INTERPRETERS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Adapted from the Association of Visual Language Interpreters in Canada (1992)

ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

The primary role of interpreters in the educational setting is to facilitate communication between deaf and hard of hearing students and others, including teachers, peers and other service providers.

The interpreter functions as an integral part of an educational team by commenting on the interpreting process (including the students’ language preference and skills) and contributing to the discussion of appropriateness of interpreting services within a particular placement.

While engaged in interpreting interpreters should not be asked to interrupt this activity in order to perform other tasks. Remember, if the interpreter is out of the classroom, the student’s access to communication will be severely hindered.

RESPONSIBILITIES

• Accurately interpret instructional information;

• Convey a student’s questions or replies to questions to the teacher and the class in the language level used by students;

• Interpret subject matter without personal bias or emotion

• Consult with the deaf or hard of hearing student, members of the deaf or interpreting community regarding appropriate signs for new or technical terminology;

• May be required to interpret questions on a test while ensuring the answer is not divulged;

• Will be familiar with school rules;
• Maintain confidentiality of information regarding students (such as grades, behaviour, and personal information). Interpreters function as part of an 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. Interpreters are bound by a code of ethics, however, when an interpreter has acquired knowledge pertaining to child abuse, drug, alcohol or weapon use or possession, and any other activity which pose a threat to the safety of the students and others, then the interpreter is required by law as well as principle to report such instances to the proper authorities. Situations may also arise in which a student is rude to the interpreter or the interpreter overhears inappropriate language or comments. In such instances, interpreter ethics do not preclude responding in an appropriate manner as a staff member of a school.

• Stay in the role of interpreter during the interpreting process;

• Do not censor what is spoken or signed;

• 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. (e.g. The interpreter may need to leave the situation or find a replacement interpreter, etc.)

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 preparation. It would be helpful if the teacher provided the interpreter with an orientation to the curriculum. For example, at the beginning of the school year or semester, the teacher could furnish the interpreter with curriculum guides, textbooks, and other relevant instructional materials and review them with the interpreter as necessary;
• Needs to be available on a regular basis for consultation and collaborative planning with the interpreter. Throughout the year the teacher and interpreter should meet to review curriculum and discuss their efforts to work collaboratively. When a unit of particularly difficult material is to be covered that includes new technical vocabulary and material that is hard to explain in alternative forms of communication, the teacher and the interpreter may want to meet on a more frequent basis. For example, when teaching a unit about the geological history of the earth, the teacher might provide the interpreter with a list of key terms and a copy of lesson plans so that the interpreter can plan in advance how to interpret difficult terms;

• The interpreter should be informed of the dates, times, and content of special assemblies and class trips;

• With the interpreter examine the location of the interpreter in the classroom. Whenever possible the interpreter should be seated in a glare-free well-lit location with a solid-coloured background free of visual and auditory distractions. For example, when the teacher is using a lecture format it may be desirable for the interpreter to stand or sit to the side and slightly in front of the teacher, with the student’s desk located three to five feet from the interpreter. In a one to one instruction setting, the interpreter should be placed next to the hearing individual and facing the student from distance of about 4 to 6 feet.

• Respects the individuality of the deaf or hard of hearing student, while maintaining the same expectations for behaviour and performance of all students;

• Accepts responsibility for classroom management of all students, including the deaf or hard of hearing student.
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 the first person, using “I” to identify the speaker, deaf or hard of hearing;

• Address the 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 teacher;

• Provide the deaf 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 the interpreter 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;

• When using media such as videotapes or audiotapes to teach a class, provide the interpreter with a script or allow the interpreter time to preview the video in order to be better prepared. Be aware that if all the lights are turned off the deaf student cannot see the interpreter – having a lamp or flashlight will be helpful in this situation;

• Do not say things to the interpreter in the presence of the deaf student that you do not want interpreted;

• Make provisions for note taking for the deaf student during class lectures. It is impossible for the student to watch the interpreter and take notes at the same time;

• During group discussions identify speakers and repeat questions before answering, to enable the deaf student and the interpreter to know whose answers or comments are being interpreted;
• Be aware that the deaf student may not notice that you have begun speaking if you and/or
  the interpreter are not in their line of vision;

• Be aware that if someone speaks inaudibly or more than one person speaks at the same
time, the interpreter may need to intervene for clarification. The interpreter does this by
making clear that it is “the interpreter” who is requesting clarification and repetition of the
information. The interpreter should also make this known to the deaf student;

• Be aware that the interpreting process requires intense concentration and stamina.
Interpreters require a 5 to 10 min. break each hour. If lectures exceed one hour without a
break, a team approach (using two interpreters should be used).

For more information on interpreters see the following:

The Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada. Retrieved from
http://www.avlic.ca/

University.

Educational Services for the Hearing Impaired (1999). Teaching Students Who Are Deaf
How to Use an Interpreter. Little Rock, AR.