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ABSTRACT

Designed for high school students interested in careers in special education and related services, this guide outlines the role of interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It addresses the nature of the work, the education required, personal qualities that interpreters should have, job outlook and advancement, and how to prepare for a career as an interpreter. Interpreters are described as helping students with hearing impairments fully participate in classroom activities by interpreting what students want to say to the teachers and the rest of the class, as well as interpreting what the teacher and others students in the classroom are saying to them. The educational requirements for an interpreter vary by state. Most state departments of education accept certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or the National Cued Speech Association. Interpreters need to have a desire to help others and an understanding of the importance of communication. Their work requires flexibility, creativity, and courtesy, as well as good manual dexterity and an ability to concentrate for long periods of time. A profile of an interpreter is provided to illustrate the challenges and benefits of the job. (CR)

Interpreter for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Michael, who has been deaf from birth, is 16-years-old and fully immersed in the activities of his local high school. He is able to lip read, but in a classroom, with a lot of different things going on at once, he needs an interpreter to keep him in touch with what the teacher and other students are saying. Marian, an active 10-year-old, has had a profound hearing loss since an episode of meningitis when she was younger. She attends a magnet school where most of the children with hearing impairments in her community attend school. Although her regular teacher uses sign language, Marian needs an interpreter when she is involved in school activities with hearing students. Heather, a high school student, communicates in American Sign Language. She is in accelerated math and science classes utilizing a highly skilled interpreter.

More than 80% of the students who are deaf or hard of hearing go to school in general education classrooms, either on a full- or part-time basis. In order for these students to fully participate in the classroom activities, they need someone to interpret what they want to say to the teacher and the rest of the class, as well as to interpret what the teacher and other students in the classroom are saying to them. An interpreter for the deaf and hard of hearing brings these two groups together and facilitates the child's participation as an equal member of the class.

Nature of Work

The role of a classroom interpreter, sometimes called an educational interpreter, is challenging. The interpreter must—almost instantaneously—listen to, understand, and translate what the teacher is trying to communicate, in a manner the student understands—and vice versa.

The interpreter changes the spoken language of the teacher and class members into a visible format by either silently mouthing the words with a clarity that can be lip-read easily by the student; by accompanying silent mouthing with a system of hand signals that represent certain speech sounds (Cued Speech); by accompanying silent mouthing with signs presented in English word order; or by using American Sign Language (ASL) which is a visual/gestural language using hand movements and facial expressions. Regardless of the mode used, the primary responsibility of the interpreter, who may be proficient in several modes, is to make communication as clear as possible for the student and those who interact with the student. Accuracy of interpretation is essential.

The interpreter usually works closely with the teacher. The two often go over the day's lesson prior to class, to give the interpreter a better idea of what concepts and significant vocabulary will be introduced in class that day. This allows the interpreter to become familiar

with the vocabulary that will be used, as well as to get an overall picture of what the teacher wants the students to learn from that day's activities.

Additional responsibilities of the educational interpreter may vary from one school, or school district, to another depending on local contract requirements. Typical among these responsibilities are interpreting for conferences, meetings, and assemblies; reviewing vocabulary with one or more students; and interpreting for students in extracurricular activities.

***Professional* standards for certification require both academic preparation and practical experience.**

Interpreters who use ASL, other sign systems, and Cued Speech are at a high risk of developing repetitive motion disorders, such as tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome. Learning to interpret in a relaxed, effective manner, with regular rest breaks, helps to prevent these problems from developing.

Education Required

The most useful foundation for educational interpreters is a well-rounded education and strong English skills. Professional standards for certification require both academic preparation and practical experience.

There are many interpreter preparation programs in the United States. They vary in their admission requirements, as well as whether they offer associate, bachelor's or master's degree programs. A list of programs can be obtained from the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) is a national organization which offers certification for all interpreters except Cued Speech transliterators, who are certified by the National Cued Speech Association. Certification by these organizations is accepted by most state departments of education but is not always required by those states that have adopted their own screening and endorsement process.

Personal Qualities

Educational interpreters have a desire to help others and an understanding of the importance of communication. Their work requires a great deal of flexibility, creativity, and courtesy as well as good manual dexterity and an ability to concentrate for long periods of time. An interpreter working in schools must also have a strong interest in helping children develop and learn and should enjoy working in a variety of settings and situations. Interpreters must believe in the individual's right to full access and participation in society and its institutions.

Job Outlook and Advancement

There currently is a shortage of qualified interpreters to work in schools. This need for qualified interpreters is expected to continue to grow in the next decade. Recent data indicate that there are over 2,600 full-time positions for interpreters in the public schools. Continuing education for interpreters is essential for the enhancement of skills, as well as maintenance of certification status. Individuals who have not specialized during their preparation program, may choose workshops and classes which lead to specialties in legal, medical, or performance interpreting, or interpreting for individuals who are deaf and blind. Private, or freelance interpreting, is an option available to any qualified interpreter. Interpreters are also in demand at postsecondary institutions such as vocational-technical schools, community colleges, and colleges and universities.

PRACTITIONER PROFILE

Kathy Giles

Interpreter for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Denton, Texas

Kathy Giles is an interpreter for students who are deaf or hard of hearing at a high school in Denton, Texas. Kathy not only interprets for these students included in general education classrooms, but she is also the coordinator for the district and arranges the schedules of 15 interpreters, 5 of whom work at the high school level.

Kathy has always been able to communicate using sign language. As a child she learned ASL (American Sign Language) because both of her parents have hearing impairments. Because of her family experience, she wanted to work with other people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

As coordinator, Kathy makes sure that the interpreters rotate among the students. Kathy says they learned a few years back that it is not wise to assign the same interpreter to the same student throughout his or her 4-year high school career. Interpreting is an individual exercise that each one does a little differently. Kathy and the other interpreters switch students so no one student becomes too used to one interpreter or one style of interpreting. Kathy feels this is better preparation for college and the "real world" where adults who are deaf or hard of hearing have to accustom themselves to various interpreters.

Most of the interpreters in her school use a combination of finger spelling, formal signs, and silent mouthing of the words. Interpreters who are proficient in different methods of interpreting will be shifted around to meet the needs of individual students.

Kathy's main duty is to attend classes with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. She interprets the teacher's daily lessons, the lecture, and whatever is spoken in the classroom. If the student has a question or comment, he raises his hand like any other student. When the teacher calls on him, he signs his message. Kathy interprets the question or comment for the teacher and then interprets the teacher's response for the student. In short, Kathy is "the student's voice in the classroom."

Many of the students who are deaf or hard of hearing also participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, theater arts, and National Honor Society. So Kathy often finds herself not only attending and signing at meetings but also out on the football field and baseball diamond—in all kinds of weather—interpreting the coach's words for the players who cannot hear them.

Her greatest challenges come from the students who have multiple disabilities. Often these multiple disabilities impede the student's ability to learn. Sometimes Kathy has to interpret the reading material to these students and modify them to make them easier to understand.

Her rewards come directly from the students. For example, one of the students who is profoundly deaf will graduate next year with honors. "To see him be successful and make a whole life for himself and know that I helped in some small way is very rewarding for me."

Kathy finds the rewards outnumber the challenges in her work and believes it is a good career choice for people interested in working with young people who are deaf or hard of hearing. She cautions that because signing "is a visual language, do not attempt to learn it from a book. The best way to learn a language is from a native speaker. Immerse yourself in the deaf world and let the people for whom signing is their first language teach it to you."

How to Prepare for a Career

Probably the best way to find out about a career is to observe it at close range. Observing interpreters at work in a variety of settings can answer many questions about the career, working conditions, job expectations, and specific skills that are required. Contact some of the sources listed at the end of this bulletin and ask for career information and how to contact interpreters in your local area.

It is also important to seek out opportunities to interact with individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Attend public meetings and events where interpreters are present. Extend your knowledge of the wide variety of individuals who use interpreting services. Local services and resources related to deafness can be found in the National Directory of TTY Numbers, published by Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. This telephone directory can be found in many large libraries and is a rich resource of information.

Resource Information

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf
Oral Interpreting Committee
3417 Volta Place, NW
Washington, DC 20007
Voice/TTY: 202/337-5220
E-mail: agbell@aol.com

National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1589
1-800-641-7824
TTY: 703/264-9480
E-mail: ncpse@cec.sped.org
URL: http://www.cec.sped.org/ncpse.htm

National Cued Speech Association
4245 East Avenue
Rochester, NY 14618
Voice/TTY: 1-800-459-3529
E-mail: ncsa@naz.edu or cuedspdisc@aol.com

National Information Center on Deafness
800 Florida Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-3695
Voice: 202/651-5051
TTY: 202/651-5052
E-mail: nicd@gallux.gallaudet.edu
URL: http://www.gallaudet.edu/~nicd

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
8630 Fenton Street, Suite 324
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Voice/TTY: 301/608-0050
E-mail: 72620.3143@compuserve.com

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