Educational Interpreters Are Not Communication Facilitators
White Paper

We see the term *Communication Facilitator* used frequently in the education system to describe the work of an *Educational Interpreter*. This is an effort to minimize the impact of state required minimum competency standards for *Educational Interpreters*. For example, changing job titles from *Educational Interpreter* and minimum EIPA requirements to a position title as a *Communication Facilitato*r.

Regardless of job title, transferring meaning between languages for Deaf students is interpreting. Thus, the position title *Educational Interpreter* applies to interpreters, and *any other professional* (regardless of job title) who provides access to communication for students who are Deaf in a prek-12 grade environment (South Carolina Department of Education, 2007).

Educational Interpreters are Related Service Providers

Educational interpreter who provides interpreting services in a pre-K–12 setting is an identified *related services professional* (South Carolina Department of Education, 2007; South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). More specifically, as reauthorized in 2004, in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, educational interpreters were deemed related service providers (§300.34(c)(4)). https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.34.

As such, the educational interpreter is a member of the educational team. See IDEA Section 300.321(a)(6) "other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel." Part of that role includes assistance with developing and implementing the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is legally responsible for supporting the IEP goals. As with all members of the educational team, the educational interpreter is responsible for ensuring that the learning and communication needs of the student who is Deaf are met.

The most appropriate label for an interpreter in a public-school setting is an *Educational Interpreter* (Fitzmaurice, 2021b; South Carolina Department of Education, 2017, 2007).

Educational Interpreters are Not Facilitators

Generally, a facilitator position is viewed as a *paraprofessional* in which the requirements are contrary to the role and requirements for *educational interpreters* (see *NCLBA Title II Paraprofessionals: Non-Regulatory Guidance,* U.S. Department of Education, March 2004, online at http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/paraguidance.pdf).

The root of the *Communication Facilitator* metaphor being applied to professional *Educational Interpreters* stems from community-based role metaphors including: the *helper metaphor* and the *conduit metaphor*. The term facilitator was quickly adopted by some in the educational setting as an extension of the *communication facilitator metaphor*, which is very similar to the *conduit metaphor* and describes an interpreter as a channel that transfers messages from sender to receiver as a

communication expert who also ensures the environment is conducive to interpreting (Roy, 1993). This community-based *facilitator metaphor* recognized interpreters as human beings (Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014) and allowed for the interpreter's personal evaluations of the context of the communication event and mediation of the dialogue. It acknowledged that the interpreter's presence will influence the dialogue (Berge & Ytterhus, 2015; Napier, 2002) and recognizes the interpreter's responsibility for language mediation, coordinating interaction and overcoming barriers (Metzger, 1995; Roy, 2000; Wadensjö, 1998). However, this metaphor continues to portray the interpreter as a channel that merely transfers messages from sender to receiver, albeit as a communication expert (Roy, 1993).

In the education system, the term *Facilitator* is commonly paired with phrases such as "those who facilitate communication in a K–12 educational setting" (Jones, 2004; Nebraska Department of Education, 2002; Ohio School for the Deaf, 2011; Smietanski, 2016; South Carolina Department of Education, 2017; West Virginia Department of Education, 2016). However, the term *facilitator* as a whole is ubiquitous and promotes the idea of an *Educational Interpreter* who *facilitates* communication by making communication easier. <u>Interpreting work does not make communication easier – it makes it accessible.</u>

The *Facilitator* metaphor in education also promotes ideas of a paraprofessional (counter to IDEA Related Service Providers) as a flexible person who can be fully engaged in the classroom by being very helpful with hearing students as needed. In addition to interpreting duties, a *facilitator metaphor* in the education setting includes meeting with teachers to discuss student progress, informing teachers what gaps the deaf student may encounter, tutoring students, changing the content so that deaf students can understand it, and advocating for deaf students (Fitzmaurice, 2021a; Fitzmaurice, 2021b). It also promotes the notion of an employee as a flexible person who can be fully engaged in the classroom (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001).   The caveat stands that if the need arises for both interpreting and some other task, interpreting should take priority.

Educational Interpreter Role Confusion

The *Facilitator* position label is also often used in an effort to combat community-based role metaphors such as the *conduit metaphor* from being enacted in the education system and/or to subvert professional requirements for *Educational Interpreters*.

The role of the *Educational Interpreter* seamlessly already includes these aforementioned factors (see Fitzmaurice, 2021b) nullifying the need for the use of *Facilitator* position titles and generally creating confusion with a *Language Facilitator* position. <u>If an *Educational Interpreter* is not enacting the role of an *Educational Interpreter* appropriately, please reach out to the SCEIC for guidance.</u>

Summary

As we have identified an *Educational Interpreter* position (one who exchanges meaning between sign language and spoken language in a school setting for Deaf students) should not hold a position title of *Facilitator*.   Efforts to change job titles and role expectations from *Educational Interpreters* to *Communication Facilitators* is disingenuous, systemically confusing, creates role ambiguity, conflicts with IDEA and is fundamentally rooted in not understanding the role of an *Educational Interpreter* (see Fitzmaurice, 2021b).

For questions about the role of an *Educational Interpreter*, and/or the role of a *Language Facilitator* please feel free to reach out to the South Carolina Educational Interpreting Center.

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