

Competencies of K–12 Educational Interpreters: What We Need Versus What We Have

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During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the education of deaf and hard of hearing students and the use of sign language was a common occurrence. Sign language was viewed not only as an educational tool but also as a method of communication. The methods of teaching that used sign language were based on methods used to educate deaf and hard of hearing children in France. Sign language was the mode of communication in the first public school for deaf students, founded in 1755 by the Abbé Charles Michel de l'Épée (Gannon 1981). L'Épée is considered by many to be the father of modern day sign language. L'Épée's purpose was to modify signs that were naturally used by deaf people in Paris (i.e., French Sign Language, or FSL) "in such a way as to develop a visual analog of written French" (Stedt and Moores 1990, 2). In his book, *The Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb by Means of Methodical Signs*, l'Épée (1801) referred to this sign system as "Methodical Signs." These were natural FSL signs produced in the syntax of spoken French (what we in the United States might call "Pidgin Signed English" or "contact signing"). L'Épée wrote in 1801,

We have only to introduce into their minds by the eye what has been introduced into our own by the ear. These are two avenues at all times open, each presenting a path which leads to the same point. . . . (L'Épée 1801, 1)

In the United States, sign language interpreting (for adults) can first be traced to the year 1816 when Laurent Clerc traveled to the United States as a guest of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet to establish the first school for the deaf (Lane 1984; Frishberg 1990).

The middle of the twentieth century marked a significant change to public education for deaf and hard of hearing students that has affected sign language interpreting dramatically. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 started a major trend toward the removal

of barriers to educational access heretofore erected to exclude minority groups (Turnbull 1990). Although the minority group in 1954 was African American, all minority groups benefited from this decision, including individuals with disabilities.

Soon after *Brown*, Congress commissioned what later became known as the Babbidge Report (Babbidge 1965), which showed an overall weakness in the education of deaf and hard of hearing students, primarily in the residential schools for the deaf throughout the country. These findings, coupled with the Vocational Education Act Amendments, vocational rehabilitation funding of postsecondary deaf and hard of hearing students during the 1960s, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (equal access to communication, interpreter training), PL 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), and now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) all contributed to the expanded changes in educational options for deaf and hard of hearing youngsters of public school age.

K-12 educational interpreting has a relatively short history. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), which later became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), placed the primary responsibility of educating deaf and hard of hearing students, with necessary related services (IDEA Sec. 140 (22)) in the hands of K-12 local education agencies (LEAs). To accomplish this goal within the least restrictive environment (LRE) (IDEA Sec. 12 (a) (5)), namely, the mainstream, LEAs have employed educational sign language interpreters to facilitate the communication between the deaf or hard of hearing student and the teacher or teachers as well as other students in the class who are unable to use sign language. As in *Brown* in 1954, IDEA upheld the ruling that segregation based on immutable traits was illegal and unacceptable.

Nationally, Moores (1987) reported that, between the years of 1974 and 1984, the residential school population of deaf and hard of hearing students dropped 18.3 percent while the numbers of these students attending public day classes (public schools) increased by 29.8 percent. Schildroth and Hotto (1991) reported that, between the years of 1985 and 1990, the numbers of deaf and hard of hearing students in "local schools" (public schools) gained in numbers from 62 percent to 67 percent. Today, at least 83 percent (U.S. Department of Education 1999) of deaf and hard of hearing students attend public schools. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals have become a "linguistic minority" (Dolnick 1993) as they have moved from residential schools to public schools. Winston (1985) asserts that, like it or not, this situation is the reality.

With the massive shift in numbers of deaf and hard of hearing students from the residential setting to the LEAs, the need for sign language interpreters for educational settings continued to escalate. Although the need increased, the supply did not. The number of educational sign language interpreters continues to be inadequate; the demand far outweighs the supply (Witter-Merithew and Dirst 1982; Stuckless, Avery, and Hurwitz 1989; Winston 1994; see also Schick and Williams chapter 10). Further complicating problems caused by the inadequate number of sign language interpreters has been the lack of education and skills these interpreters have brought to the job. "Few interpreters had any formal training for working in an educational setting with deaf children, and virtually none had formal preparation as educational interpreters since interpreter training programs were not oriented in this direction" (Hurwitz 1991, 20).

Although the need for interpreters has been documented and the lack of skills demonstrated, educational interpreters have a dearth of education opportunities. Carew (2001) reports in the *American Annals of the Deaf* that only 1 of 74 programs (1.3 percent) is designed to teach interpreting in the K–12 classroom setting. These data are typically underreported to the *American Annals of the Deaf* because program reporting is voluntary. Additionally, this program listing does not represent those programs that may include some type of “special topics” introduction to educational interpreting, with a cursory discussion of settings and requirements in the educational setting.

However, the problem remains: Too few programs are addressing the need to educate interpreters for work in the public schools. And yet the majority of graduates from interpreter preparation programs continue to enter K–12 settings (Battaglia and Avery 1986; Frischberg 1990; Schrag 1991). As early as 1989, the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting (Stuckless, Avery, and Hurwitz 1989) stated,

[I]t is evident that more than 50 percent of the graduates of interpreter preparation programs nationally become employed as interpreters in educational settings at the elementary/postsecondary levels. (2)

By 1991, Schrag (1991) reported that two-thirds of the graduates of interpreter preparation programs (IPPs) had entered educational interpreting.

WHAT IS K–12 EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING?

To be clear about the terminology used in this chapter, some definitions are in order. First, let us define K–12 educational interpreter *qualifications* as the skills, education and training, and experience that are necessary to effectively provide sign language interpretation for school-aged children and young adults. In addition, the following definitions also will be helpful to this discussion.

K–12 educational sign language interpreter. The following two statements clearly describe what is meant by the term *educational sign language interpreter*:

“Educational Interpreter” means a person who uses sign language in the public school setting for purposes of facilitating communication between users and nonusers of sign language and who is fluent in the languages used by both deaf and nondeaf persons. (Colorado Legislature 2002, 22-20-116 (2), in CDE 2002)

[An educational sign language interpreter] . . . is a professional, who facilitates communication and understanding among deaf and hearing persons in a mainstream environment. The interpreter is a member of the educational team and is present to serve staff as well as students, hearing as well as deaf people, by minimizing linguistic, cultural, and physical barriers. The title, “Educational Interpreter,” is recommended by the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting, and is intended to imply that a person holding this title is a professional with specialized preparation in deafness, whose primary role is interpreting, but who is also qualified to provide certain other educational services. (New York State 1998)

Interpreting. Frishberg (1990) and Winston (1989) explain what the term *interpreting* encompasses:

[Interpreting is] the process of changing messages produced in one language immediately into another language. The languages in question may be spoken or signed, but the defining characteristic is the live and immediate transmission. (Frishberg 1990, 18)

Interpreting . . . refers either to the general process of changing the form of a message to another form, or to the specific process of changing an English message to American Sign Language (ASL), or vice versa. (Winston 1989, 147)

Note, however, that research (Jones, Clark, and Soltz 1997) shows that the term *interpreting* in the K–12 arena refers to transliterating (between two codes of English: one spoken, one signed).

Transliterating. According to Winston (1989),

[transliterating] is a specific form of sign language interpreting. It is the process of changing one form of an English message, either spoken English or signed English, into the other form. The assumption in transliteration is that both the spoken and the signed forms correspond to English, the spoken form following the rules of standard English and the signed form being a simple recoding of the spoken form into the manual code of expression. (Winston 1989, 147)

Transliteration incorporates features of American Sign Language (ASL) to enhance clarity. Ability to transliterate implies that one has a knowledge of ASL features and can incorporate them into a transliteration.

Methodical signs. Methodical signs are those that are based on the syntax of a spoken national language (L'Épée 1801; Stedt and Moores 1990).

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

From the little research conducted in the area of educational sign language interpreting performed in K–12 public school settings (Hayes 1991, 1992; Jones, Clark, and Soltz 1997; Yarger 2001; Antia and Kreimeyer 2001), two major issues are clear:

1. Qualifications of working K–12 educational interpreters
2. Roles and responsibilities of working K–12 educational interpreters

Let us first look at qualifications (i.e., skills, education and training, and experience). In a statewide survey conducted in the late 1980s, the Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf found that the vast majority (87 percent) of Oregon interpreters working in K–12 public schools were not certified (Togioka 1990). Also in this survey, 57 percent of the interpreters in K–12 public schools reported that they were not evaluated for their interpreting skills before being hired for their

position. A study conducted by the Bureau of Educational Research at the University of Tennessee in 1989 showed that 56 percent of the states in the United States had no minimum standards for interpreters who interpret in educational settings and that 74 percent of the states had no minimum skills assessment for educational interpreting (Bureau of Educational Research and Service 1989).

Jones, Clark, and Soltz (1997) studied all K-12 educational interpreters ($n = 222$) working in public schools in three midwestern states. Qualifications, as defined by skills (measured by means of a certification mechanism), education, and experience, were lacking. Sixty-three percent held no certification; 36 percent of this group had attended some college but had earned no degree. Sixty-five percent had been working in the classroom for five years or less. In addition, 57 percent of the total numbers of interpreters were not evaluated for their interpreting skills before being hired, and 25 percent of the total had never been evaluated for their skills.

The above findings might have been understandable, albeit distressing, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, the problem of interpreters lacking qualifications remains virtually unchanged today. This alarming fact begs the question, Why? Why, a decade later, are students still being subjected to substandard services in interpreted education?

In 2000, the state of West Virginia found that 81 percent of the state's K-12 educational interpreters held no certification. Seventeen percent held certification through the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), but 75 percent of those held NAD Level 2 certification, which is classified as "below average performance" (WVCDHH and WVDOE 2002).

Jones (2001) again gathered the same types of information asked for in his previous study (Jones, Clark, and Soltz 1997) of 108 students enrolled within the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program (EICP) at Front Range Community College, Colorado (see Johnson and Winston, 1999, for more information about this program). These students were working interpreters, employed in public school systems in ten states. Fifty percent did not hold any certification; 43 percent had attended some college before EICP admittance but had earned no degree; 40 percent had been on the job for five years or less; and 58 percent were not evaluated for interpreting skills before being hired as K-12 educational interpreters. Further, 31 percent had never been evaluated for their interpreting skills before enrollment in the EICP.

What makes these findings even more distressing is that this group of 108 interpreters was a cohort of individuals who had taken the initiative to improve their skills and knowledge by attending an organized program of study. Although their actions were admirable, the fact that the education system did not require this training is distressing. The encouraging news is that these working interpreters were required to take an entrance exam for the EICP. This exam, loosely referred to as a "modified EIPA (Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment)," did not include the evaluation of sign-to-voice interpreting skills. However, it did measure voice-to-sign interpreting skills, and these interpreters had to obtain at least a level 2.0 (on a five-point scale) to gain admittance to the EICP. Although the level of 2 is somewhat nebulous, it is a beginning point. This beginning point is, unfortunately, somewhat low in the total scheme of things; the "Profile of Skill at Each Rating Level of the EIPA" describes a Level 2 as an "Advanced Beginner" who "demonstrates only basic sign vocabulary and these limitations interfere with communication. . . . An individual at this level is not recommended for classroom interpreting" (Williams and Schick 1999, 4).

Yarger's (2001) study of sixty-three educational interpreters working in two rural states showed that, although none were certified, 73 percent had been evaluated for their voice-to-sign interpreting skills (sans sign-to-voice skills) as a part of the EICP enrollment (minimum score of 2.0) process. At the very least, we can gain some understanding of the skills (or lack of skills) exhibited by these working interpreters and establish a benchmark. Although this minimal step would be somewhat encouraging, one must still be discouraged to note that K-12 interpreters are working with skill levels that are inadequate.

A study of K-12 educational interpreters working in nine western states during fall 2002 (JCCC 2002) found that 83 percent held no national interpreter certification. Clearly, improvement has not happened in the area of interpreter certification. However, some good news is evident. This same study found that 49 percent have, at least, taken the EIPA, 86 percent of that group within the past two years. The time frame is significant because it means that the majority has probably taken the new videotape-standardized version of the EIPA. Of these nine states, the state of Colorado shows the largest percentage of K-12 interpreters having taken the exam (85 percent). Of this 85 percent in the state of Colorado, 70 percent have met or surpassed that state's minimum standard of 3.5 (personal communication, Kim Sweetwood, CDE interpreter standards coordinator, May 18, 2003), which is encouraging progress. Data of this nature for the other eight states are not yet available.

Some progress toward a qualified K-12 interpreter workforce is being made. But what about the interpreters who have chosen not to improve their skills and knowledge? Yarger (2001) found that every interpreter she studied self-reported a higher level of interpreting skill than was later actually found to be true by means of interpreting performance testing. From these data, we surely cannot say that interpreters who have chosen not to improve their skills would be more skilled than interpreters already evaluated for skill.

Yarger's study clearly shows the need for standards of quality for these important support personnel. Even so, what benefits are there to placing a student in an interpreted education with unskilled interpreters? Ramsey (1997) has suggested,

The mere placement of deaf and hearing children in the same room is a waste of deaf children's developmental time and a thoughtless burden to place on them. . . . Unless a school principal and teaching staff [and interpreting staff] can make a commitment to preparing themselves to communicate with and understand the educational needs of deaf children, simply scheduling periods of integration is a fruitless exercise in logistics. . . . If students cannot engage with instruction and with others, it is hard to imagine how they will be able to acquire language and school skills. (113)

"Engaging with instruction" is not possible for deaf and hard of hearing students who use an interpreter with either questionable qualifications or unknown qualifications. One cannot help but wonder how an individual educational program (IEP) team can make an appropriate educational placement of a deaf or hard of hearing student without knowing whether that student's communication needs are being met. At least 50 percent of the time, we cannot know the answer to this question because the empirical data show that at least half of the K-12 educational interpreters in the United States are not certified, or have not been tested for their skill.

According to Sanderson (1991), “Ninety percent of deaf children born to hearing parents will not be fluent during the critical years of language acquisition, so only the best interpreters should be working with them” (67). Affonso (1998) also echoes this notion. Bowen-Bailey (1996) notes, however, that “too often, the interpreters who work with young children are the interpreters most in need of models for their own language development” (16). The reality is that “most often education attracts inexperienced, unskilled interpreters” (Winston 1994, 61).

WHO ARE THESE INTERPRETERS?

Table 1, compiled from data in Jones, Clark, and Soltz (1997) and Jones (2001), compares characteristics of educational interpreters in 1993 and in 2001 and shows little difference. The educational sign language interpreter working in the public school setting in 2001 had the following characteristics: The interpreter is a White female, averaging 31–40 years of age, with 6–10 years of experience, having attended college, but having earned no degree. She earns \$11.01–\$13.00 per hour in a full-time job and may be working in a rural or urban setting. She has expressed the need for opportunities to continue upgrading her skills, but those opportunities are not readily available and, if available, are rarely supported by the employer (i.e., the LEA).

The K–12 educational interpreter performs a variety of duties in addition to the primary responsibility of interpreting in the classroom. Traditionally, these have been assigned because there is no one else to do them and not because an assessment has been conducted of the best practices of educational interpreting nor even an assessment of the parameters of interpreting. Some of these duties vary in frequency depending on which state the interpreter works in and whether the interpreter is employed in a rural or urban setting. On the job, the K–12 educational interpreter transliterates using an English-based sign system. This person will primarily sign using methodical signs, although she (sometimes, he) also may use a manually coded English system. The K–12 educational interpreter rarely (by definition) *interprets*.

The notion of the “professional educational interpreter” must be introduced into this discussion to help us view the bigger picture. Mills (1996) states that educational interpreters are professionals. This statement sounds plausible but, in fact, is not based on empirical evidence. We simply do not know about 50 percent of the K–12 educational interpreter workforce and, because no uniform standards exist, we cannot say with certainty how many *professional* K–12 educational interpreters exist. The term *professional* means “conforming to the rules or standards of a profession (Webster’s 1996, 1998) and one who “possesses distinctive qualifications” (*WorldNet 1.6* 1997).

Yarger (2001) states that K–12 educational interpreters “need to be viewed as professionals, and as such, held to minimum standards in regard to skill level and other areas” (25). I would suggest that K–12 educational interpreters be viewed as professionals when they have proven, by definition, that they have met at least the minimum standards. If the field of K–12 educational interpreting is ever to be viewed as professional, standards must be in place and evaluation must be the cornerstone. If not, we are subjecting deaf and hard of hearing students to amateur interpreting services. Yarger (2001) also recommends, “Expectations of interpreters’ skill levels need to be higher.” This recommendation is not enough. For

TABLE 1 Summary of Variables for K–12 Educational Interpreters: Then and Now

Variable	1993 Findings	2001 Findings
I. Group Characteristics		
A. Gender	95% Female	99% Female
B. Race	98% White	94% White
C. Median Age	31–40 Years	Same
D. Median Education	Voc. Certificate	College/No Degree
E. Median Experience	2–5 Years	Same
F. Median Salary (per hour)	\$9.01–\$11.00	\$11.01–\$13.00
G. Job Status	95% Full Time	88% Full Time
H. Experienced Injuries Due to Interpreting	29%	34%
II. Sign System Most Used while Interpreting		
A. Conceptually Accurate Signed English/Pidgin Sign English (CASE/PSE)	56%	70%
B. Signing Exact English (SEE II)	33%	19%
C. Signed English (SE)	7%	3%
D. American Sign Language (ASL)	3%	7%
III. Certification, Evaluation, and Training		
A. No Certification Held	63%	50%
B. Not Evaluated for Interpreting Skills before Hire	57%	58%
C. Never Been Evaluated for Interpreting Skills	25%	31%
D. Interpreting In-Service Training Never Provided	36%	38%
E. Expressed Need for Continued Interpreter Training	95%	90%

expectations to be higher, we must require that *all* K–12 educational interpreters be measured (i.e., evaluated) for their skills and knowledge. This evaluation needs to happen now.

We have seen some progress with the establishment of standards in some states and with evaluation using the EIPA. This progress is encouraging. However, we do not know about the qualifications of at least 50 percent of working K–12 educational interpreters. This lack of information is damaging not only

to the field but also to the deaf and hard of hearing students who depend on interpreting services.

WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INTERPRETER?

Let us look at the second issue that remains a concern in our field: the notion of the K–12 educational interpreter’s job roles and responsibilities and the timing of these responsibilities. What does this issue involve?

Until the early 1990s, almost every description in the literature was based on individual or group recommendations as to what educational sign language interpreters ideally should be doing (Heavner 1986; Massachusetts Commission and Massachusetts Department of Education 1988; Jones 1989; Brazeau 1991; Contrucci 1991; Wendel 1993). However, in reality, in a small sample of thirty-two educational interpreters in western Pennsylvania, Hayes (1991, 1992) found confusion with respect to what the interpreter, the regular education teacher, the special education teacher, and the interpreter’s supervisor reported as the educational sign language interpreter’s roles and responsibilities.

Several perspectives (Moore 1984; Mertens 1991; McCreery et al. 1999) articulate these roles and responsibilities. However, both interpreters and educators continue to be confused today with respect to the roles and responsibilities of K–12 educational interpreters (Affonso 1998; Yarger 2001; Antia and Kreimeyer 2001). Stewart, Schein, and Cartwright (1998) describe the misconception:

Once educational interpreters become members of a team, it is realistic to expect them to share information they may have about the student with the other team members. Realistic, yes, but a violation of the profession’s code of ethics. Some interpreters decline to be “members of the team.” (194)

This description is stated as if there were an option for team membership. The interpreter is, by law, a member of the educational team. Transliterating-interpreting is one of four roles that the K–12 educational interpreter plays on a daily basis (Winston 1998; Jones 1999). Although interpreting is the primary responsibility of the K–12 educational interpreter, tutoring plays a significant role in the daily lives of deaf and hard of hearing students and is the second most frequent responsibility borne by the K–12 educational interpreter (Jones, Clark, and Soltz 1997; Yarger 2001). The responsibilities do not stop there. Third, the interpreter acts as an aide in the classroom and in the school environment as needed, as all school personnel are expected to do. Finally, and of significance, the interpreter also acts as a consultant. The state of Colorado categorizes the two latter roles within the catchall category of “Team Member” roles (CDE 2002), but the fact remains that aiding and consulting are important roles the K–12 educational interpreter plays.

These four roles may cause confusion in the school setting when roles overlap or seem to conflict with one another. One can rightfully argue that transliterating-interpreting is the most critical function within the responsibilities of K–12 educational interpreting. However, let us not discuss this paramount role to the exclusion of the other three. Interpreting is only one support service (albeit the most crucial). Tutoring may be more appropriate than interpreting for some students,

if not many (see chapters 2 and 3 about level of language skills). This use of an educational interpreter is an educational team decision, but it points to the need for K–12 educational interpreters to possess qualifications in addition to transliterating–interpreting.

Winston (1998) and Jones (1999) have identified and clarified the four roles that educational interpreters play in the public school setting. Jones’s (1999) Windmill Model presents the framework within which to address potential “dilemmas” faced by interpreters working in the public schools. The dilemma mentioned by Cartwright above with respect to the code of ethics is not a dilemma when properly viewed. Many of the ethical decisions an interpreter makes in the context of the K–12 public school environment are “right versus right” decisions (Kidder 1996) and are of larger magnitude than that of simply interpreting. If the goal is clear (appropriate, equivalent, and accessible education for the deaf or hard of hearing student), then the interpreter role becomes secondary to the role of consultant to the educational team. This adjustment in no way renders the interpreting responsibilities less significant. It is a critical blade of the Windmill Model. Problems continue to arise when the interpreter is unable to categorize the dilemmas into one (or more) of the four roles. However, *professionals* categorize decision making every day.

WHY SHOULD K–12 EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETERS BE QUALIFIED?

Participation (involvement, communication) and high expectations of deaf and hard of hearing students are indicators of success (Luckner and Muir 2001). It is incongruent to hold high expectations for students and to hold no (or minimal) expectations of interpreters who provide access to education. We are not even discussing maximum potential of deaf and hard of hearing students, as the *Rowley* case (Anthony 1982) has taught us. We are simply discussing equality of access. Deaf and hard of hearing students cannot meet high expectations (or even, heaven forbid, minimum expectations) when we do not even ensure that, at minimum, K–12 educational interpreters can provide equal access. Deaf students, with the help of their parents, school personnel, and peers, will drive themselves to achieve. However, they will not be successful if interpreters are not qualified.

Schein, Mallory, and Greaves (1991) contended that too many educational interpreters are not qualified. They determined that educational sign language interpreter subjects were, by definition, not interpreters, merely “communication aides.”

It would appear that in most schools communication aides choose what to interpret within very loose guidelines, if any, and that there is no ongoing assessment of the appropriateness of these moment-to-moment decisions. (Schein, Mallory, and Greaves 1991, 19)

It would be unconscionable and unacceptable to place any student with a teacher who is not qualified (i.e., certified, educated, and experienced). In fact, a teacher who is not qualified would not be a teacher at all. Yet, the above data show that deaf and hard of hearing students are subjected to unqualified, uncertified interpreters regularly.

HOW DO WE MEASURE QUALIFICATIONS?

Recommended guidelines and standards for the field are not new (e.g., Anderson and Stauffer 1990; Scheibe and Hoza 1985; Moose 1999). Sanderson and Gustason (1993) have proposed a system for the evaluation of interpreting-transliterating skills specific to the educational environment. Educational interpreter certification has been suggested by many to be necessary to ensure the quality of interpreter services (Witter-Merithew and Dirst 1982; Zawolkow and DeFiore 1986; Stuckless, Avery, and Hurwitz 1989; Contrucci 1991; Schein, Mallory, and Greaves 1991; Sanderson and Gustason 1993; New York State 1998). Certification is one measurement of skills that should be included in an overall system of standards for K–12 educational interpreters.

Many states are addressing this issue by passing legislation that establishes state minimum standards, licensure, or both (e.g., Oklahoma Legislature 2002; Colorado Legislature 1997; Minnesota Legislature 1994; Kansas Legislature 1993; Wisconsin Legislature 1992) and some LEAs are setting their own standards (e.g., Wilcox, Schroeder, and Martinez 1990). These requirements are now finally forcing into the discussion the difficult questions of interpreter qualifications and appropriate placement of deaf and hard of hearing students in LEAs throughout the United States. This discussion is positive for the field. Once we know the qualifications of K–12 educational interpreters, we are better able to improve those qualifications and, therefore, improve access to education.

Accurate measurement of interpreting skills is certainly important. An excellent example of an interpreting evaluation system that addresses these skill areas is the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), authored by Schick and Williams (1994). The EIPA is not only a measuring instrument that addresses specific criteria of interpreting message equivalency but also one that provides diagnostic results and recommendations for interpreter applicants, guiding them to improved performance (Seal 1998; see also chapter 10). This duality sets the EIPA apart. It is a valid means of evaluating skills (Seal 1998), designed specifically to measure interpreting work in the classroom. The EIPA, a dual-purpose instrument, is the ideal measurement tool to use for exploring the work of K–12 educational interpreters. We are then able to discuss qualifications and skills using the same language. We are then able to discuss remediation of skills using the same language. And we are then able to upgrade specific skills through strategies based on the diagnostics of the interpreters' performance in the educational setting, also provided by the EIPA. As appropriate as this evaluation is, the results are still a "snapshot" of skills on a given day of performance in an elementary or secondary classroom situation. It does, however, specifically address in an organized format the skills needed to interpret in the K–12 setting. In other words, it establishes a benchmark.

Interestingly, even with the use of a testing instrument designed specifically for the K–12 educational interpreter, Schick, Williams, and Bolster (1999) found that 56 percent of educational interpreters did not have the minimum interpreting skills to serve as an interpreter in the classroom. Remember, these interpreters made the effort to take the EIPA and are to be commended, even if their scores were low. Nevertheless, the finding raises concern not only about the group that was evaluated but also about the working interpreters who elected not to be tested for their skills.

There is good news. Almost 49 percent of the respondents in the Johnson County Community College study of K–12 interpreters in nine western states

(JCCC 2002) had taken the EIPA and reported a mean score of 3.7. This finding is encouraging. The percentage of interpreters having taken the EIPA does vary from state to state (13.8 percent to 84.6 percent) as do the mean (average) scores (3.2 to 4.1). The majority of these interpreters have taken the EIPA within the past two years, which is significant because it means that many, if not most, have taken the videotape-standardized version of the EIPA (the new and current test), and therefore, their scores can rightfully be compared with their next test. From these data, we see that the average K–12 interpreter has achieved at least a Level 3.2. However, “average” indicates that just as many interpreters are below the average (3.7) as are above it. Most likely, future EIPA testing will yield lower average scores. The reason for this prediction is that the interpreters already tested had volunteered for the evaluation and were more assertive when it came to measuring their skills. Generally, the interpreters who have procrastinated or ignored the issue will not fare as well (Yarger 2001).

WHO IS INCLUDED WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FULL INCLUSION?

In light of the previous discussion, I would like to call into question the very notion of “full inclusion” (Wang, Reynolds, and Walberg 1990) of deaf and hard of hearing elementary and secondary students. Qualified K–12 educational interpreters provide a vital support service to a large number of deaf and hard of hearing students who attend their local elementary and secondary schools. Without qualified interpreters, these students are denied access to the mainstream. Without qualified interpreters, “full inclusion” is a myth for these students. Deafness is not a disability within the context that most disabilities are viewed. Deaf and hard of hearing students are a “linguistic minority” (Dolnick 1993). Mediation is achieved through visual linguistic input and output. This visual communication must be accurate to allow equal access to the myriad bits of information, both auditory and visual, with which all K–12 students deal on a daily basis. IEP educational teams attempting to serve the needs of this population have not adequately addressed communication. Qualified interpreters only increase the probability of full inclusion; they do not guarantee it. As language competencies are a prerequisite to interpreting proficiency, qualified interpreters are a prerequisite to accessibility.

The pleas to address these concerns have been, until recently, largely ignored. As long ago as 1988, the Commission on Education of the Deaf stated:

It is vitally important to students who are deaf that only interpreters possessing appropriate qualifications be employed in regular educational settings. . . . A lack of minimum standards for interpreters and pervasive confusion about their role has compromised the educational services provided to many deaf students. In regular classrooms, hearing students generally communicate by speaking and listening. For many deaf students, however, interpreters are needed to facilitate communications with their teachers and classmates. EHA (Education of the Handicapped Act) requires that deaf students be integrated into regular classroom settings to the maximum extent possible, but if quality interpreting services are not provided, that goal becomes a mockery. . . . Just as a person who

completes two levels of a foreign language in college would not be qualified to interpret in the United Nations, completing two levels of sign language does not make a qualified sign language interpreter in any setting. (COED 1988, 103–4)

The secretary of the U.S. Department of Education echoed this concern in 1992:

The Secretary believes that the unique communication and related needs of many children who are deaf have not been adequately considered in the development of their IEPs. . . . Meeting the unique communication and related needs of a student who is deaf is a fundamental part of providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child. . . . Any setting which does not meet the communication and related needs of a child who is deaf, and therefore does not allow for the provision of FAPE, cannot be considered the LRE for that child. . . . The Secretary is concerned that some public agencies have misapplied the LRE provision by presuming that placements in or closer to the regular classroom are required for children who are deaf, without taking into consideration the range of communication and related needs that must be addressed in order to provide appropriate services. (in Alexander 1992, 49274–75)

Winston is more specific:

The only way to determine a LRE is to view the environment from the deaf student's perspective; no other perspective can provide an accurate assessment of the setting. (Winston 1990, 61)

Again, if 50 percent of the K–12 educational interpreter workforce is not certified, how do we know whether communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing students are being met? Are parents of deaf and hard of hearing students aware of this situation? It is doubtful.

We have come a great distance since the 1960s when interpreting was portrayed as a paternal “helper” model (Quigley and Youngs 1965). However, a difficult road lies ahead. We presently are facing an underqualified field of K–12 educational interpreters and have been for more than two decades. This underqualified field has done (and is doing) a disservice to deaf and hard of hearing students, those students' parents, and their LEAs in this country.

Standards are here. Expectations are on the rise. This change will strain the system, but it is necessary to reach the goal of equal access for deaf and hard of hearing students attending public school systems in the United States. The question becomes (and has always been), What must we do to meet the expectations that deaf and hard of hearing students deserve and achieve the qualifications necessary to serve this population?

WHAT MUST THE INTERPRETING FIELD DO?

Interpreting in the K–12 educational setting is a specialization within the field of interpreting. Interpreting for children is not the same as interpreting for adults (Schick 2001). Likewise, evaluation of interpreters who work with children is not the

same as evaluation of interpreters who work with adults (Schick and Williams 2001). Specific steps such as those that follow must be taken to address this specialty.

Standards for K–12 interpreters, with evaluation of skills, must be established and put into practice. (See chapter 9.) We have discussed the beginning of this effort, which involves using the EIPA as the cornerstone skills evaluation instrument. Individual states and the Regional Assessment System Project of state departments of education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (RAS 2002) have begun using the EIPA. This start is commendable, but much more needs to be done. It is appropriate to use an instrument that can be recognized throughout the United States. Qualifications would be reciprocal between the states, and interpreters could move into new districts with less of a disruption for the deaf and hard of hearing students they serve.

Standards for evaluating the knowledge of K–12 interpreters must be established and put into practice. One instrument by which to evaluate this knowledge might be in the form of a written test designed to evaluate the variety of knowledge required to function properly in the public school setting. Fortunately, this type of test is being designed. Through the collaborative effort of Boys Town National Research Hospital (EIPA Diagnostic Center); the University of Colorado, Boulder; and the Regional Assessment System for K–12 Interpreters, the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment Written Test (EIPA-WT) has been created for this purpose. As with skills qualifications, mentioned above, knowledge qualifications can now be reciprocal.

Deadlines for compliance must be reasonable and enforced. Any practice to grandfather experienced interpreters is inappropriate. Indefinite extension of deadlines for demonstrating qualifications is also inappropriate. Experience alone is not enough to interpret in K–12 public school settings. Experience, with no education-training intervention, will not improve interpreting skill. Good intentions are not enough when dealing with the future of the deaf and hard of hearing population in the United States. Results and accountability (i.e., professional interpreter qualifications) are the keys to success.

Associate degrees in interpreting are not enough for the specialty area of K–12 educational interpreting. The curriculum of a basic interpreter education program simply does not include enough hours to provide adequate preparation for the specialized field of K–12 educational interpreting. Interpreting in the K–12 setting is a specialization with not only requisite skills but also requisite knowledge (see, for example, PDES 1995). Whether interpreting is performed in the elementary setting or the high school setting makes no difference. In a national survey, Burch (2002) reports that all interpreter practitioners and stakeholders realize that a bachelor's degree for K–12 educational interpreters is "essential at all three instructional levels [elementary, middle school, and high school] of students served" (136). We must leave behind the notion that educational interpreters can be "trained." We are not discussing preparation for a circus act. Interpreting requires an in-depth education that builds not only specific interpreting skills but also decision-making skills for professional behavior.

Bachelor-level educational interpreting programs need to be established now. These programs must require students to satisfy exit criteria that measure skills

and knowledge. A few bachelor-level models currently in the field can provide examples and guidance: California State University-Fresno, College of St. Catherine, Indiana University and Purdue University at Indianapolis, Kent State University, Northeastern University, University of Arizona, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of New Hampshire-Manchester, University of New Mexico, University of Tennessee, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Western Oregon University, and William Woods University. The College of St. Catherine is a specialized program for interpreters wanting to enter the medical field. The Arizona and Kent State programs are designed specifically for K–12 educational interpreters. The other programs are “generalist” programs. Could these generalist programs add programming specialty options to meet the need for K–12 educational interpreters? Could new programs be designed to follow a distance learning model such as the EICP? Of course they could. Interpreter standards will drive the establishment of new bachelor-level programs. Comprehensive delivery and high expectations must be the goals of these new programs. Accessibility for students of interpreting (i.e., distance learning, blended delivery) needs to be evaluated to allow the largest number of qualified students to participate.

Education and professional development must be part of the in-service training for K–12 educational interpreters within their LEAs. The term *in-service* is inclusive, meaning in-service opportunities for K–12 educational interpreters and staff members within a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), as mandated by the IDEA. In-service education must be specifically designed for K–12 educational interpreters, addressing both skills and knowledge, and provided by the LEA or offered by outside agencies contracted by the LEA.

LEAs in the United States must take the above steps. The new No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) makes it clear that the responsibility for regular education lies at the levels of the state education agency (SEA) and the LEA. This responsibility includes “setting standards for student achievement and holding students and educators accountable for results” (Paige 2002, 3). This devolution of power and responsibility is also clear for special education through the IDEA: “(C) developing and implementing a comprehensive system of personnel development needed to provide qualified personnel in sufficient number to deliver special education, *related services*, and early intervention services” (IDEA 1990, 104 STAT. 1114, italics added).

The time has come for partnerships between SEAs, LEAs, regional resource centers, higher education, and others to address these concerns and engage appropriate strategies for taking action. The time is now. The effort is the right thing to do for deaf and hard of hearing students if they are to have any chance of equal access to the public school system in the United States.

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