Training Students to Work with Educational Interpreters:
A Curriculum for the Preparation of Educational Interpreters

by

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Acknowledgments

Statement of the Problem

In New York State, as in many other places across the United States, school administrators have been hard pressed to locate qualified educational interpreters to fill vacancies. During a presentation at the 1989 Conference on Educational Interpreting it was reported that

> the increasing number of hearing impaired students in the mainstream settings
> has resulted in a much higher demand and widespread need for qualified
> educational interpreters than are available, leading to the employment of

untrained, unqualified interpreters, and often no interpreter at all (Hurwitz, 1991, p.21).

There are several problems within the educational setting that have contributed to this state of affairs.

The first problem contributing to the shortage of qualified applicants is that educational interpreters have not been recognized or adequately compensated for their skills and knowledge. The National Task Force on Educational Interpreting reported that "many interpreters continue to work under poor conditions, often under circumstances of inequity when compared with their colleagues with similar levels of training and experience in interpreting or in education" (Stuckless et al. 1989, p. 15). Little has changed in most areas of the country in the years since this study was conducted. Most administrators are still unaware of the skills and knowledge that are necessary to function successfully as an educational interpreter and as a result have failed to recognize interpreters as professionals. This fact has led to interpreters being hired in a variety of categories. A study of the role of educational interpreters conducted by Melnyk (1997) found a wide range of job titles being used. These titles included teaching assistant, teacher assistant (special needs), educational assistant, visual language interpreter, and interpreter. While not included in this study, educational interpreters have commonly been hired as teacher aides and paid accordingly low wages. A memo issued by the New York State Education Department reported a wide variance in the compensation of interpreters with some being paid an hourly rate with no benefits and others with compensation and benefit packages based on level of education achieved, years of experience, and certification attained. The poor working conditions and the low wages

make attracting qualified applicants exceedingly difficult and shortages of qualified interpreters common not just in New York State but across the country.

Another reason for the shortage of qualified interpreters, and perhaps the most pressing problem at this time, is the fact that those who do enter the field often lack training or are poorly prepared to work in an educational setting. In New York State only 23.6% of the 212 educational interpreters who responded to a Department of Education survey in the spring of 1996 graduated from a registered interpreter preparation program and only 7% had completed a collegiate program specifically designed to prepare educational interpreters (NYS Education Department memo, May 30, 1997, attachment 1). It can be assumed that the remaining individuals who are working as interpreters have little or no training in educational interpreting leaving districts faced with hiring interpreters in a quandary. This problem however, is not a new one.

The rapid increase in the number of Deaf and hard of hearing students being mainstreamed began in the 1970's with the passage of PL 94-142 which guaranteed all "handicapped" children the right to an education in the least restrictive environment. For many Deaf and hard of hearing students this has been interpreted as meaning education in local public schools with the provision of support services. A majority of those interpreters who entered the field of educational interpreting at this time came from two sectors of the community; those who had experience in the field of interpreting for Deaf adults, and those who had experience working with children but little or no skill as interpreters. Often these individuals had little prior experience in interpreting for Deaf children or knowledge of pedagogy, language acquisition, or child development (Stuckless et al., 1989). In fact many of those who were hired had no training as

interpreters at all. During the 1970's there were few interpreter preparation programs. Those that existed focused primarily on producing interpreters capable of interpreting for adults in the community, not for children within an educational setting (Stuckless et al., 1989).

According to a study by Gustason (1985), although more than one-third of interpreter training program graduates obtain work as educational interpreters, very few programs adequately prepare their graduates to work in this specialized setting. Results of a survey of 50 interpreter training programs conducted by Dahl and Wilcox (1990) suggest that graduates are unprepared to work in educational settings due to lack of appropriate course work. Of the 45 programs that responded to the survey, only 31% of the programs offered a course on educational interpreting. Of these programs only 43% also offered a child development course. Only 22% of those programs that did not offer a course in educational interpreting offered a course in child development. Four percent of the programs covered foundations of deaf education, child language development, and child development in one course. While interpreter-training programs have begun to address this issue over the past few years, the number of programs that train interpreters to work in K-12 settings is still insufficient.

In 1986 the Education of the Deaf Act established a commission to investigate the state of education for Deaf children. The Commission made 52 recommendations, among them was one that focused on educational interpreters:

> The Department of Education, in consultation with consumers, professionals, and organizations, should provide guidelines for states to include in their state plans such policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of standards

to ensure that interpreters in educational settings are adequately prepared, trained, and evaluated (p.xxi).

In 1989 the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting responded to the Commission's findings by issuing a report designed "to stimulate initiatives, beyond the Task Force, on the part of governmental, professional, and consumer organizations, and institutions that prepare the interpreters who work in schools"(Stuckless et al., preface). New York State followed suit by publishing Guidelines for Educational Interpreting. These guidelines were intended to provide guidance in the appropriate use of educational interpreters, the standards for their employment, and an understanding of the relationship between the student who is deaf or hard of hearing, the educational interpreter and others who affect the education of the student (New York State Guidelines for Educational Interpreting). Despite these guidelines there are still Deaf and hard of hearing students across New York State and the country who are being denied appropriate services due to shortages of qualified interpreters.

Rationale for Curriculum Development

New York State is currently in the process of establishing licensing requirements for educational interpreters. In April of 1997 the New York State Board of Regents issued a plan to address the training and certification of Educational Interpreters. This push to improve the standards for interpreters is congruent with the Board's initiatives designed to ensure that teachers in New York are prepared to assist all students in meeting the newly established academic standards. When the Board called for improved standards for interpreters they recognized that a vast majority of currently employed educational interpreters would not meet the licensing requirements that have been

proposed. Requiring educational interpreters to meet the higher standards without assistance would likely result in increased shortages of educational interpreters.

Therefore, in 1998 the New York State Department of Education issued a five-year grant for $ 3,900,000 to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and Monroe #1 BOCES. The purpose of this grant was twofold: to assist in the establishment of two new pre-service programs to train educational interpreters and the establishment and supervision of four regional training sites to provide assessment and training for those interpreters currently employed in Pre-K-12 settings within New York State. These tasks were to occur under the direction of the newly established Center for the Preparation and Training of Educational Interpreters.

During year one of the grant the four regional sites were selected, and a two-part interpreter assessment process was developed. The first part of the process is the Educational Interpreter Knowledge Assessment (EIKA), a written instrument designed to assess the knowledge base of the interpreters. This assessment tool was developed following the recommendations of the RID/NAD ad hoc Committee on Educational Interpreter Standards. The second part of the process, is a diagnostic assessment of the interpreter's skills in transliteration and ASL-English interpretation. By the end of 1999 the Center for the Preparation and Training of Educational Interpreters had identified more than 800 educational interpreters working in New York State. Out of this number only 5-10% have elected not to participate in the assessment and training being offered across the state. (Mitchell, 2001). Upon completion of the assessment, each interpreter is assisted in forming a professional development plan. Each plan is designed to assist the interpreter in selecting workshops and training sessions that will address specific areas of

deficiency. The modules are being offered free of charge to all educational interpreters currently working in New York State who have completed the assessment process. Under this grant more than forty skills and knowledge modules that have been developed to address specific core competencies. (See Appendix A for a list of the competencies).

Curriculum Summary

The basic idea for this module originated from a discussion with the Central/North/Hudson Valley regional coordinator, Karen Lefevre. As the coordinator for one of the four regional sites under the Center for the Preparation and Training of Educational Interpreters, Karen saw a need to train Deaf and hard of hearing students how to become effective consumers of interpreting services. We both strongly believe that students who are trained in interpreter use skills will be more successful in advocating for their own communication needs as adults. Therefore, the goal of Preparation of Educational Interpreters: Training Students to Work with Educational Interpreters is to provide educational interpreters with the knowledge required to train students to become effective consumers of interpreting services.

Discussions with colleagues suggest that educational interpreters are already informally teaching interpreter use skills but formal programs with specific goals seem to be the exception rather than the norm. (For examples of successful programs see Bennett, McEnhill & Gemalsky-Larder, 1998 & Mills, 1996). Many of the educational interpreters who are providing this informal training to students lack the background information to produce the desired results.

Acquisition of the skills and knowledge needed to use interpreting services effectively (which I call "interpreter use skills") cannot happen overnight, but is a developmental process that requires years of training and practice. This training should begin before a student's first exposure to interpreting services and should continue throughout their school years. The key to any successful training is establishing clear and obtainable goals. As members of the educational team, interpreters should work with the other members of the student's education team to establish meaningful and measurable interpreter use goals for each student. The goals that are established should take into consideration the student's developmental stage, cognitive abilities, and previous experience with interpreters. In order to establish goals that are reasonable and achievable the interpreter must first:

1) understand the role of the interpreter and how historical, educational, and social changes have, and will continue to, affect that role;

2) understand and be able to apply ethics in a K-12 educational setting;

3) be able to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of the educational interpreter, teacher, and student consumer;

4) and have an understanding of child development in the learning process and the impact of deafness on that process.

Since the EIKA indicated that many interpreters were deficient in one or more of the knowledge areas listed above, it was determined that the module should incorporate the following knowledge-based core competencies:

- History of interpreting
- Models of interpreting

- Professionalism in interpreting

- Ethical considerations (Code of Ethics)

- Child adolescent development

- Training students to use interpreting services

Criteria for the module established by the regional training center coordinator defined the format and scope of the module. The module was to consist of a total of 30 hours of training. Each unit within the module was to include goals and objectives for the unit, a list of teacher resources, recommended student readings (when applicable), overhead transparencies, and an assessment tool to verify participant achievement of the objectives. The module was to be constructed so that each unit may be presented independently. This format would allow the Center maximum flexibility in scheduling. The module was to be written so that other trainers across the state will be able to use the materials to conduct the same training within their region. Once written, the module was to become the property of the New York State Education Department.

Preparation of Educational Interpreters: Training Students to Work with Educational Interpreters is unique in that it provides interpreters with a developmental framework for teaching students interpreter-use skills. The module consists of two parts. Part I provides a critical theoretical foundation for teaching students about the role of an interpreter. It contains units that introduce theories of child/adolescent development, the history of interpreting, models of interpreting used in the educational setting, the role(s) of the interpreter at various educational levels, and the importance of ethics in educational interpreting. Part II builds on the theoretical foundation established in Part I by providing interpreters with developmentally appropriate strategies for training

students to use interpreting services effectively. The units should be taught in the order presented as each builds on the information contained in the previous units.

Unit 1 of the module is an introduction to child development and the impact of deafness. Please note that this unit is meant as an *introduction only.* The purpose of this unit is to introduce basic theories of child development as a foundation upon which the participants can build through additional course work or independent reading. Trainers for this unit should be well versed in the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Erikson as well as being thoroughly familiar with the current research related to the cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic development of deaf children. This unit includes teaching notes to assist trainers in focusing on specific aspects of child development. Within these notes are suggested questions for discussion. These questions are by no means all inclusive and trainers are encouraged to come up with additional questions that elicit further student participation and dialogue. The concepts taught within this unit are the cornerstone of the module. Trainers should take every opportunity to reinforce and apply these concepts throughout the remaining units.

Unit 2 introduces students to the various models of interpreting. These models are presented within a historical framework in order to provide participants with an understanding of the underlying social and political events that led to the development of each model. The exercise at the end of the unit is designed to elicit discussion about the various models and their appropriate/inappropriate use in the educational setting today. Trainers should encourage discussion about how the developmental stage of the student affects the determination of which model(s) will be used.

Unit 3 takes a look at ethics in educational settings. Participants analyze the RID code of ethics to discover the underlying values and discuss its application to the educational setting. The ethical decision making exercise at the end of the unit allows the participants to work together to solve ethical dilemmas that they may face in their own daily work.

Unit 4 looks at the role of the educational interpreter from a developmental perspective. Trainers should encourage discussion about how the developmental stage of the student will assist the interpreter in defining their role in the educational environment. Participants will become familiar with the recommendations of the New York State department of Education as outlined in the New York State Guidelines for Educational Interpreting. Participants also have the opportunity to reflect on their role as it is currently defined and determine whether changes in their role would be beneficial for the student(s) with whom they work. Participants should be cautioned that any changes in their role and responsibilities should only be undertaken with the appropriate administrative approval.

Part I of the module concludes with a written assessment. The Post-Test serves several purposes: to reinforce the materials presented in Units 1-4; to identify areas in which further study would be benefit the participant; and to assist trainers in evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching.

Interpreters participating in Part II should have demonstrated knowledge of child development and an understanding of the role and responsibilities of an interpreter in an educational setting either through the EIKA or through successful completion of Part I of

this module. Participants without the requisite background knowledge will not receive the full benefit of this training.

Unit 5 is an introduction to teaching the interpreter's role. This unit provides participants with general teaching strategies and information that are then tailored to meet the developmental needs of various age groups in Units 6-9. These units are designed to be hands-on. While basic strategies and materials are listed, participants should be encouraged to be creative and to share their experiences and ideas. Lecture time should be kept to a minimum with a majority of the time spent on discussion and small group activities. Each unit contains a list of scenarios that may be used for role-play or as a starting point for discussion. Trainers should use their discretion as to which approach to use. Some groups have enjoyed the role-plays and found them beneficial while others have been hesitant to participate. Whichever approach is used trainers should be sure to follow up with a discussion of why the solution was developmentally appropriate, or brainstorm ideas that might be more productive for the particular age group of students being discussed.

Discussion

During the development phase of the curriculum, Unit 1 (Child Development and the Impact of Deafness), and a condensed version of Part II (Strategies for Training Students to Work with Educational Interpreters) were presented at the Ohio Summer Institute for Educational Interpreters. The presentations were well received and evaluations administered by the Summer Institute indicated that the participants felt the information presented would be beneficial to their daily work. Presenting the material

from the module at this Institute provided an opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of the video materials, overheads, and handouts; to determine whether the time allotted for each unit was adequate; and to fine-tune the focus of the materials. The feedback from the participants indicated that the module successfully met its goals and needed only minor alterations to the time allocated to specific portions of the module.

The completed module was presented in Watertown, New York during the winter of 2001. Participants met from 9:00-4:00 on five Saturdays. While the evaluations from this presentation were overwhelmingly positive several units had to be modified due to the small size of the group. With only 4 or 5 participants at each session many of the activities required less time to conduct than anticipated and more time was spent discussing application of the materials to specific individuals' working environments. While the participants liked the smaller group and felt more comfortable participating in discussions, the small number limited the breadth of experience that they were exposed to. Part II of the module is designed to allow participants to share strategies that they have found successful. Conducting this training with a larger group exposes the participants to a wider variety of experiences from which they may benefit. For this reason it has been recommended to the Center that in the future this training be conducted with no fewer than eight participants.

One criticism of the module is that some participants feel they may meet with resistance in attempting to implement the training they have received. Teachers and administrators who have yet to recognize interpreters as members of the educational team may view this type of training as overstepping the bounds of the interpreter's role. Therefore, throughout the module interpreters are encouraged to work in conjunction

with the teacher of the Deaf, the classroom teacher, and Deaf adults in establishing goals and conducting training for the students with whom they work. Determining who should provide the initial training will vary depending on the skills and knowledge of the team members. In some settings the interpreter may indeed be the most appropriate person to teach interpreter use skills, in others a team approach may be most successful. Regardless of who provides the initial training, the interpreter can provide information that is crucial in establishing reasonable goals and will be providing constant reinforcement in the classroom.

While the feedback from participants has been positive, the curriculum has yet to be fully evaluated for its effectiveness in achieving the desired long-term results. The ultimate goal of providing this training to interpreters is to produce students who are more effective consumers of interpreting services; students who know their communication needs and are able to advocate for them. Determining whether the interpreters who have completed this training are more effective in achieving this goal would require a long-term study that is beyond the scope of this project. Regardless of whether this long-term goal is achieved, those interpreters completing this module will have a better understanding of their role in the education of the students with whom they work. Hopefully, this knowledge will lead to a pride in their work and a desire to provide the highest quality interpreting services possible.

References

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Interpreter Technical Training
- Sign Communication Systems (SEE, Cued Speech, Oral)
- Models of Interpreting (Helper, Conduit, Facilitator of Communication, Bi-Bi)
- ASL/Semantics/Grammar
- Communication Assessment (Deaf/blind, Cued Speech, SEE, PSE, Oral)
- Basic Special Education (i.e. additional handicapping conditions)
- Sign-to-voice/Transliteration/Interpreting
- Models of Processing in Interpreting (Simultaneous/Consecutive, Colonomos, Cokely)

Interpreter Professional Training
- Professionalism in Interpreting
- RMI
- History of Interpreting (certification)
- Deaf Culture and Heritage
- Ethical Consideration (Code of Ethics)
- Training Students to Use Interpreting Services

Regulations
- ADA
- State Laws and State Education Department Regulations/ Federal Laws
- IEP and Implementations

School
- Advocacy
- Adapting Physical Environment for Optimal Inclusion
- In-service Content/Process (Staff and Students)
- Mandated Reporting
- School Policies and Procedures
- Extra Curricular Activities (Theater, Sports)
- Special Testing/Counseling

Support Services
- Additional Support Services
- Functioning as Team Member
- IDEA Implementation (Including IEP and Interpreter Multiple Roles)
- Relationships with Team Members
- Teaching Sign Language

Audiological/Physiological
- Etiology of Hearing Loss
- Educational Amplification

Closed Captioning/Open Captioning

Psychological
- Educational and Social Impact of Hearing Loss
- Advocacy
- Child/Adolescent Development
- Practice of Education