

How Educational Context Impacts the Support of Educational Interpreters

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Introduction: Educational interpreters provide a vital role in facilitating language and education for deaf children in K-12 public classrooms. Most of the research to date has examined educational interpreters' role and interactions with teachers and students in individual classrooms. However, the larger context in which educational interpreters work may significantly impact their performance. Previous studies indicate that some interpreters work solo in a school with only one deaf student or may also work in schools with multiple and serve with a team of other educational interpreters. In each of these contexts, research indicates that interpreters may work with school personnel who have a limited understanding of the role of an interpreter and resist their efforts, or they may be familiar with the interpreter's role and be more accommodating and engaging. Moreover, there is little research that has examined how teachers of the deaf may collaborate with educational interpreters to increase their effectiveness in a general education classroom.

Background: The purpose of this study is to examine three different types of educational contexts in which interpreters work: 1) Silo programs, school programs in which an interpreter works solo with little support from the teacher of the deaf, 2) General Magnet programs, schools where interpreters works as a part of a team of interpreters to support a group deaf students with little support from a teacher of the deaf, 3) Holistic magnet programs, schools where the interpreter works as part of a team of interpreters to support a group of students while collaborating with a teacher of deaf. The driving research question for the study is 1) Does the broader school context makes a difference in the level of support an interpreter may receive, and 2) What structures and/or philosophy in a school context contribute to a more positive and supportive environment for educational interpreters. This study uses a qualitative study and collect individual and focus group interviews of educational interpreters, teachers of the deaf, general education classroom teachers, and school administrators to investigate the level of awareness and support educational interpreters may have in the classroom.