

Educational Interpreting: A Changed Perspective

By: Morgan Magnuson

If I had been asked to sum up in a single word my entire, albeit brief experience as an educational interpreter, I would probably go with the word “surprising.” No, that’s not to say that I face shockers on a daily basis as I walk into school (although there have been a few of those, too). What I mean to say is that, when I more or less fell into a full-time position last year, I had a very different impression of the educational interpreter’s job than what I now have.

Upon graduation from my ITP at North Central University, I never imagined myself as a K-12 interpreter in the mainstream setting. From an amalgamation of various experiences, I came out believing that the job of a K-12 interpreter was too great a burden for a recent graduate such as myself; to be a language model - perhaps the only language model - for a young, impressionable deaf kid was something to be taken very seriously. However, at some point, via a variety of factors, that initial intimidation that I felt toward the role changed. I could tell the story of how I went from refusing to be an educational interpreter to thoroughly enjoying it, but I must move on to the point.

The point is this: it is an honor to be a part of the academic and social development of deaf youth and adolescents. Furthermore, it is humbling to see and, to some extent, experience a deaf student’s daily life - both the struggles and the triumphs - in the mainstream setting. It has changed many aspects of my work.

Yes, educational interpreting is still an intimidating job for me; there are few days when I don’t think about how the following seven hours could impact my kid, for better or for worse, for the rest of his or her life. That thought keeps me going, pushing myself to improve my skills and provide my best work. Sometimes it is exhausting work; sometimes I just have to plow through an impossible situation and be a team with my student; sometimes I leave an ethical scenario feeling like there was no right answer. But, surprisingly, I wouldn’t trade it for any other work because, at the end of the day, it is worth it.

Morgan Magnuson

Morgan Magnuson grew up in the small town of Lindström, Minnesota. She took her first formal ASL class at St. Catherine’s University while still in high school, and attended North Central University’s interpreter training program. She graduated in 2014 and has since then become an educational interpreter for Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916. She was a member of the 2015 VRS Interpreting Institute’s SchooltoWork program in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she further developed her work. Some pastimes that she enjoys include reading, rollerblading, running, and playing and officiating sports.