

Raising the bar: How intentional collaboration must define the work of educational interpreters

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Context

Should collaboration be seen as foundational to educational interpreters' work?

Should collaboration be applied consistently by educational interpreters?

An intentional and consistent collaborative practice between Educational Interpreters (EIs) and teachers would...

- strengthen the EI's professional identity and role as an educational team member (Caselli et al., 2020; Fitzmaurice & Cates, 2026), and
- create a unified approach to support Deaf students' access to their academic and social environments (Brimm, 2018; Fitzmaurice, 2021).

Approach

This pilot study sought to understand current collaborative practices between EIs and elementary school teachers across several urban school districts on the East Coast of Virginia. An analysis of survey responses from 32 EIs focused on two key questions:

- How do EIs view collaboration with elementary school teachers?
- What collaborative approaches are EIs using that support student access and instructional alignment?

Findings

What did survey participants say is involved in "collaboration"?



- "We work as a team and not as a separate entity, so that the students we service have an opportunity to be successful."
- "The most important piece in collaboration is mutual respect for each person's expertise."
- "Collaboration as an educational interpreter is the establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship between the classroom teacher and the interpreter."

Overall, survey participants' responses parallel Brimm's 2018 study on collaboration between EIs and teachers.

- 50% of EIs agree that such collaboration is effective, and 58% find it to be extremely useful.

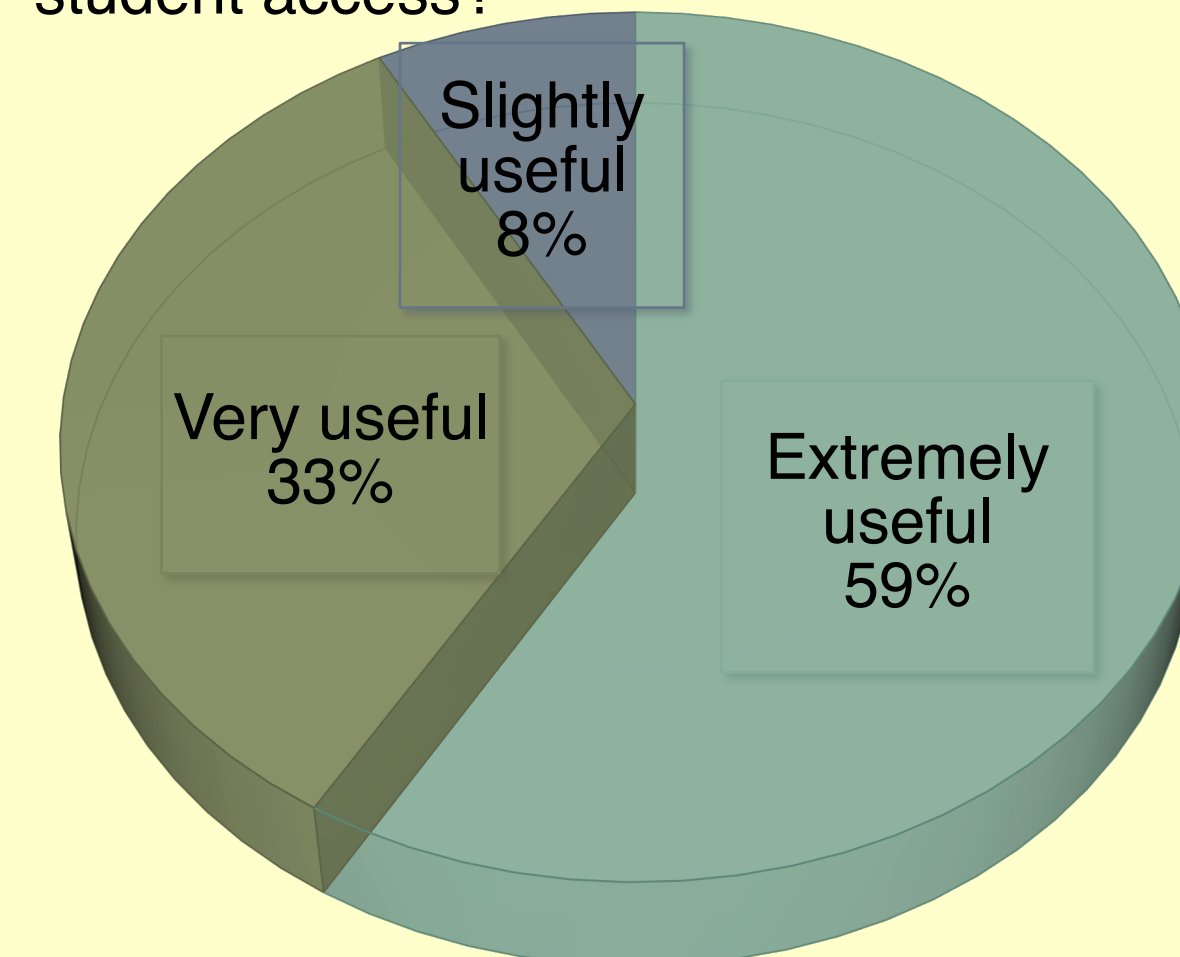
Findings continued

Survey responses indicate the EI's role is increasingly understood as that of a Related Service Provider and member of the educational team.

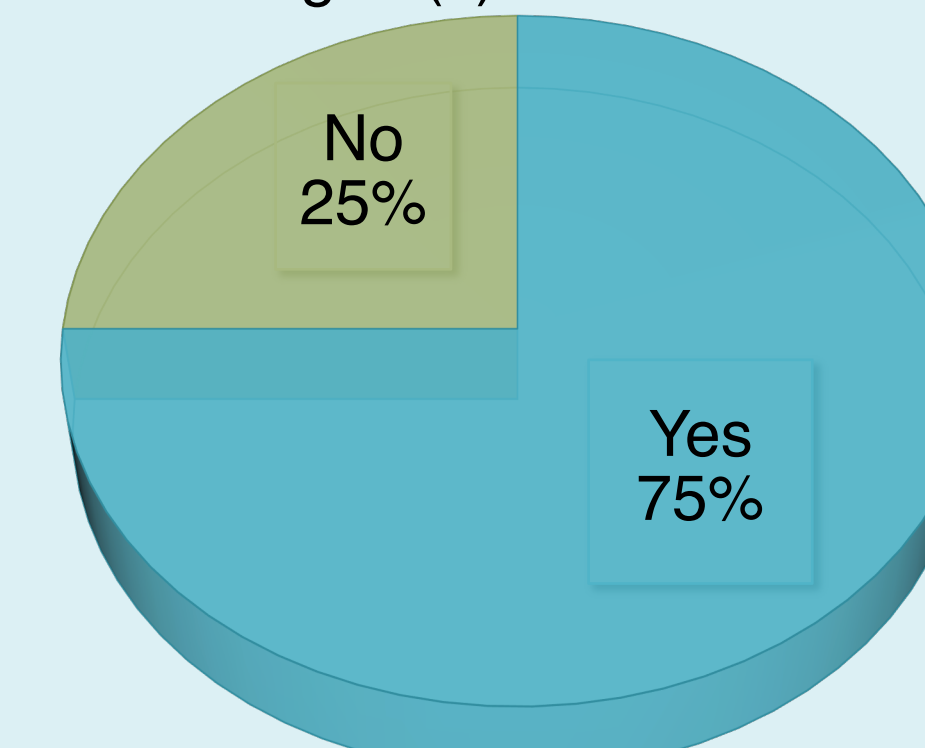
- 83% of EIs report not being viewed as a classroom instructional assistant, and 75% state they are positively viewed as a member of the educational team.
- This suggests progress in the field compared to earlier findings indicating the EI role was often misunderstood (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001; Fitzmaurice, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023; Schaefer & Cokely, 2016).

EIs expressed perceiving value in intentionally collaborating with teachers:

To what extent does meeting with the classroom teacher to understand lesson goals support your ability to provide effective interpretation and student access?



Are you proactive about meeting with the teacher to understand their classroom goal(s) for each lesson?



Additional survey findings:



These top 3 approaches to EI-teacher collaboration were identified:

- 1 Build relationships**
 - > Respect each other's expertise
 - > Increase professional representation of the EI's role
- 2 Prepare**
 - > Plan together as a team of colleagues
 - > Share information with each other
 - > Be creative together
- 3 Communicate**
 - > Clarify roles and expectations
 - > Discuss cultural mediation approaches
 - > Report on language development and access

Effective collaboration ideas:



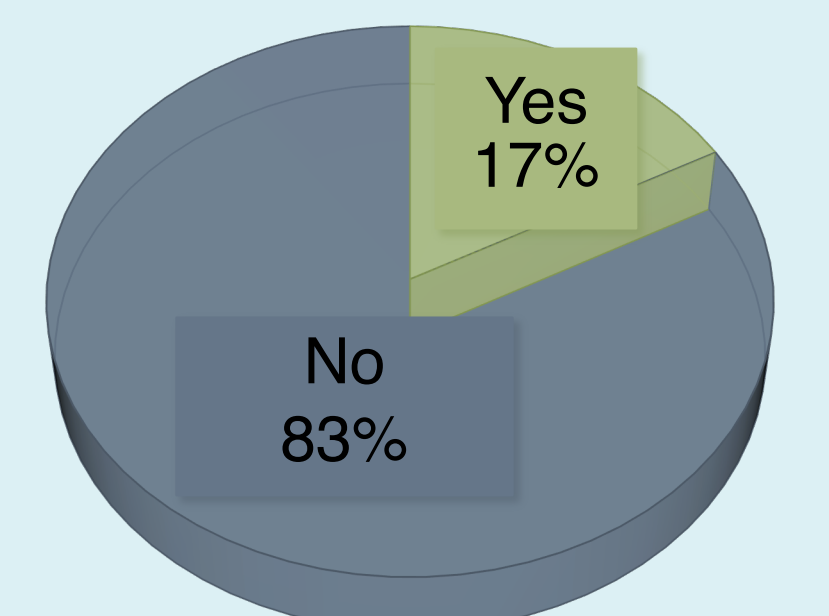
Implications

The survey is done.... Now what?

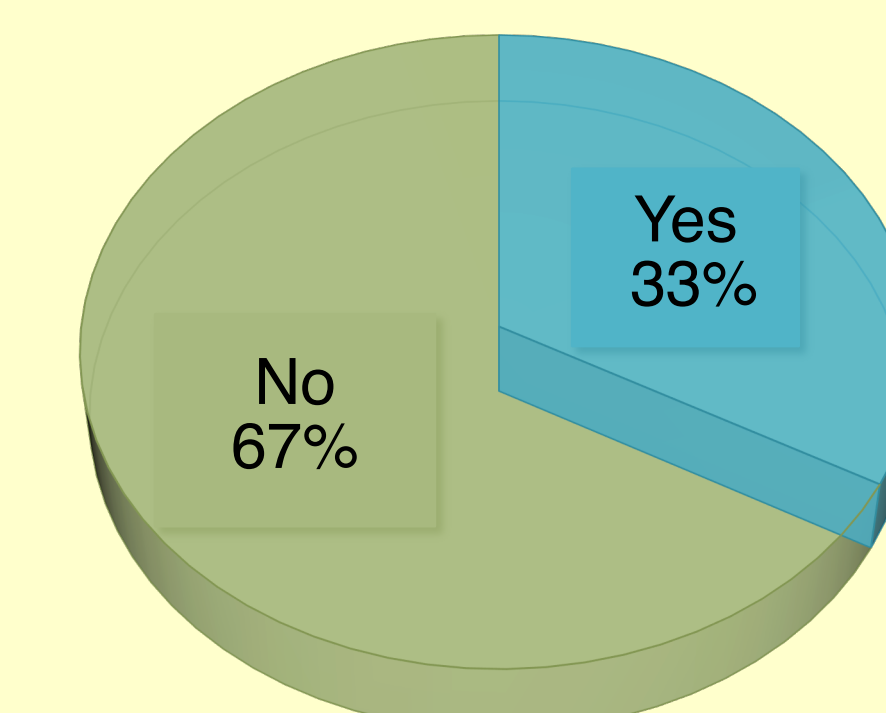
Results from the survey indicate that an opportunity exists for further research into the systems that teachers and EIs each work within, and developing collaborative strategies that bridge the two.

- The majority of EIs—67%—stated they do not know enough about the curriculum to be able to apply appropriate interpreting strategies to teachers' lessons.
- Only 8% of EIs identified the work of Related Service Providers as including developing strategies/materials that support Deaf students' academic access (e.g., signed videos) (Fitzmaurice & Cates, 2026).

Are you informed of and invited to participate in collaborative practices between the classroom teacher and their grade-level team?



Do you know how your teacher collaborates with their team and for what purpose?



The work toward more intentional and consistent collaborative practice between EIs and classroom teachers will yield positive, student-centered outcomes. The work toward applying effective collaboration strategies in school settings continues with YOU.

How will you raise the bar?



References:



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Learn more about the PSI Project:

