between the start of the interpreting programme (2001) and our data collection (2016). This was the time during which our participants performed as agents of change. The present provides examples of how the educators act as interpreting educators and agents of change.

3.3.3. The future

The projective capacity, the future, in the case of our study relates to how the educators project the demands of students, the authorities or societal changes to invoke or create future change. We will give examples in which the educators reflected on how to proactively meet future demands as agents of change.

4. Results

In this section, we present the results in light of the threefold dimension of agency (i.e. informed by the past, oriented towards the future and part of the present), as agency cannot be understood as occurring at one point in time. All information in this section stems from the participants' narratives. We seek to show clearly how we interpret the content of their narratives based on the theory of agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and intercultural competence (Howard-Hamilton et al. 1998).

In our analysis, we labelled the different dimensions as follows:

- becoming an agent of change
- being an agent of change
- being an agent in a changing field

In this section, we elaborate on these different dimensions and illustrate them with quotes from our participants.

4.1. Becoming an agent of change

By understanding the past of the educators participating in this study, we can also understand their underlying values and motivations and what they draw upon to create responses – that is, how they evolve into agents of change. When the educators describe themselves and their backgrounds, they refer to their strong solidarity with the deaf communities of Finland. The educators describe themselves as well grounded in sign language culture and report affiliation with the deaf communities of Finland. Educator 1 says that 'we all come from the sign language community'.

The background questionnaire shows that the educators use both spoken Finnish and Finnish sign language as their languages for teaching. Educator 2 describes her background as a CODA: 'My parents are deaf, so I feel that my knowledge is in Finnish sign language linguistics and [spoken/written] Finnish and so on. I know the way of life of deaf people, and I can use it as a teacher'. These quotes are representative of our data and show that educators have a meta-awareness of their background, values and world view (cf. Sue et al. 1999), either strongly identifying with or having been raised in sign language communities. They also show mastery (Van der Heijden et al. 2018).

In addition to the participants' spoken language cultural competence,[3] they describe themselves as having 1) knowledge of signed language culture and history, 2) skills in signed language and interpreting and 3) attitudes that show alignment with deaf communities. The data support that the participants have intercultural competence in the three distinct capacities of knowledge, skills and attitude (Howard-Hamilton et al. 1998). This means that the participants can be considered to have high deaf competence (Kermit and Holiman 2018).

In conclusion, our participants describe their past in a way that supports that they have relevant intercultural competence, which likely contributes to them being agents of change in the field of sign language interpreter education.

4.2. Being an agent of change

Our data include the educators' narratives of their teaching experiences and actions to affect change. The participants act on demands and opportunities from KELA and educational legislation and from students, both deaf and hearing. In this section, we provide examples of how the participants report that they have acted at particular points in time to initiate change and/or meet demands from both students and institutions based on their own past experiences or expectations for the future. The examples show several different actions at the curriculum and classroom levels. The curriculum level covers the educators' personal reflections and institutional changes, while the classroom level covers the educators' professional development and adaptation to student needs. We give examples of the participants' narratives, which we interpret as the educators having the capacity to actively shape their response to different, potentially problematic situations rather than just react to events (cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

Our participants state that the general curriculum for the SLI programme has changed over the years. The experience of the educators contributes to meeting the needs of the entire student population, hearing and deaf. With respect to the deaf students, '[The] deaf students got more [teaching hours with] written [language] and less [with] signed

language' (Educator 4). At the same time, the participants reveal that the economic downturn (i.e. less funding for education) has put an end to some of these efforts.

Other contextual and structural factors that affect the educators' environment include demands, such as the need for different modes of interpreting (SLI or speech-to-text) and the choice of language varieties (Finnish sign language or signed Finnish). The demands come from 'associations for the hard of hearing' and 'deaf organisations and signed language companies' (Educator 1). The data show the educators' lifelong learning (Van der Heijden et al. 2018). The demands are also reflected in the results of the educators' research. All the different actors and/or factors place different and potentially conflicting demands on the education of students, making educational prioritising difficult. Although Educator 3 does not explicitly tell us how she changed her teaching, we believe that the conflicting demands are partly exemplified when she says, '[I'm] sure teaching deaf students has challenged my plans and challenged the tasks and rehearsals we do during the lessons and the tasks I give them to do after'. This quote also shows the educators' entrepreneurship (Van der Heijden et al. 2018).

Since 2011, in Finland, it has been possible in higher education to adapt the curricula to individual students, depending on the students' existing knowledge (formal and informal). The curricula can be adapted to allow students to skip certain parts of courses and to complete different tasks during a course. As Educator 4 puts it, 'We have a basic curriculum that we can adapt. We have a discussion with the student and find out what knowledge she already has'. Our participants report that it was possible for them to make certain adaptations, for example, for the students' different language and cultural backgrounds even before 2011 at Humak. This supports the characteristics of entrepreneurship (Van der Heijden et al. 2018). The educators have had a unique opportunity to adapt the curriculum to meet student's demands and needs. According to their narratives, to individually change the curriculum, the educators draw upon their intercultural competence and experience in the SLI field. According to Educator 2, 'I still recommend that both deaf and hearing interpreters should be educated. They should be educated in the same class, but sometimes they need to be separated. Sometimes they need to have their own discussions about language'. This indicates that she reflects on integrated groups, lesson planning and group division. Educator 1 stresses that the choices are not only with regard to language: 'It's never the language [of teaching]; it's the content'.

The educators also talk about professional development, and based on this discussion, they reflect on their own teaching. This is illustrated by Educator 3: 'I need to check, to reflect on what I am doing and then improve things'. A concrete example of this is the evaluation of language use in the classroom when the educators reflect on when to use signed language or spoken [language] with an interpreter when they teach. Due to the participants' past experiences, they can choose which language to use, depending on the topic and the goal, thereby including all the students in the classroom. An example of this is the quote from Educator 2: 'I alternated between speech and sign. It depends on the subject, depending on the situation, availability of interpreters and so on'. Signed language as the language of instruction is undoubtedly more straightforward for deaf students. However, acquiring meta comprehension of the parallel use of signed and spoken languages in interpreting situations can also be beneficial in preparing deaf interpreters for their future profession. In this context, high deaf competence, as described by Kermit and Holiman (Kermit and Holiman 2018) in terms of visual

teaching methods, appropriate language and interpreter use, is an important tool for inclusive teaching. The fact that the educators have access to both signed language and spoken Finnish and can decide which of these to use depending on the context supports our assumption that they have high deaf competence. The educators' ability to adapt their teaching shows the entrepreneurial characteristic of agency (Van der Heijden et al. 2018). However, the educators do not merely strive to develop their own teaching; they also see themselves as acting as agents of change in a collective manner.

The educators' narratives of their teaching practice boil down to how they can 'produce interpreters who can really live with the demands of the community' (Educator 1). Deaf communities, as well as society as a whole, are changing, and 'we are trying to cope with all of these new changes' (Educator 1). The educators perceive that they respond to the situational and students' demands by teaching deaf and hearing interpreters together. They also respond to the challenges by adapting their curriculum and changing their way of teaching, which shows their entrepreneurship (Van der Heijden et al. 2018).

4.3. *Being an agent in a changing field*

According to Educator 2, 'we have to understand that sign language is changing'. Through this data, we find that the educators sometimes use 'we' to refer to themselves as part of a teaching collective (cf. Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015). This can be labelled as collaboration (Van der Heijden et al. 2018). As agents of change, our participants identify external challenges (i.e. not coming from the training institution but from larger institutions) to which they feel the need to respond. Our case includes examples (Skaten, Urdal, and Tiselius 2020) such as the requirement by authorities that all signed language interpreters should have a degree and that they should all be assigned through KELA. According to our participants, this may challenge the education of deaf interpreters, as KELA does not necessarily see the need for deaf interpreters.

Our educators report on the external challenges in educating sign language interpreters, such as the disruption caused by the large proportion of Finnish deaf children who are receiving CIs (Rainò 2012), leading to language change, as Educator 2 notes above. The pedagogical ideology of integrating deaf children into the mainstream hearing classroom in combination with the support of a medical – technical device (i.e. CIs) is resulting in societal change (Rainò 2012). This change means that the educational norm is integrating into a mainstream classroom with an interpreter rather than being at a deaf school (Murray et al. 2020). Consequently, these children are not exposed to a natural signed language, as would have been the case had they attended a deaf school. In some cases, the interpreter may be their only language model, as described by Educator 3:

> I don't see teaching signs as traditionally being a task of interpreters during the assignment. That is what the interpreters in the field are told they are supposed to do, and they are actually the main language model for most of the pupils.

In Finland, sign language interpreters report that deaf children with CIs lack the sign language skills necessary to comprehend educational content through sign language interpreters. They also lack the necessary spoken language skills (Rainò 2012), as reflected in Educator 4's comment on CIs:

> In the wake of cochlear implants, the whole field is greatly changing. The needs [for interpreting] of people with CIs are quite different from those of traditional deaf people, so we are confronted with new, unknown things in both education and the profession.

Currently, signed Finnish[4] is being introduced to the mainstream hard-of-hearing children in basic education as a possible language. The educators believe that the cornerstones of university education in Finnish sign language and SLI, as well as the way of educating interpreters, are threatened. Educator 2 expresses this as follows: 'There is a new era of deafness [. . .], we should unify our forces [. . .], we should talk about it, but not even sign language researchers want to talk about it'. This comment, which can be understood to refer to a greater collective than the teaching collegiate, also shows a desire for entrepreneurship (i.e. innovativeness and responsibility) in dealing with structural changes perceived as threatening. The examples show that the educators discuss changes and consider how to adapt to them (e.g. through changes in the curriculum). Educator 1 reflects on how to make practical changes to education: 'What should we teach our students?' When reflecting on the diverse language situation for deaf children that has been brought about by the introduction of CIs, she says that they ask themselves the following question: 'What do you teach if you teach [for that kind of] diversity?' Educator 1 also points out, 'We do not have any answers as to what the method is'. This comment should not be understood as resistance of the educators to the changing landscape but rather as a call to action. More concretely, the educators also discuss practical matters, such as how to meet the new demands of language varieties. An example of the discussions that were ongoing at the time of the data collection is the possibility of teaching the different approaches to interpreting (e.g. Finnish sign language and signed Finnish) separately on different campuses.

As shown by these narratives, the challenges are on a societal level, outside the teaching environment, but they are perceived by the teachers as having an effect on the programme requirements, which will challenge them to change the curriculum. The challenges can also be perceived as threats to education or the educators' personal beliefs, values and attitudes, as expressed by Educator 2:

> . . . but now I feel that something has, is being changed. I don't know whether it is because of this new cochlear implant era, when sign language, the area of sign language and using sign language are going to be reduced, or if there is, you know, this threat of something

In conclusion, we obtain quotes from our participants on their past, their present and how they perceive the future. Their stories indicate how they perceive their role as teachers and educators and how they understand the challenges from the students or education and from society at large. Due to their intercultural competence, the educators consider most of these challenges as opportunities to create changes for improvement. However, some of the external challenges are seen as threats to signed language, SLI and signed language interpreter education.

5. Discussion

We have analysed our data from three temporal perspectives of the educators: the past (what shaped them into agents of change), the present (how they act as agents of change) and the future (how they perceive the future as agents in a changing field). We have shown that even when change is not necessarily seen as positive by the educators, they

use their experience and background to find solutions to integrate their convictions and the demands of society (e.g. workplace readiness). Our research question is whether the educators at Humak can be considered agents of change, and we argue that they can.

5.1. Characteristics of change

With regard to mastery, Van der Heijden et al'.s (2018, 348–349) first characteristic of change, we did not investigate our participants' teaching skills per se, but their narratives show evidence of their commitment to and passion for their practice as teachers (e.g. when they need to reflect on their teaching and improve, if necessary). According to Van der Heijden et al. (2018), this is one of the characteristics of mastery.

Regarding collaboration, the narratives indicate the educators' close connections with the deaf communities of Finland and their students and colleagues (e.g. how they use the collective 'we' and how they discuss with students how to adapt the curriculum and identify approved prior learning). However, we do not find any evidence in terms of collaboration with disruptive agents, such as KELA, or with agents promoting signed Finnish. This may be due to the educators' values, motivation and intercultural competence. We can assume that their past, which created their strong affiliation with the deaf communities of Finland, formed their views on signed Finnish and the impact of KELA.

In terms of entrepreneurship, we argue that they have shown entrepreneurship by initiating education and adapting the curriculum, as well as by developing their own teaching over time by adapting it to the needs of both deaf and hearing students. Biesta and Tedder (2007) suggest that agency can be understood based on the quality of engagement rather than the power of the individual actor. In terms of adapting to recent external demands, the educators' narratives show reluctance and criticism at the individual level, whereas at the professional level, they show a pragmatic determination to cope with these changes. When applying Biesta and Tedder's (Biesta and Tedder 2007) model, the fact that the educators are reluctant yet determined is proof of the quality of engagement. Willingness or the capacity to adapt is also a condition for social change.

For lifelong learning, our participants' narratives describe how they adapt their teaching following input from students and after evaluating themselves. They also discuss challenges in the field, which shows that they engage in lifelong learning. With this support for the general characteristics of agents of change, we argue that our participants are truly agents of change.

5.2. Collective agency

On the methodological level, Biesta and Tedder (2007) use their model to investigate individual agency. In their paper, they invite others to use it to study collective agency, which we have done in this paper. We have applied their model to analyse the educators' agency and show how they could become agents, how we understand them as being agents and how they could be seen as agents in a changing field. We believe that the model lent itself well to this type of application. Biesta and Tedder stress that understanding achievement requires an understanding of the ecological conditions in which agency is achieved. We have investigated the collective agency of the SLI faculty at Humak by analysing their conditions through their narratives (and also those of their students; see Skaten, Urdal, and Tiselius 2020).

5.3. Intercultural and deaf competence

This study aims to explore the educators' role as potential agents of change, challenging the curriculum that may lead to social change for interpreting students. Based on our findings, we argue that being interculturally competent is a crucial element enabling our educators to become agents of social change. Educators who are agents of social change may contribute to changes in educational programmes. In the case of integrated SLI programmes, they can contribute to making these programmes relevant for all students, deaf and hearing alike, as well as society.

In terms of deaf competence, our analysis shows that our participants have a high level of deaf competence (Kermit and Holiman 2018). Their narratives bear evidence of them being interculturally competent. The intercultural competence embedded in the participants' past contributed to them being agents of change in the present. Moreover, being interculturally competent has allowed them to identify areas where actions are needed to create a level playing field for deaf interpreting students. An example of these actions is choosing the language of instruction at different moments and in different aspects of the curriculum. Another action is anticipating what is needed to prepare for the future, such as changing the curriculum.

5.4. Limitations

The main limitations of this study are the small number of participants and the fact that only one country was studied. Nevertheless, the educators of the specific SLI programme chosen had experience from all 20 years of the programme's history. The programme has also taught both deaf and hearing students from the start. Therefore, we believe that our study, although small, can be an example for educators of other SLI programmes on how to become agents of change.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, our study enriches the understanding of how teachers may contribute consciously and unconsciously to the empowerment of deaf and hearing students in interpreter education. In the case of Finland, this has been manifested through the change in how students are given credit for previous knowledge (Section 2.2) and through the changes in the curriculum to reflect the students' different language backgrounds (Section 4.2). By showing how the teachers in this case study describe their role, we reveal the importance of having a reflective approach to interpreter education in general and the role of interpreter teachers in particular.

Notes

1. Students in these programmes study to become sign language interpreters, both deaf and hearing. Deaf sign language interpreters interpret primarily between or within different national signed languages or between International Sign and a national sign language. Hearing sign language interpreters interpret between spoken and signed languages.

2. Deaf competence is described as the knowledge of deaf students' needs, consciousness of using visually oriented teaching methods, and appropriate language and interpreter use (Kermit and Holiman 2018).
3. We base our assumption of the participants spoken language cultural competence on their background information, in which they state that they are, in addition to being hearing, also trained as hearing sign language interpreters and hearing teachers.
4. We have not been able to find a definition for Signed Finnish in English, but for the similar phenomenon of Signed American English, Collins dictionary gives the following definition: 'a form of communication employing the signs of American Sign Language but using English grammar in place of ASL syntax and using invented forms for English grammatical elements, such as of, to, the, and -ing, where no ASL sign exists' (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/signed-english).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Gro Hege Saltnes Urdal http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9881-4250
Ingeborg Skaten http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0251-9063
Elisabet Tiselius http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2285-6729

References

Biesta, G., M. Priestley, and S. Robinson. 2015. "The Role of Beliefs in Teacher Agency." *Teachers & Teaching* 21 (6): 624–640. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325.

Biesta, G., and M. Tedder. 2007. "Agency and Learning in the Lifecourse: Towards an Ecological Perspective." *Studies in the Education of Adults* 39 (2): 132–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Bontempo, K., D. Goswell, P. Levitzke-Gray, J. Napier, and L. Warby. 2014. "Testing Times: Towards the Professionalization of Deaf Interpreters in Australia." In *Deaf Interpreters at Work: International Insights*, edited by R. Adam, C. Stone, S. D. Collins, and M. Metzger, 51–89. Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Emirbayer, M., and A. Mische. 1998. "What is Agency?" *The American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4): 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294.

Forestal, E. 2005. "The Emerging Professionals: Deaf Interpreters and Their Views and Experiences on Training." In *Sign Language Interpreting and Interpreter Education*, edited by M. Marschark, R. Peterson, and E. A. Winston, 235–258. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Howard-Hamilton, M., F. Brenda, J. Richardson, and B. Shuford. 1998. "Promoting Multicultural Education: A Holistic Approach." *College Student Affairs Journal* 18 (1): 5–17.

Kermit, P. S., and S. M. Holiman. 2018. "Inclusion in Norwegian Higher Education: Deaf students' Experiences with Lecturers." *Social Inclusion* 6 (4): 158–167. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v6i4.1656.

Krippendorff, K., and M. A. Bock. 2009. *The Content Analysis Reader*. California: Sage.

Leigh, I. W. 2020. "Deaf Identities: A Maturing Framework." In *Deaf Identities. Exploring New Frontiers*, edited by I. W. Leigh and C. A. O'Brien, 1–27. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lindsay, M. S. 2016. *Deaf Interpreters in Europe - A Comprehensive European Survey of the Situation of Deaf Interpreters Today*. Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364029312DEAFINTERPRETERSINEUROPE_-acomprehensiveEuropeansurveyofthesituationofDeafInterpreterstoday.

Llewellyn-Jones, P., and R. G. Lee. 2013. "Getting to the Core of Role: Defining interpreters' Role Space." *International Journal of Interpreter Education* 5 (2): 54–72.
Ludwig, K. 2016. "From Individual to Plural Agency." In *Collective Action: Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
McDermid, C. 2010. "Culture Brokers, Advocates, or Conduits: Pedagogical Considerations for Deaf Interpreter Education." *International Journal of Interpreter Education* 2:76–101.
Morgan, P., and R. Adam. 2012. "Deaf Interpreters in Mental Health Settings: Some Reflections on and Thoughts about Deaf Interpreter Education." In *Our Hands: Educating Healthcare Interpreters*, edited by L. Swabey and K. Malcolm, 190–208. Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press.
Murray, J. J., K. Snoddon, M. De Meulder, and K. Underwood. 2020. "Intersectional Inclusion for Deaf Learners: Moving Beyond General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 24 (7): 691–705. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1482013.
Napier, J., R. McKee, and D. Goswell. 2006. *Sign Language Interpreting: Theory and Practice in Australia and New Zealand*. Annandale: The federation press.
Priestley, M., R. Edwards, A. Priestley, and K. Miller. 2012. "Teacher Agency in Curriculum Making: Agents of Change and Spaces for Manoeuvre." *Curriculum Inquiry* 42 (2): 191–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2012.00588.x.
Quinn Patton, M. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. London: Sage.
Rainò, P. 2012. *Language Choices and the Need for Interpreting Services for Deaf Children and Young People with Cochlear Implants*. Helsinki: Humak Publications 13.
Rogers, J. 2018. "Exploring Deaf Interpreter Education: Narratives from Practitioners and Students." In *The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education. Pursuing Evidence-Based Practices*, edited by C. B. Roy and E. A. Winston, 19–47. Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press.
Skaten, I., G. H. S. Urdal, and E. Tiselius. 2020. "Exploring deaf sign language interpreting students' experiences from joint sign language interpreting programs for deaf and hearing students in Finland." *Translation & Interpreting Studies* 16 (3): 347–367. https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.18033.ska.
Spitzberg, B. H. 2010. *"Axioms for a Theory of Intercultural Communication Competence."intercultural Communication: A Reader*, edited by L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter and E. R. McDaniel, 424–434. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
Sue, D. W., D. Sue, H. A. Neville, and L. Smith. 1999. *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
Tate, G., and G. Turner. 2001. "The Code and the Culture: Sign Language Interpreters-In Search of the New Breed's Ethics." In *Interpreting interpreting: Studies & Reflections on Sign Language Interpreting*, edited by F. J. Harrington and G. Turner, 56–66. Gloucestershire: Douglas McLean.
Van der Heijden, H. R. M. A., D. Beijaard, J. J. M. Geldens, and H. L. Popeijus. 2018. "Understanding Teachers as Change Agents: An Investigation of Primary School teachers' Self-Perception." *Journal of Educational Change* 19 (3): 347–373. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9320-9.