UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

IRIS
Improving Rural Interpreter Skills

Copyright & Disclaimer

This product was developed by the [University of Northern Colorado (UNC) Improving Rural Interpreter Skills (IRIS) Project](). The contents of this course were developed under a grant (#H160D210006) from the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement from the Federal Government (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1221e-3 and 3474).

Module 13: Working with Deaf interpreters

Module content developed by Naomi Sheneman
[ASL lecture](#) **by Naomi Sheneman & Elisa M. Velez**

Module Overview & Objectives

Overview: This module focuses on Deaf interpreters: function/value/relevance of their work in the sign language interpreting profession, how non-deaf interpreters can advocate for their presence for optimal communication access, and approaches to Deaf/non-deaf teaming.

Learning Outcomes and Objectives

Upon completion of this module participants will be able to:

1. Describe Deaf interpreters' function in interpreted situations.
2. Explain what the Acculturation Gap Model is and how it is relevant to advocating for Deaf interpreters.
3. Evaluate attitudes towards Deaf interpreters and identify actions they can take to work against barriers for quality of access.
4. Illustrate different teaming approaches when working in Deaf/non-deaf teams.

Answer the following questions:

1. True or False - Deaf interpreters are only assigned to work with specific consumers with language issues.
2. True or False - Deaf interpreters are assigned to work in situations with diverse deaf consumers to promote clarity/optimal communication access for acculturation.
3. In your own words, describe what Deaf interpreters do.

Introduction

Deaf people have been interpreting for other deaf people for as long as deaf people existed. This is a community-based act of reciprocity within deaf communities in which deaf people's strengths are used to support deaf people's individual needs. Unfortunately, it was not until recently that Deaf interpreters were recognized as members of the sign language interpreting profession.

Deaf interpreters are commonly called cultural and linguistic specialists to serve as a justification why organizations should pay for their services. However, there is much more to what they actually do as you will learn later in this module about the Acculturation Gap Model.

Despite the increased demand for Deaf interpreters, there continue to be negative attitudes toward Deaf interpreters. That is where non-deaf interpreters come in. It is our hope that this module will give you the tools and resources you need to advocate for Deaf interpreters when specific interpreting situations warrant the need for their services. While one module dedicated to Deaf interpreters is not sufficient, this should give you a basic understanding. We encourage you to continue learning about the work of Deaf interpreters outside this program.

Let's talk about labels: CDI or DI?

Don't you find it odd that non-deaf interpreters are not commonly called CHI (certified hearing interpreters) but Deaf interpreters are called CDI? Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) is the name of the certification that is issued by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) upon passing the associated knowledge and performance examinations.

In 2015, it was declared that the performance examination was outdated. As of 2022, the new performance examination was still in its beta stage and there was a pool of Deaf interpreters awaiting their test results. (This creates a problematic situation in which the demand for Deaf interpreters has increased especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, but many organizations require national certification.)

There is a very limited number of certified Deaf interpreters as compared to a high number of certified hearing interpreters. In addition, the majority of the certified Deaf interpreters are white.

Agencies will often state that an assignment requires a CDI, but often go with non-certified Deaf interpreters if the paying entities authorize that.

Let's talk about labels: CDI or DI? Part 2

Points for consideration:

- Deaf interpreters, like non-deaf interpreters, have various certifications, credentials, and experiences.
- The use of the CDI label could be excluding other certification holders that are also Deaf interpreters: RSC, BEI, state licensure, and state QA.
- Non-deaf interpreters' certifications over the years did not have their hearing status in the certification name. The insertion of the word, Deaf, is an example of "othering".
- Robert Adam (2017), a Deaf interpreter based in the United Kingdom, proposes that we all call non-deaf/Deaf interpreters by their working languages, namely ASL-English in the United States context.
- Outside of the United States, Deaf interpreters are called DI.

GoReact Discussion: CDI or DI?

University of Northern Colorado | IRIS — Improving Rural Interpreter Skills

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

After reviewing the issues related to labeling an interpreter as a CDI or DI, create an original post explaining what implications these labels have on: our field, deaf consumers' communication access, and on Deaf interpreters themselves.

Response post directions:

Respond to the post of at least two of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

A brief history of Deaf interpreters

Looking back:

- 427-347 BC (approximately) Deaf interpreters emerged as early as signed languages did (Adam, Aro, Druetta, Dunne & Klintberg, 2014)
- 1640: First documentation of a Deaf interpreter at work (colonial New England) (Carty, Macready & Sayers, 2009)
- 1886: First documentation of a Deaf interpreter working in a courtroom (*Skaggs v. State,* 1886)
- 1886-Present: Other occurrences. Histories of deaf people are largely narrative-based but that does not mean those should be discounted (Boudreault, 2005; Forestal, 2014)

Credentialing Systems:

- State Screening Quality Assurances/State Licensure
  - [Varies state by state](#)
- [RID Certifications](#):
  - 1972-1988: Reverse Skills Certificate (RSC)
    - As the RSC was phasing out and the CDI performance exam was in development, the Certified Deaf Interpreter-Provisional (CDI-P) was offered as a bridge written exam. This was made available if Deaf interpreters did not want to take the RSC examination.
  - 1988-2015; 2022-present: Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI)
  - 1991-2016 Conditional Legal Interpreting Permit - Relay (CLIP-R)
  - 2018-2021 Provisional Deaf Interpreter Certificate (PDIC)
- [BEI Certification](#):
  - Current - Board of Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Intermediary Level III, Level IV, Level V

Marginalization of Deaf interpreters in the United States

There are various compounding factors that contribute to the marginalization of Deaf interpreters, rooted systematically, in both overt and covert ways. Undoubtedly, the sign language interpreting profession moved away from a deaf-centered interpreting profession over the years. As discussed in Module 3, in a lecture video about Fant's book, the RID was structured at the very beginning to limit the amount of voice/input deaf people (deaf consumers and deaf interpreters) had within the organization. These limits manifested in the following ways:

- The composition of the RID board has been hearing majority for so long compelling the need to establish a special position: Deaf Member-at-large (DMAL). The first person to serve in this position was Deborah Peterson for the two-year term of 2009-2011.
- As of 2021 the RID board is led by a majority of Deaf board members for the *first time* in history. The current president, Ritchie Bryant, is also the first Deaf president *and* the first Black Deaf president of RID.
- RID's 1997 [Standard Practice Paper (SPP) on Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI)](#) is also the oldest SPP. Over the years, there have been so many developments and further understanding of Deaf interpreters' work and yet there has been no update.

- Prior to 2022, Deaf interpreters were required to participate in trainings in order to sit for the certification examinations whereas non-deaf individuals could sit for certification examinations without proof of completed interpreter trainings. For further information about differences in interpreter and testing requirements between prospective deaf and non-deaf interpreters, read Deaf Interpreters' Ethics: Reflections on Training and Decision-Making by Naomi Sheneman (2016).
- From 2015 to 2022 the lack of a CASLI performance examination and the extended time it took to get results on the newest performance examination were harming Deaf interpreters as many agencies pay certified interpreters more than non-certified interpreters.
- The costs for certification examinations are the same for non-deaf interpreters despite Deaf people's struggle to get work opportunities that would give them the needed funds to pay for the examinations.
- There continue to be many CEU-generating professional development opportunities that are not accessible to Deaf interpreters, compelling them to receive the information via a non-deaf interpreter. This disparity prompted the establishment of the National Deaf Interpreters (NDI) organization that is currently focused on providing professional development opportunities to Deaf interpreters.

This is a list of comments that are commonly made by non-deaf interpreters to argue that Deaf interpreters are not needed:

- "Deaf interpreters are too involved in the Deaf world."
- "If I team with Deaf interpreter, it means I'm lousy."
- "My ASL is so great. I don't need to work with one."
- "I am so involved in the Deaf community. I don't need one."
- "The deaf consumer told me that they don't want a Deaf interpreter."
- "My English is better."
- "My Deaf interpreter team copies me all the time."

In deconstructing the last comment, it is important to consider the difficulty of the task of simultaneous interpreting. For non-deaf interpreters, think about how long it took for you to become competent in simultaneous interpreting. Disparities in niche training available for Deaf interpreters to build mastery in simultaneous interpreting are real. This gap has further perpetuated where and when Deaf interpreters' expertise is called upon, if at all.

GoReact Discussion: Marginalization of Deaf interpreters in the United States

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

After reviewing information about the history of Deaf interpreters as well as the marginalization of Deaf interpreters in the United States, post on GoReact addressing the following questions:

- What was the most surprising thing you learned?
- How can you use this information to advocate for Deaf interpreters?
- What questions do you still have?

Response post directions:

Review and respond to at least two other participants by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

Deaf interpreters: Deaf Extralinguistic Knowledge (DELK)

Deaf extralinguistic knowledge (DELK) was first introduced in 2009 by a group of Deaf interpreters (Beldon, Forestal, Garcia & Peterson). They argue that Deaf interpreters are unique in the sense that they possess lived experiences as deaf individuals communicating with diverse deaf people over the years. Their DELK influences how Deaf interpreters make interpretation and ethical decisions.

It is important to acknowledge that not all deaf people have the same DELK. They do have shared experiences: communication barriers, information deprivation, and fighting for access. Individual Deaf interpreters' DELK may be different in how they decide how to process an interpretation or how to resolve ethical conflicts.

If you want to read more about DELK, you can see the original presentation slides here.

Deaf interpreters: Functions

Functions of Deaf interpreters:

- **Relay**: when a situation needs more than one interpreter to convey the information
- **Intermediary**: this term is often used interchangeably with relay. This also means an interpreter who is familiar with a range of communication styles and linguistic needs among deaf people
- **Cultural/ linguistic specialist/expert**: this is a common description to explain *why* Deaf interpreters are needed. Deaf interpreters possess cultural and linguistic expertise to optimize the communication access.
- **Power neutralizer**: at times, the mere presence of a Deaf interpreter levels the playing field for the deaf consumer who may feel alone in a room full of hearing people.

Deaf interpreters: Domains

Domains of Deaf interpreters' work:

- **Translation**: there is sufficient time to interact with the source text to render a translation into another language (including preparation)
- **Sight translation**: this is a translation done on-the-spot. The source text is static (example: paperwork that needs to be filled out, information given to the deaf consumer by the hearing consumer)
- **Intralanguage interpretation**: working in one language such as ASL-ASL
- **Interlanguage interpretation**: working in two languages such as ASL-English
- **Trilingual interpretation**: working with three languages simultaneously such as ASL-English-LSQ
- **ProTactile:** Language used by DeafBlind people. For more information, review the wealth of resources available here

This is a general list of how Deaf interpreters can be beneficial. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

- DELK
- Cultural mediation
- Information sharing
- Process meaning allowing us to let go of form
- Range of sign choices
- Document translations
- Use of fund of information and analogies
- Natural use of classifiers and space
- The tone and spirit of the message are carried over
- Effective assessment of comprehension
- Notice mumbles and grammatical nuances

What do the national organizations in the United States say?

- RID (1997): Use of CDI Standard Practice Paper states "A Certified Deaf Interpreter may be needed when the communication mode of a deaf consumer is so unique that it cannot be adequately accessed by interpreters who are hearing," (RID, 1997, p. 1).

Twenty years later…

- National Association of the Deaf (NAD) (2017): NAD's Position Paper on HealthCare Interpretation states, "Certain individuals may require the addition of a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI). A CDI is a certified interpreter who is also deaf or hard of hearing who works in tandem with the sign language interpreter. This type of an interpreter is specially trained to facilitate communication between the medical provider and individuals who are deaf with poor communication skills secondary to language deprivation or use a foreign or home-based sign language unfamiliar to the medical interpreter," (2017, Item 5c).

Deaf interpreters: For-for?, Part II

Therefore, existing beliefs held by RID and NAD have had an influence on deaf people's *and* non-deaf interpreters' perspective of Deaf interpreters. Thus, the resistance to the use of Deaf interpreters is due to the perception that Deaf interpreters are tied to *specific* types of consumers. At times, non-deaf interpreters have asked Deaf consumers if they *really needed a Deaf interpreter there*.

Watch [this video](#) by Naomi Sheneman describing a scenario that reveals the negative perception of Deaf interpreters that still runs deep. Now, consider how the negative perception is harmful/hinders optimal communication access.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a game changer for Deaf interpreters as in April 2020, RID made a [statement](#) supporting Deaf interpreters for press conferences: "The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf holds the position and fully endorses that Deaf interpreters are the best to provide this critical information to the masses," (para. 2).

Acculturation Gap Model

Trenton Marsh, a Deaf interpreter, developed a model to describe what Deaf interpreters are for. Watch the Acculturation Gap Model video to learn more.

This model challenges the existing belief that Deaf interpreters are only for specific consumers and proposes a reframing by arguing that Deaf interpreters are for whatever situations warrant the need. The RID's April 2020 statement was in line with the Acculturation Gap Model. Press conferences often are for current, emergent information which is usually new situations, requiring clear, communication access.

Additional Resources:

The following ASL resources offer different explanations and examples of how Deaf interpreters would be beneficial for various situations.

- [The Benefits of Deaf Interpreters](#)
- [Why We Need Deaf interpreters (CDI and DI)](#)
- [deaf@work: June](#)

GoReact Discussion: The value of Deaf interpreters, Part I

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

Create an original post sharing your reflection after reviewing the information about Deaf extralinguistic knowledge (DELK) and the Acculturation Gap Model. This post has two parts:

Part I:

Using the Acculturation Gap Model as your rationale, present your argument on why the situation below would need a Deaf interpreter.

- *For non-deaf interpreters:* describe one situation that you have encountered in your community that would have benefited from having a Deaf interpreter.
- *For Deaf interpreters:* describe one situation you have encountered in which you were told by either the deaf consumer or non-deaf interpreter that you were not needed but you know your service would have been beneficial.

Part II:

If you had to explain to paying entities why a Deaf interpreter is needed, what would you say?

- *Note: there is no standardized statement agreed upon by the interpreting profession. Often, we have to adapt our statements based on who is involved, given a particular situation. Please respond accordingly to your knowledge about how your rural areas. The goal is to give members of your COL various options to try.*

GoReact Discussion: The value of Deaf interpreters, Part II

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Response post directions:
Review and respond to at least two other participants by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

Deaf/non-deaf teams

Teaming considerations

There continues to be discussions on how Deaf/non-deaf teams work together in the interpreting process. Some Deaf interpreters prefer that their team provide the source language in its exact form (English word order) while others prefer a more processed version of the source text (ASL). Yet others prefer that their team provide them with an interpretation however it can be delivered. The best approach is to work as a team, collaborate and made adjustments as needed.
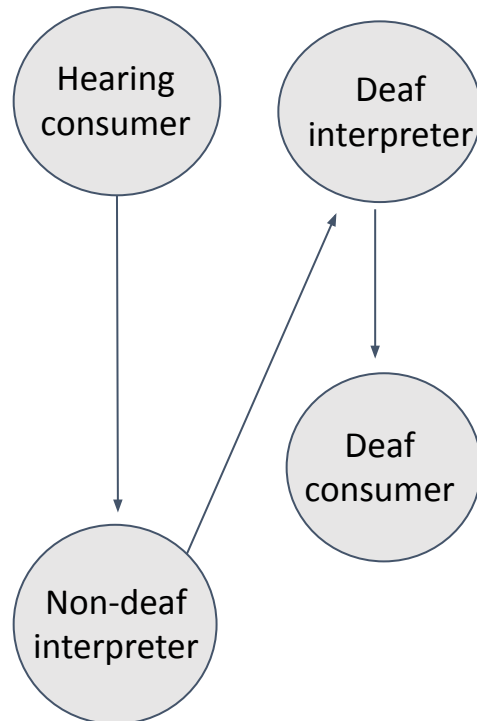
How teams best work together (comprehending the source, representing ideas, and preparing the product) is an ongoing process. Every setting and scenario (and team of interpreters) will bring nuance and variation to the teaming process.

Ethical decision making is another critical component of teaming. Is the team jointly responsible for all decision making? Is one party at greater liability for the other's decisions? How can each member of the team be on equitable footing, collaborating in this work?
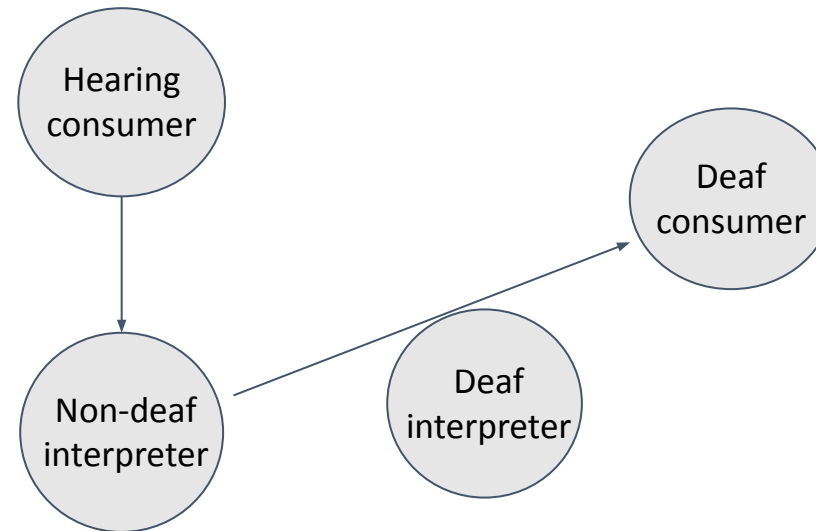
Deaf/non-deaf teams, Part II

There are two teaming approaches. Closed teaming process (N or Z model) and open process:

Closed teaming process

Hearing consumer → Non-deaf interpreter → Deaf interpreter → Deaf consumer

Open teaming process

Hearing consumer → Non-deaf interpreter → Deaf consumer / Deaf interpreter

In this scenario, the Deaf interpreter acts as a monitor rather than actively interpret. This approach was used in the scenario video by Naomi Sheneman earlier in this module.

What does it look like?

Closed teaming process

Open teaming process

the interpreters
need clarification

The closed process is set up in a way that the deaf consumer most likely would not be able to see the non-deaf interpreter. The Deaf interpreter is located next to the hearing consumer. The non-deaf interpreter feeds the hearing consumer's renditions to the Deaf interpreter who then communicates the information to the Deaf consumer.

The open process scenario allows the deaf consumer to see the non-deaf interpreter and hearing consumer at the same time. In this scenario, the Deaf interpreter is not actively interpreting but acting as a monitor of the interpreting process. The Deaf interpreter can jump in at any time to clarify information for either the Deaf consumer or the non-deaf interpreter.

The closed process is typically preferred by Deaf interpreters. One possible explanation for this is that they want to feel they offer value to interpreting situations by actively interpreting. However, the open process allows the Deaf interpreter time and space to observe the interpreting process and make any modifications/corrections as needed. If the Deaf interpreter is actively interpreting, they would not be able to do the monitoring because they are too busy focusing on interpreting.

One advantage of the open process is that it allows all individuals in the interpreting situation: hearing consumer, non-deaf interpreter, and the deaf consumer to see what value the Deaf interpreter brings, *especially* when it is their first time to have a Deaf interpreter present, when there are needed clarifications and adjustments to the interpreting process whereas with the closed process, there's this level of uncertainty why the information is being repeated through two parties.

It is important to remember that open process is not necessarily the best approach. In some situations, closed process may be the best approach such as with DeafBlind. The key is to assess the situation and who all are involved to determine the best approach (role-space framework is one approach to assessing the situation). Talk to the deaf consumers to see what they prefer.

GoReact Discussion: Deaf/non-deaf teams

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Original post directions:

After reviewing information about Deaf/non-deaf teams, post on GoReact addressing the following prompts:

- Summarize your experiences working within Deaf/non-deaf teams.
- What additional support and resources do you need when working in these teams?
- What questions do you still have?

Response post directions:

Review and respond to at least two other participants by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

References, Part I

Adam, R. (2017, April 2). *Mind the gap: What is missing for deaf interpreters and translators?* [Conference keynote presentation]. *Second Symposium on Signed Language Interpretation and Translation Research,* Washington DC.

Adam, R., Aro, M., Druetta, J.C., Dunne, S. & Klintberg, J.A. (2014) Deaf interpreters: An introduction. In R. Adam, C Stone, S.D. Collins & M. Metzger (Eds.), *Deaf interpreters at work: International insights* (p. 1-18). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

ASLized. (2014, August 10). *The benefits of deaf interpreters* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Ec8LjnVuJx8

Beldon, J., Forestal, E., Garcia, L. M. & Peterson, D. (2009, August). *NCIEC deaf interpreting initiative*. Paper presented at the RID Deaf Caucus, Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from http://www.diinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/RID2009_DI_FINAL0802.pdf

Boudreault, P. (2005). Deaf interpreters. In T. Janzen (Ed.), *Topics in signed language interpreting* (p. 323-355). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

CATIE Center. (2019, July 25). *The acculturation gap model* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/SLHGekIXHZw

References, Part II

Cherry, K. (2020, December 13). *What is othering?* Verywell Mind. Retrieved from
https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-othering-5084425

Forestal, E. (2014) Deaf interpreters: The dynamics of their interpreting processes. In R. Adam, C Stone, S.D. Collins & M. Metzger (Eds.), *Deaf interpreters at work: International insights* (p. 29-50). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

NADvlogs. (2019, October 23). *deaf@work: June* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Nmmi7qu_a2A

National Association of the Deaf. (2017). *Position statement on health care access for deaf patients* [Position statement]. Retrieved from
https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/position-statement-on-health-care-access-for-deaf-patients/

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. (n.d.) *State-by-state regulations for interpreters and transliterators.* Retrieved from https://rid.org/programs/gap/state-by-state-regulations/

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. (n.d.). *Types of RID certification.* Retrieved from
https://rid.org/certification/

References, Part III

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. (2019, April 9). *RID position statement: CDIs at press conferences.* Retrieved from https://rid.org/rid-position-statement-cdis-at-press-conferences/

Registry of the Interpreters for the Deaf. (1997). *Use of a certified deaf interpreter* [Standard practice paper]. Retrieved from https://rid.org/about/interpreting-resources/

Sheneman, Naomi (2016) Deaf interpreters' ethics: Reflections on training and decision-making," *Journal of Interpretation, 25*(1) Article 8. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/joi/vol25/iss1/8

Skaggs v. State, 8 N.E. 695 (Indiana State Court, 1886)

Texas Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *BEI certificates awarded*. Retrieved from https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/assistive-services-providers/board-evaluation-interpreters-certification-program/bei-certificates-awarded.

VirtualDeafChurch (2017, May 24). *Why we need deaf interpreters (CDI & DI)* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/xxZURmLNw9A

Western Oregon University (n.d.) *Protactile language interpreting: National education program.* Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/dbi/

Answer the following questions:

1. True or False - Deaf interpreters are only assigned to work with specific consumers with language issues.
2. True or False - Deaf interpreters are assigned to work in situations with diverse deaf consumers to promote clarity/optimal communication access for acculturation.
3. In your own words, describe what Deaf interpreters do.
4. What can you do to advocate for Deaf interpreters?

Correct responses: 1. False, 2. True, 3. & 4. Various answers will apply.

Improving Rural Interpreter Skills

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO