INTERPRETERS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

A Resource Document

Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada

June, 1992
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I. PURPOSE

This document is intended to assist staff in educational settings (elementary and secondary) in the hiring, supervision and coordination of interpreters for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students with a view to ensuring that these individuals provide appropriate services, are competent, and meet acceptable standards. It is also intended to assist in the development of job descriptions for interpreters in educational settings so that administrators, teachers, students and interpreters have clarity about the role of the interpreter. The primary focus throughout this document is on the provision of sign language interpreting services. Those interested in employment of oral communication facilitators are encouraged to contact AVLIC for further information.

It is suggested that a candidate applying for an interpreting position in the educational setting receive a copy of this document. This resource is available in both official languages and may be obtained from:

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II. INTRODUCTION

This resource guide is the product of two years of activity, coordinated by Darlene Karran and Barb Marsh, along with members of the Educational Interpreting Ad Hoc Committee: Linda Cundy, Deaf educator; Angela Stratiy, Program Chair, Interpreter Training Program; Cathy Kruger, Canadian Association of the Deaf, Representative; Jill Gift, Association of Canadian Educators of the Hearing Impaired, Representative, and the provincial interpreting organizations' Educational Committee members. AVLIC would like to congratulate each of the committee participants on completing the task with such dedication and thoroughness, and thank them for their valuable contributions to our profession. A special thanks is due to Alberta Vocational College, Calgary, for their contribution towards the printing of this document.

AVLIC recognizes the need for such a document to offer guidance and assistance to those persons involved in providing quality interpreting services in educational settings. We also understand that much of our work is just beginning, as we strive towards enhanced training opportunities for interpreters, certification and improved working conditions for interpreters in educational settings. It is our hope that this document will stimulate continued advancement of our profession and serve to improve upon the services presently offered to d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. It also needs to be stated that the views in this document are views expressed by a majority of interpreters working in educational settings across this country, and may not reflect the views of administrators and educators in some jurisdictions.

The field of education can be a controversial one and is one that is filled with many issues for interpreters. Some of these issues currently include:

* qualifications of interpreters in educational settings
* language policies within the school systems
* role delineation
* the closure of the Saskatchewan School for the Deaf and the threat of closure of other programs for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing children
* appropriateness of using interpreters with very young d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing children versus the placement of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing children with teachers who can communicate directly with the students
* hiring practices
* salary and benefit issues
* supervision of interpreters
* ethical concerns
* information explosion related to interpreting

It is not the intent of this document to deal with the myriad of issues facing education today, but rather to state our position on the major issues affecting interpreters. AVLIC hopes by stating our position that we will then be opening the doors to further discussions with interested parties. Increasingly, discussions are being held across this country about the best options for educating d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. As a Board of Directors, we too have discussed the educational options and the place of interpreters in education. The current Board of Directors has unanimously agreed that the preferred option for educating d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students is in programs designed with full accessibility to communication. It is our opinion that Schools for the Deaf and day programs serving d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students are the preferred option, with a teaching staff who can communicate directly with students, where there are critical numbers of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students for peer interaction, where there are adult Deaf role models and where the student is guaranteed full access to an equitable education in the least restrictive environment. AVLIC supports the Deaf community at the national and provincial levels, in their lobbying efforts to have Schools for the Deaf remain an equal option for all students. We also support the Deaf community in its desire to use qualified interpreters at the post-secondary level for students who wish to access education in that manner. AVLIC also recognizes that not every geographic area in this country may have programs designed for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, and that some jurisdictions may decide to mainstream d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. AVLIC believes that if quality education is to be offered when employing interpreters that these individuals must possess suitable training, experience and be working towards meeting standards as determined by the professional associations. AVLIC also believes that interpreters in educational settings must be just that, interpreters, first and foremost. Without interpreting abilities, they cannot function as part of an educational team. We recognize the nature of education and the realities of funding and resources, acknowledging that interpreters sometimes have additional responsibilities within that setting. Our position remains, though, that their primary function is to interpret and when interpreting is required they should not be required to perform other functions. We also believe the function of an Oral
Communication Facilitator, or Oral Interpreter, and a Sign Language Interpreter to be equal in status, and when employing such individuals, they must have training and meet high standards.

AVLIC has been criticized by some readers of this document who believe we have emphasized American Sign Language (ASL), with less attention given to sign systems. As stated in the AVLIC Canadian Evaluation System Manual, practice has demonstrated that those individuals with skills only in a signed English system may not be able to function in ASL, which may be the language of preference for the student. Provincial governments in several provinces have recognized ASL as the language of the Deaf Community and have supported its use as one of the educational options available. Increasingly, those involved in the field of education are aware of the Bilingual/Bicultural research occurring throughout the world and its impact on the education of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

AVLIC has engaged in a process of consultation with major consumer organizations representing the interests of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing people and we have studied the interpreting process. It is from that consultation and knowledge base that we state our belief that interpreters must have interpreting abilities. If interpreters have strong skills in American Sign Language and English with solid interpreting abilities then it is likely they can accommodate student preferences and/or school policies that desire more English-like transliterations. Providing accurate and meaningful interpretation is our emphasis, whether it is in ASL or a signed English system.

AVLIC’s emphasis is on interpreters possessing ALL of the skills needed to ensure they are providing quality interpretation to d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

AVLIC wishes to acknowledge the controversial issues and state a majority position on some of the issues affecting those working as interpreters in the educational setting. We look forward to continued discussions among colleagues and stakeholder groups, such as the Deaf Community, educators, parents, students and professional organizations at the national and provincial levels, as we strive to reach solutions that are timely and educationally sound. It is our hope that this document will serve as a guide in our efforts and advancement.

Board of Directors, 1990-1992
Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada

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III. JOB TITLE

Interpreters working in the educational setting are first and foremost interpreters. They may perform different tasks from community interpreters, but without interpreting skills -- oral or sign -- they cannot function as part of an educational team. It is therefore recommended that the job title "Interpreter" be used for those interpreting in the educational setting. This does not diminish the role of interpreters in the educational setting and also does not differentiate these interpreters from those in the community.

Job titles obviously vary. Large programs for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students may have sizeable interpreting staffs, leading to distinctions such as "Interpreter Co-ordinator", "Lead Interpreter", or "Senior" Interpreter.

A clear distinction should be made between interpreters and aides. Although interpreters, like aides, do have supporting roles in the educational setting, the use of the term "aide" should be avoided in job titles of interpreters. Interpreters occasionally may perform duties similar to those of aides, but it should be remembered that their primary responsibility is interpreting. There is an inherent risk that the use of the term "aide" will lead the teacher or other school personnel to assign interpreters aide-related tasks at the expense of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

Furthermore, as a matter of administrative convenience, an already existing job title such as "teacher's aide" will sometimes be given to interpreters, who may be locked into title, wage and benefits, role expectations, etc. designed for persons with different kinds of responsibilities.
IV. JOB DESCRIPTION

It is crucial for both interpreters and employing schools or school systems that job descriptions be prepared for interpreters in educational settings.

The job description should be developed by local school administrators in conjunction with experts in the field (the local interpreting chapter and members of the Deaf Community) to meet local needs and specifications. Professional assistance is available through a variety of sources, this document being one. Appendix B contains a list of professional resources.

A generic job description can be used with the inclusion of the following:

A. Job Title (See Section III)
B. Responsibilities (See Section X)
C. Supervision (See Section IX)
D. Qualifications (See Section VI)
E. Remuneration (Appendix E)
V. ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

The fundamental role of interpreters, regardless of specialty or place of employment, is to facilitate communication between d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons and others. Interpreters in the educational setting facilitate communication between d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students and others, including teachers, other service providers, and peers, within an educational environment, usually a mainstream setting.

The educational interpreter functions as an integral part of an educational team by commenting on the interpreting process (including the students’ language preferences and skills) and contributing to the discussion of the appropriateness of interpreting services within a particular placement. Interpreters also help to educate others about interpreting by participating in workshops and inservices as a facilitator or as a participant.

While engaged in interpreting, interpreters should not be asked to interrupt this activity in order to perform some other task. Similarly, when the need arises for both interpreting and some other task, interpreting should take priority. When not actually interpreting, interpreters may perform other tasks which would not interfere with the need to remain "on call" for interpreting. Judgment is required in each situation. However, the teacher must be cognizant of the fact that if the interpreter is out of the classroom, the student’s access to communication will be severely hindered. Incidental learning often takes place in the classroom, thus the rationale for interpreters to be easily accessible.

"The role of interpreters in the educational setting should not include classroom management, i.e., formal instruction or classroom supervision" (Report of the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting, 1989, p. 7). If the interpreter’s duties include tutoring, it should be under the supervision of the teacher.

The choice of language or communication method will be subject to the communication policy of the educational jurisdiction and the decisions of the educational team" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990, p. 9).
VI. QUALIFICATIONS

Mandatory

Interpreters in the educational setting are required to have the following:

1. Graduation from a recognized interpreter training program (ITP).
2. Ability to interpret. (As evidenced through a screening committee comprised of Deaf Community members and representatives from professional interpreting organizations).
3. Hold active membership in the provincial and national organizations.

OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING

1. Fluency in English and American Sign Language (ASL) or French and La langue des signes du Quebec (LSQ).
3. Ability to interpret. (As evidenced through a screening committee comprised of Deaf Community members and representatives from professional interpreting organizations).
4. Knowledge and understanding of Deaf culture.
5. Experience in interpreting. Some individuals may not have had formal training, but may be fluent in American Sign Language through their active involvement with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people over a number of years.
6. Is a member of the provincial and/or national organization.

NOTE: Regardless of the educational level at which interpreters will work, candidates should be competent in the use of spoken and written English/French.
Recommended

1. Certification from AVLIC (or RID). (See Section VIII, Certification)

2. If uncertified at the time of hiring, it is recommended that the candidate be required to enter the Canadian Evaluation System process within five years of employment.

3. Interpreters should demonstrate maturity, flexibility, objectivity, and a professional attitude. In addition, they should have the ability to work as team members, and the ability to work with students.

4. If the position involves interpreting at the post-secondary level, completion of a post-secondary program would be preferred.

5. Knowledge of child development.

NOTE:

It is strongly recommended that interview panels of school boards, educational institutions and Provincial Schools enlist the assistance of professional agencies, such as AVLIC or the local provincial association of Sign Language Interpreters as well as Deaf organizations, in determining the appropriateness of candidates.
VII. HIRING PROCEDURES

Job Announcement and Recruitment

For assistance in recruitment, contacts might be made with interpreter preparation programs, interpreter service agencies and interpreter organizations (Appendix B) in the region. Local Schools for the Deaf and post secondary programs already serving d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students may also be helpful in identifying possible recruitment sources.

Interpreting and d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing organizations publish newsletters on a regular basis. These newsletters reach a broad range of interpreters and are an excellent medium in which to advertise an interpreting position.

Job Application

Applications should be screened by personnel, either on the staff or serving in a consulting capacity, who are knowledgeable about Deaf Culture and the profession of sign language interpreting in the educational setting, and if practicable, knowledgeable also about the particular educational setting in which interpreters will be employed.

Interview

The interview panel should include persons (d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing and hearing) who are knowledgeable about the process of interpreting in an educational setting and understand the guidelines outlined regarding qualifications. If the expertise is not available locally, then the provincial interpreting organization or the national interpreter organization (AVLIC) should be able to provide assistance. It is suggested that all candidates demonstrate their interpreting skills on videotape for persons qualified to make an assessment. If it is not possible to include a member of the Deaf Community or an interpreter on the interview panel, the videotape should be made available to them. It is suggested that the audio portion of the videotape be scripted to enable the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing panel member to evaluate the interpreter’s performance.
VIII. CERTIFICATION

The United States Commission on Education of the Deaf has stated:

"It is vitally important to students who are deaf that only interpreters possessing appropriate qualifications be employed in regular educational settings". (Commission on Education of the Deaf, 1988, p. 49)

AVLIC concurs that interpreters should be appropriately qualified to be employed in educational settings. It is necessary to develop standardization because of the variance of skills.

AVLIC has developed the Canadian Evaluation System (CES) which is the Canadian certification system for visual language interpreters. Candidates are evaluated in a two step process:

1. Written Test of Knowledge (interpretative theory, Deaf Culture and history of interpreting).
2. Test of Interpretation - performance test determining competence in:
   ASL as a target language;
   English as a target language;
   Message equivalency in the interpreting process.

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in the United States also has an evaluation system for interpreters. Neither the Canadian nor the American evaluation systems assess the factors associated with carrying out the responsibilities of interpreters in the educational setting. However, certification by either AVLIC or RID would ensure that d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, their teachers, and their hearing peers in mainstream settings have interpreters who are skilled in relaying information accurately and intelligibly in support of the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing student. For information about certification procedures see Appendix H.
IX. WORKING CONDITIONS

This discussion of working conditions focuses on interpreters in the educational setting who are employed as members of the educational team -- they may be salaried or hourly, full or part time, or contracted.

A. Compensation, Hours and Benefits

Pay level should be based on interpreting skill, education, experience, certification, (by AVLIC or RID) performance and job responsibilities. The decision with regard to compensation should be determined by a person in a position to evaluate interpreters' skills. This does not mean a school administrator who may be able to look at job responsibilities, but who is otherwise unqualified to assess interpreting skill. (See Appendix E for Sample Salary Grid)

Interpreters who are paid on an hourly basis should have a guaranteed work week if working less than full-time. It is highly recommended that a minimum hourly work week be arranged so that in the event of student absence, interpreters will be given time to prepare for classes (prep time).

Like other school employees, interpreters in the educational setting should be given a reasonable assurance of employment for the full academic year. "If, however, an interpreter joins the staff to interpret for one particular student, and that student leaves for any reason in mid-year, the interpreter may be left without responsibilities" (Report of the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting, 1989, p. 16). A cancellation clause should be part of the employment terms in order to fairly compensate the interpreters should their services be terminated as a result of a student leaving. Interpreters should be treated the same as other employees and receive the same benefits package. Professional development leave and training warrant special attention in this regard and are discussed under Part IV of this section.

B. Schedule

There needs to be a schedule that outlines clearly the interpreter's work activities, including adequate preparation time. To avoid fatigue and reduction of effectiveness, interpreters should not be asked to interpret continuously for long periods of time, i.e., more than 40 - 60 minutes. Interpreters require a 5 - 10 minute break each hour. If lectures or presentations are complex and intense in nature or exceed one hour without a break, a team approach (using two interpreters) should be used. Prolonged interpreting without a break introduces a health risk for interpreters in the form of
Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI), such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Overuse Syndrome, Tendonitis, etc. (Appendices A and I).

"Provisions must be in place in the event that the regular interpreter is absent. A list of previously screened substitute interpreters should be available. If an interpreter is not available, notetaking services should be provided" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990, p. 8). It is also recommended that notetaking services be available for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students at all times.

i. Preparation
Interpreters need time and space (desk/office) for preparation. Preparation involves such activities as pre-reading and previewing of instructional materials (e.g. videos, films, class presentations, etc.) to gain knowledge of the content in order for the material to be accurately interpreted. Time is also needed for consultation and collaboration with teachers and other members of the educational team. Interpreters need prep time in order to perform the interpreting task effectively, which enhances the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students' education.

ii. Special Considerations
Under no circumstances should interpreters take on the responsibility of the teacher for management of the class or other duties for which they do not have the necessary training or background knowledge. The interpreters' duties should be consistent with the job description and other school guidelines.

If an interpreting situation is complex and requires intense interpreting, special consideration must be given to either arranging for a team interpreter, or to allowing the interpreter more frequent short breaks than normally would be required. As stated above, this would help to reduce the incidence of RSI. For this reason, it is also recommended interpreters have input into scheduling. (Appendix I)

iii. Physical Environment
It is important for interpreters in the educational setting to assume responsibility for appropriate seating, lighting and positioning considerations. Interpreters should have suitable space for unobstructed classroom interpreting. Other conditions will come into play when interpreting for assemblies, dramatic presentations, student parliament meetings, field trips, films and meetings with counsellors and other school officials. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990, p. 8)
C. Supervision

"The educational jurisdiction is responsible for assuring that interpreters have appropriate supervision" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990, p. 8). Schools or school systems that employ numerous interpreters should consider employing an interpreter with the credentials and skills to serve in an administrative/supervisory role. In situations where supervisors or educational authorities lack the knowledge and experience of interpreting, outside expertise should be called in for assistance. Agencies such as AVLIC, provincial interpreter organizations or a recognized interpreter training program can provide the necessary help.

Interpreters should be evaluated in the same manner as the other staff members regarding job performance. In addition to the routine supervision of employees, attention must be paid to specific interpreting competencies.

D. Professional Development and Advancement

It is highly recommended that all non-certified interpreters strive toward certification within five years of recruitment. Certified interpreters should be required to maintain their certification. AVLIC has an evaluation system in place and may be contacted for further information. (Appendices B and H).

Planned professional development activities should be available for interpreters as they are for teachers and other school employees. In addition to activities for all professional staff, it is recommended that interpreters also participate in the following kinds of activities:

* join their provincial and national organization of professional interpreters (Appendix B) in order to be kept abreast of ongoing training and informational workshops for interpreters;
* train toward AVLIC certification;
* develop a basic knowledge in foundations of education and/or in the education of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students;
* continue skill development in ASL to English and English to ASL interpretation as well as other specific communication methods;
* attend workshops sponsored by the provincial and/or national organizations.

Interpreters and their supervisors are encouraged to draw upon staff and community resources to augment the interpreters' professional development.
X. RESPONSIBILITIES OF INTERPRETERS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

The responsibility of interpreters in educational settings is to provide interpreting services for the complete range of instructional activities within educational programs. Interpreting is not limited to classroom programs but includes out of classroom activities such as:

* Guidance and counselling sessions
* Student parliament meetings
* Extra Curricular activities
* Tutorials (under the guidance and supervision of the teacher)
* Parent/student meetings; field trips; assemblies

As stated under section V. Role of the Interpreter, the interpreters' primary role is to interpret. They should not be interrupted from this task to perform other duties. However, should a student be absent and the interpreters do not feel they need more prep time, they may be required to carry out other duties in addition to interpreting. Interpreters should not be assigned responsibilities for which they are not qualified.

Written guidelines and inservice training are one way to ensure that the interpreters' roles and responsibilities are understood by teachers and others who make up the educational team, by the students who will be using the service, by their parents, and, by the interpreters.

Interpreters are expected to maintain membership in professional interpreter organizations and should adhere to the Code of Ethics of the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC). (Code of Ethics, Appendix G). The role and responsibilities of interpreters will further be guided by the policies of the particular educational authority. It is, therefore, important that the educational jurisdiction recognize the professional parameters of the interpreters and that the interpreters recognize those of the educational setting.

Interpreters' Responsibilities

Interpreters:

* accurately interpret instructional information including the subtleties and nuances that the speaker conveys.
* convey a student's questions or replies to questions to the teacher and the class in the language level used by the student.
* encourage teacher/staff and d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing students to speak to one another directly while facilitating and assisting in communication.

* are willing to work in a given setting, keeping in mind that each class has its own procedures and technical language; understand the material; and are able to interpret the subject without personal bias or emotion (i.e. sex education class, school counselling services, etc.). In the event that new class material will be presented, interpreters will spend time to become familiar with it.

* consult with the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student, members of the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, and/or interpreting community, regarding appropriate signs for new or technical terminology, in order to avoid introducing erroneously invented sign vocabulary.

* may be required to interpret questions on a test while ensuring that the answer is not divulged.

* may, with permission from the instructor, and initiated by the student, interpret the student’s sign language into English in order to assist the student in his/her written English.

* sign all spoken messages and voice all signed messages in class.

* are available to provide information about the dynamics of interpreting at educational conferences, case meetings, and parent/teacher interviews.

* assist school staff and other individuals by providing information or referring them to other sources on Deaf Culture and sign language.

* will be familiar with school rules.

* consider carefully their attire in order to reduce eye strain for the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student. The hands must be clearly visible against the interpreters’ clothing. Interpreters should position themselves close to the teacher in order for the student to be able to view both with ease.

* maintain confidentiality of information regarding students (such as grades, behaviour, personal information). Interpreters function as an integral part of the educational team and therefore may have access to certain information. This information may be discussed within a case conference but must be kept confidential within that setting.

* stay in the role of interpreter during the interpreting process.

* do not censor what is spoken or signed.

* cannot take responsibility for students’ classroom performance or absences.

* must be aware of conflicts of interest and, in consultation with the school administration, have in place strategies for dealing with conflicts should they arise. (eg. the interpreter may need to leave the situation or find a replacement interpreter, etc.)
XI. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TEACHER WHEN WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER

The teacher must understand the role of interpreters and facilitate the effective use of interpreting services. The classroom teacher:

* ensures interpreters have access to all materials necessary for adequate preparation.
* needs to be available on a regular basis for consultation and collaborative planning with the interpreters.
* in collaboration with the interpreter ensures that the student is able to make effective use of interpreting services (Ministry of Education, 1990, p. 12).
* respects the individuality of the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student, while maintaining the same expectations for behaviour and performance for all students.
* accepts responsibility for classroom management of ALL students.

Suggestions for Teachers Working with Interpreters

In order for the student to participate fully in the mainstreamed setting, the teacher should:

* be aware that interpreters will interpret in first person, using "I" to identify the speaker, d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing or hearing.
* address the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student directly in order to establish rapport.
* speak at a normal rate. This enables the interpreter to provide a smooth interpretation.
* avoid movements which distract or block the student’s view of the interpreter or the teacher.
* provide the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student and the interpreter with information on program structure and content in advance. This will facilitate the student’s ability to follow the process and comprehend the information. This also allows interpreters to research vocabulary and interpret content accurately.
* use visual aids such as the blackboard and overhead projectors as they provide additional information for students and interpreters.
* not say things to the interpreter in the presence of the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student that you do not want interpreted.
* make provisions for note-taking for the d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing student during class lectures. It is impossible for the student to watch the interpreter and take notes at the same time.