

# Teacher In-Service: Interpreters in the Classroom

Dear Parents,

At the start of a new school year, teachers and staff may be unfamiliar with interpreters in the classroom. In some cases, there is no access to interpreters before school starts to provide an in-service. As a result, parents have requested materials to help them be better advocates for their child through a teacher in-service.

The material presented in this document talks about your child as "the student," so that it can be used as a handout for teachers.

*Communication is key.* After all, that's why the interpreter is there - to facilitate communication between the staff, other students, and your child. Let this be the focus of your in-service.

Even if an interpreter has previously been used, the talking points in this document can provide clarification for anyone regarding the process of teaching via interpreters. Bear in mind that interpreters themselves are great resources for information, and they will do "on the job" training and advocating as well. Every classroom has a different dynamic, so there will never be cookie-cutter answers or techniques. However, if you are able to forge this trail in advance, the process will be that much more successful.

Good Luck!

Alberta Hands & Voices

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY!

- Communicate Before
- Communicate During
- Communicate After
- Communicate Through
- Communicate Without

### 1. Communicate Before

When an interpreter enters a classroom, they do so as a bridge, across which the teacher's knowledge and lessons flow. Without preparation, road-blocks may inhibit that flow. The interpreter is not there to do the teaching and thereby usurp the teacher's role. However, they cannot do their job well without adequate preparation. It is imperative that the interpreter be able to fully understand the information being presented so that they can accurately and efficiently interpret the lessons into sign language. Therefore, they need direction from the teacher on the topics and desired outcomes of lessons.

This prep could come in many different forms:

- lesson plans, text books or other materials
- a storybook to be read aloud to the class
- any video clips that will be shown
- PowerPoint presentations
- worksheets students will be expected to complete
- giving notice about upcoming topics that can be further researched online

Some topics present more of an interpreting challenge than others. We'll say it again - *communication is key!* Teachers are strongly encouraged to talk to the interpreter and come to an agreement on what will best aid the interpreter in being the information highway between the student and the teacher.

## 2. Communicate During

Interpreting, like teaching, does not happen in a vacuum. The dynamics of the classroom invariably provides surprises which require real-time modification of plans, techniques, and interactions. It is important that the teacher is ready and willing to communicate in-the-moment with the interpreter.

One of the most important challenges is the "show-and-tell" scenario. There will always be a slight lag in time before the Deaf or Hard of Hearing student receives the information being taught. It is important to refrain from *teaching* and *showing* simultaneously.

Take a science experiment for example: students with typical hearing will be able to follow visual activity while listening to the lesson. Not so for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing student. Multi-tasking (watching the interpreter and watching the teacher) is not a realistic expectation. If you show and tell at the same time, the student will be forced to choose between the verbal lesson and the visual demonstration. The modification here would be as follows: first the teacher can explain what is going to be done and then pause ever so briefly, allowing the Deaf or Hard of Hearing student to receive the whole message. Then, the teacher can demonstrate without talking.

Another common teaching habit is to point while speaking and use the innocuous pronouns "this" and "that." For example, written on the board is a math equation:  $3 \times 4 \times 2 = ?$  To help guide her students through this problem, the teacher might point sequentially to the numbers while saying, "This times this times that equals...." To clearly formulate such a statement in sign language, the interpreter must break away from a visual connection with the student to hopefully catch which referents the teacher pointed to. This is not an impossible situation for an interpreter, but teachers should be aware that the interpreter may need to interrupt to ask for clarification about what is being referenced.

The solution? As much as possible, try to refer to referents by name.

NOTE: It can be disconcerting for teachers to suddenly have another adult in the class interrupting the lesson. The interpreter will only interrupt for the benefit of the student. If the interpreter misses a piece of information or is unclear on the message being conveyed, the student has no hope of accurately learning the

lesson. Again, it is important for the teacher and the interpreter to discuss classroom strategies both can use to effectively communicate during the teaching time.

### **3. Communicate After**

Learning never happens the same way for every child in every subject. This is equally true for the student who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing in the classroom. The interpreter can be a wonderful resource for teachers to discern how successful the teaching strategies are for the student. It is helpful for teachers to spend a bit of time after classes or lessons to check in with the interpreter - this will ensure that any roadblocks are dealt with quickly. Roadblocks may simply be topics or concepts the student is struggling to access through the interpreter.

### **4. Communicate Through**

The interpreter is in the classroom to facilitate the learning of the student. It is important for teachers to remember, however, that the student is nonetheless an active, viable member of the classroom community in his own right. Communication with the interpreter is imperative for conducive learning; equally, communication *through* the interpreter is necessary for the student to feel a sense of belonging within the classroom environment.

The logistics of speaking through a third party can be awkward and intimidating. Speak directly to the student, calling him or her by name. Your eye gaze should be on the student, not on the interpreter. The interpreter is trained to process everything you say in the first person, so you need not say, "Please tell her...." This may feel odd at the outset, because the student will be looking at the interpreter, not at you, when you speak. Also, there will often be a bit of a delay between your statement and their response, simply due to the fact that it must be processed through a third party going both directions.

The initial discomfort will ease fairly quickly. It will mean the world to a student to feel that he has a level of relationship with you, even though you don't speak the same language. It demonstrates to him that you see him as an individual,

not as having this strange appendage called an interpreter. Remember - the interpreter is there for the teacher as much as for the student! The language need goes both ways.

## 5. Communicate Without

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it helps to learn a few ways to communicate with the Deaf or Hard of Hearing student without the interpreter. For example, you can ask the student to teach you greetings (Good morning!) and compliments (Great job!) in sign language. Even simple gestures prove valuable - for example, using the "thumbs up" to indicate a job well done. Then make sure to put these phrases into practice when interacting with the student. This effort of direct communication displays a desire to involve the student in the class environment as much as possible. It demonstrates to the student that he is valued as an individual and that the language barrier does not isolate him and keep him in a lonely corner with the interpreter.

### Video Clips from Minerva Deaf Research Lab in Edmonton

These tutorials are designed to assist educational teams in supporting Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who use educational interpreters to access education and social interaction:

#### [Link to Educational Interpreting video clips](http://tinyurl.com/H-Vtoolkit-9)

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- **Introduction:** this is the introductory chapter for the Classroom Interpreting Tutorial. It provides an overview of the tutorial and considerations that educators need to be aware of when working with D/HH students and an interpreter.
- **Deaf Education and Choices: Interpreted Education and Direct Education:** this clip provides information on direct education and interpreted education. It explores the myths of interpreted education as well as factors of student readiness for an interpreted education.
- **Research on Mediated Education:** outlines a study done by Dr. Russell exploring Deaf children and working with interpreters.

- **What is an Interpreter?:** explores what it means to be a sign language interpreter - the education of an interpreter, the realities of interpreted education, as well as how interpreting can be more effective in the classroom.
- **The Role of an Interpreter:** addresses the question "What is the role of an interpreter?" It discusses the preparation interpreters need from the classroom teacher, how the classroom setup can best support an interpreter, and interpreting outside of the classroom.
- **How Do I Work With an Interpreter?:** outlines strategies for teachers to work more effectively with interpreters in the classroom.
- **Interpreting Audits and Classroom Strategies:** includes useful information on how to perform an audit of your classroom, and strategies educators can then use to adjust practices.