

Overview of the Role of the Educational Interpreter

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An educational interpreter is a communication specialist who bridges the gap between the deaf student and the mainstream educational environment.

This is the singular role of the educational interpreter and affects every decision made throughout the workday. The overriding goal of the educational interpreter is to help Deaf and hard of hearing students become independent learners who use interpreters properly throughout their education. These habits are developed in childhood and have a strong connection with long-term success both academically and vocationally.

Why we do what we do (and why we don't do what we don't do)

for teachers and other staff

For many teachers, substitutes, and staff, my student will be the first and only time you will work with a deaf student or an interpreter. Educational interpreters certainly have one of the oddest jobs in the school system. *We go to work each day with the goal of being invisible; of creating as little disruption as possible in the classroom and in the day of the deaf or hard of hearing (often referred to as hearing impaired) student.*

To keep your classroom as normal as possible, I may even leave the room when the student is with another teacher. I will have minimal interaction with the other students to keep your class as unaffected by my presence as possible. I will be polite, positive, and caring but will try to be as quiet and removed as possible. I will try to keep myself busy by reading, writing or another activity but believe me, my eye is always on the student and my ear tuned to the classroom to jump into action when needed. You are welcomed to interrupt me because I am here to serve the communication needs of the student. I will generally avoid helping other children in the class because it becomes a distraction and may ultimately become a barrier for my student.

There will be times you may be puzzled about why I remain aloof from the activities of the class but ultimately you will really appreciate my "invisible" role because it decreases classroom disruption. You do not have to work another personality into the mix. I go to work everyday to be unseen. I am working all day long to best serve my student but much of that time involves sitting, watching, and waiting. I am always ready to interpret but if my student is not paying attention, it is the teacher's responsibility to correct the student as you would any other inattentive child.

One way to think of the educational interpreter is as "oil in a motor" meaning I am here to help the educational machinery work smoothly through opening lines of communication within the classroom setting. The oil is not part of the machinery but without it, the motor will not run for long. If oil is not pure in its role, then the motor doesn't run smoothly.

Full Access and the Role of the Interpreter

The student needs a direct relationship with the teacher.

All instruction, discipline, correction, and evaluation needs to be directly between the teacher and student. This helps the teacher get the best and most accurate understanding of the student; it helps the student become more accountable, responsible, and attentive. It prevents the student from "hiding" behind the interpreter. *As an interpreter, I will move in and out of the interaction to assure a flow of communication but cannot become an intermediary or tutor.*

The student needs a direct relationship with peers.

It is unusual for a student to have an adult escort throughout the day. It distorts the normal interactions (both positive and negative). Although this may initially feel "safe" to the student, it ultimately suppresses the normal developmental processes of the student. *As an interpreter, I will allow my student to interact with peers with minimal intervention or interference. If a problem arises, I will direct the students to the teacher and serve as an interpreter.*

The student needs a direct relationship with the subject matter.

Deaf students need to learn responsibility for following directions, organizing materials, doing homework, turning in assignments, and preparing for tests. The interpreter must avoid helping with any of these because it creates an unhealthy dependency by the student and stunts normal skill development. It is important for students to develop independence and confidence. *As an interpreter, I will not be involved in the instruction of the student except to help the flow of communication between the student and the subject matter.*

Fatigue and the Deaf student

It is physically exhausting to watch interpreting all day. This is not an excuse for inattention but means the interpreter must be selective about stressing the student's eyes and mental capacity to focus. This is why there will be times I choose to ignore superfluous or extraneous comments in the classroom environment or may not disturb the working student to interpret what's being

said. *I am fully responsible to faithfully render all appropriate information accurately.*

It is emotionally exhausting for a student to look at the same adult all day long.

This is why I try to take every opportunity to avoid being in the line of sight of the student unless I am interpreting. This gives an important and needed emotional break which makes later learning more productive. When I am interpreting, I will usually move into a position where the student is able to see you, as the source of the information, so they are better able to perceive your expressions and intonation.

It is socially exhausting to have an adult watching you all day long. I have to watch the student in a way that does not bring attention to the fact I am constantly aware of the student's whereabouts and behavior. Most students do not have an adult assigned to watch them all day long. It is frustrating to feel like your every move is being tracked and reported. This is part of the reason I am not responsible for discipline of my student. At the same time, if I am in the role of authority with other students, it becomes a barrier to normal peer relationships with my student.

Long Term Benefits of this Approach

There are many benefits to educational mainstreaming for deaf and hard of hearing students but there are also many new challenges, particularly socially and developmentally. Ignoring these principles of educational interpreting perpetuates (even creates) significant gaps in the normal developmental process of the student. An over-involved interpreter isolates the child, creates an unhealthy dependency mentality, increases tendencies for the student to manipulate and triangulate adults, creates social immaturity, and hinders academic accountability and ultimately, success. The student has to learn how to compete and succeed in a hearing world.

Someday, this student will be an adult and will need to deal directly with a boss, neighbor, physician, dentist, and host of other professionals. He or she must have the social skills and confidence to deal directly with the world and use interpreters properly. Especially for children in the mainstreamed setting, this must be modeled by interpreters who appear only when needed with as little disruption to the educational day as possible.

As an educational interpreter in your classroom, I will...

Hardly Ever

1. Go to lunch with the student
2. Discipline this student or others

3. Teach the student new information (other than the meaning of words)
4. Intervene in the social interactions with peers.
5. Administer tests or quizzes

Usually Not

1. Leave the room while the student is present
2. Relay messages between this student and the teacher or other staff
3. Report minor misbehavior observed about my student or other students
4. Attend staff meetings about this student except as an interpreter
5. Do anything for the student that he/she can do for him/herself

Usually

1. Leave the room when the student is out of the room with another teacher
2. Read something (or work on another activity) when not interpreting
3. Help adjust any technology or room problems to insure that barriers for the student are removed
4. Inform the teacher about persistent problems with the student
5. Let the teacher know when certain behavior is related to the student's deafness and when it is not.

Almost Always

1. Move into position to interpret if the teacher is interacting or instructing the student
2. Intervene whenever a threat is made by any student to another
3. Refer any complaints between students for the teacher to handle
4. Explain the meaning of words and vocabulary if the student is puzzled
5. Upon request, help the teacher so long as it doesn't interfere (or potentially interfere) with my primary role as an interpreter.