



World Association of Sign Language Interpreters

Deafblind Interpreter Education Guidelines

1.0 Introduction

The lack of qualified interpreters working with Deafblind people is widespread; it is not limited to a single country or region of the world. One way to address this lack is to increase the educational and training opportunities that lead to skilled and knowledgeable interpreters available to Deafblind communities. The identified global need for opportunities for students of signed language interpreting to be exposed to, learn about, and become skilled in Deafblind interpreting led to the development of these guidelines in 2012. The hope is that this document will stimulate creative and effective approaches to Deafblind interpreter education everywhere.

1.1 Document background

These guidelines were designed specifically for countries with existing signed language interpreter education programs that seek to either add Deafblind interpreting to their curriculum or enhance their Deafblind interpreting curriculum offerings. There are recommendations elsewhere for developing signed language interpreting programs where none currently exist. (See, for example, WASLI Interpreter Education Guidelines, at www.wasli.org.) The guidelines presented here are not a set of rules; rather, they are intended to assist countries in making decisions that best fit their realities. Neither are these guidelines comprehensive; it is likely there are effective approaches to Deafblind interpreter education not included here.

1.2 Committee background

Late in 2011 the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) established the Deafblind Interpreting Committee, and among its initial goals was to create this resource document. Members were sought using the WASLI email list, newsletter, and Facebook page. The group consists of 11 volunteers, including Deafblind, Deaf, and hearing interpreters, consumers, educators, students, and researchers; a majority of the WASLI regions are represented. This committee would like to especially acknowledge the prior work of the WASLI

Task Force on Education and Training. This document relies heavily on their 2009 Interpreter Education Guidelines in terms of both format and content.

1.3 Definitions

Brief definitions of deafblindness and Deafblind interpreting are warranted in this introductory section in order to establish a common framework. Both definitions come from the Association of the Swedish Deafblind (FSDB) and have been adopted by many Deafblind organizations worldwide, including the World Federation of the Deafblind and the European Deafblind Union.

Deafblindness refers to persons having varying degrees of hearing and vision. “Deafblindness limits a person’s activities and restricts her/his full participation in society to such a degree that society is required to facilitate specific services, environmental alterations and/or technology” (FSDB, 2007). Deafblind interpreting is one example of a “specific service.”

Deafblind interpreting is described as “a requirement in order for people with deafblindness to achieve full participation, equality, independence and self-determination in every area of society” (FSDB, 2008). It is the provision via an intermediary of visual and/or auditory information, which occurs through offering three, fully integrated elements: the interpreting of spoken or signed language, environmental description, and physical guiding. Section 5.0, on curriculum content, articulates how each of these elements might be included in a signed language interpreting program.

2.0 Collaborative approach

The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters is committed to the advancement of the profession of signed language interpreting worldwide. Similarly, the WASLI Deafblind Interpreting Committee is committed to the development of Deafblind interpreting on a global scale through collaboration with Deafblind communities and other stakeholders to provide information, resources, and connections. The spirit of this commitment is embedded throughout this document.

In keeping with the philosophical statement above, WASLI believes that any interpreter education endeavors that countries undertake must include the perspectives and experiences of Deafblind people in determining how interpreters learn to work with them. WASLI envisions collaborative relationships that purposely and thoughtfully incorporate local expertise in the cultural, linguistic, social, and political conditions that influence teaching and practicing Deafblind interpreting in a particular region.

Stakeholders involved in collaborative educational efforts may include, but are not limited to, Deafblind, Deaf, and hearing community members; Deaf and hearing interpreters; national Deafblind and Deaf representatives; government representatives; and representatives of educational institutions. The aim of these efforts is the development of expertise and empowerment of local people to lead Deafblind interpreter education endeavors in their own countries.

3.0 Availability of training

The availability of Deafblind interpreter education varies widely; some countries include such training in their signed language interpreting programs while many currently do not. The reasons for this vary and are complex and can in part be linked to countries' access to resources—including financial, human, technological, and knowledge—as well as the level of political awareness and involvement on the part of Deafblind and Deaf communities. South Africa is an example where funding is cited as the major reason why Deafblind interpreter training is not offered. An example of extremely limited training options is England, where certification is offered only in tactile fingerspelling; no formal training for interpreters is available in other, more commonly used communication methods such as tactile signing or restricted space signing. Another factor that may impact the availability of Deafblind interpreter education is the lack of awareness within educational and governmental institutions. Still, despite situations with limited government involvement, there has been some success due to efforts at the community level. Croatia serves as an example of this, where the national Deafblind association was able to establish interpreter training without recognition or support from the government.

In some countries with established Deafblind communities—communities that include self-advocacy organizations and support services—interpreter education programs include more robust Deafblind interpreter training. However, even in these cases training and expectations are rarely standardized and vary greatly from program to program. One example is the United States, where over 130 college-level signed language interpreting programs exist, without standardization among them. Delivery methods in formal programs, including instruction on Deafblind interpreting, is another area of much variation. Courses may be available in the traditional classroom format and, in regions where technology allows, online or in hybrid format (i.e., a combination of classroom and online learning).

4.0 Approaches to training

Just as the availability of Deafblind interpreter training varies widely, so do approaches to training. The countries mentioned in this document were selected to demonstrate this variety—from intensive training to cursory—and were also chosen based on committee members' knowledge, experience, and contacts. Again, these countries' approaches are not representative of all possible

pathways to offering Deafblind interpreter education.

4.1 Program-based training

One approach to teaching students of interpreting about working with Deafblind people is to infuse the topic throughout a program's curriculum. This option allows students to encounter Deafblind individuals and topics early and often during their studies as one thread in the tapestry of the signing community. Rather than treating Deafblind interpreting as a separate, specialized—and potentially unusual or even intimidating—subject, programs following an infused approach present Deafblind interpreting as an essential and natural component of their curriculum. By emphasizing the reality that practicing interpreters are likely to come across Deafblind people during their career, an infused curriculum prepares students whether or not they plan to work in the Deafblind community.

The signed language interpreting program in Croatia, where Deafblind topics are included in all three levels of the curriculum, is one example of infusing Deafblind information into a program. First, students enrolled in signed language courses study both Deaf and Deafblind cultures. Then all students take a Deafblind interpreting course, qualifying them to guide and interpret in low-stakes, informal situations. The final level of study involves more intensive training on interpreting with Deaf and Deafblind consumers to allow graduates to work with both consumer groups in a variety of settings. For a suggested strategy for embedding Deafblind interpreting topics throughout a curriculum, see sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Another approach to program-based training on Deafblind interpreting is to offer a series of specialized courses dedicated to the topic. Spain provides an example of this approach, where in 1997 specific requirements for a two-year signed language interpreting program were formally established. Of the 2,000 hours required for certification, 130 hours focus exclusively on Deafblind interpreting; all students in the program must take the Deafblind course sequence. Topics include guiding techniques, interpreting techniques, communication methods (e.g., tactile signed language, Lorm, Tadoma, etc.), ethics for guide interpreters, characteristics of Deafblind populations (e.g., causes of deafblindness, education options, etc.), braille, and technology used by Deafblind people.

Yet another approach to Deafblind interpreter training is one found in interpreting programs in several countries. In this option the topic is covered in a single course, such as an Introduction to Deafblind Interpreting course, or offered as a single class session during a general signed language interpreting course. While this is a more superficial approach compared to those described above, it can result in piquing students' interest to learn more about working in their Deafblind communities. Australia provides two examples of the single-course option.

Diploma-level Deaf studies is offered at the Technical and Further Education program in Victoria and includes an introduction to tactile signing and guiding. This part of the program is taught by a Deafblind instructor, reflecting the value of educational institutions partnering with the local Deafblind community. Many students from this program continue on to interpreting studies. The second example from Australia is the University of Melbourne, where the signed language interpreting certificate program includes an optional introductory course on Deafblind topics. Students in this program are encouraged, though not required, to volunteer at Deafblind social events.

4.2 Non-program-based training

Outside of formal programs, training in Deafblind interpreting in some countries is offered as separate, special-interest workshops or seminars. In many instances, the “on-the-job training” approach is still used, with no formal training provided. Although the goal of this document is to guide formal programs in either incorporating or enhancing Deafblind interpreter education, approaches outside of formal programs do exist, a selection of which follows in this section. Ideally, non-program-based training is offered in addition to, rather than in lieu of, formal programming. In regions where this is not yet feasible, colleges and universities can partner with local Deafblind or Deaf organizations or service agencies to co-sponsor training opportunities while at the same time continuing their efforts to develop formal, comprehensive training at their educational institutions.

An example of successful collaboration among several partners to provide Deafblind interpreter training outside of a formal program occurred in 1997 in Colombia. The following entities came together to provide intensive training: the Association of Swedish Deafblind (FSDB); the National Federation of the Deaf in Colombia (FENASCOL); Valle University in Cali, Colombia; and the National Institute for the Deaf in Colombia (INSOR). This training spanned over 400 hours, including supervised practice sessions, and covered topics such as Deafblind communication systems, community organizations, definitions and characteristics of the Deafblind community, interpreting, guiding, roles, visual description, and ethics. Although the training was offered only once, the National Association of Translators and Interpreters of Sign Language and Guide Interpreters of Colombia (ANISCOL) has expressed interest in collaborating with INSOR and various universities to again offer intensive training.

Mentoring is another approach to Deafblind interpreter training, one that takes place within or external to programs, both formally and informally. While some mentoring opportunities exist for Deafblind interpreting, they are not yet seen on the scale of general signed language interpreter mentoring. An example of an in-depth, non-program-based mentoring experience in Deafblind interpreting comes from the United States. In the summer of 2011, a number of organizations came together to provide a unique mentoring opportunity. These entities were the American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB), the National Task Force on

Deaf-Blind Interpreting (NTFDBI), and several regional, federally funded signed language interpreter education centers. The program included two components. The first part involved mentors and mentees participating in two weeks of online instruction co-facilitated by a Deafblind instructor and an interpreter educator. Mentors and mentees—both Deaf and hearing—received the same instruction on Deafblind interpreting, with additional instruction provided to the mentors on techniques for mentoring. Participants also had one-on-one video mentoring sessions during this period. The second part involved the mentors and mentees working together at the AADB National Symposium, held over six days in Kentucky. During the day mentoring pairs worked with Deafblind symposium attendees, and in the evenings they participated in facilitated mentoring sessions. This experiential learning opportunity allowed mentors and mentees to directly apply the skills and knowledge gained during their two weeks of training, while also increasing the number of interpreters available to Deafblind AADB symposium attendees.

4.3 *Transnational options*

On occasion interpreter educators from one country with more experience and a longer history of Deafblind interpreter education will provide training to educators or interpreters in another country, though this type of international partnering does not seem as common as in general signed language interpreter training. This approach can be beneficial as long as steps are taken to ensure the training is linguistically and culturally sensitive, includes the realities of the local Deafblind community, and leads to development of local educators who can effectively continue the work. (See section 2.0 for more about WASLI’s philosophical approach.)

Another transnational option is for individual interpreters to study and gain experience abroad, then return with professional knowledge and an academic foundation that can be applied to teaching and practicing Deafblind interpreting in their home country. Because it cannot be assumed that methods and perspectives from one location will translate effectively to another, appropriate adaptations to local contexts must be considered.

5.0 Approaches to curriculum

This section begins with general recommendations that serve as common program elements applicable regardless of specific culture and language. The subsections then become increasingly more specific, moving into areas where adaptations to the particular context of a given program must be taken into consideration.

5.1 Deafblind instructors

Having qualified, knowledgeable teachers is as important to students' program of study as is completing a comprehensive, rigorous curriculum. Therefore, a first step all interpreting programs are encouraged to take is to identify qualified educators who are Deafblind and who can take an integral role in developing and implementing appropriate interpreter training. These teachers can offer students their unique linguistic and cultural perspectives based on personal life experiences. In addition, qualified Deaf and hearing educators of languages, linguistics, cultures, and interpreting pedagogy can work with Deafblind educators to bring their perspectives and experience into the learning environment.

In cases of a lack of qualified Deafblind educators, current interpreting educators should be encouraged to become allies within their institutions to support Deafblind people in their efforts to become qualified instructors. In conjunction with these efforts, members of the Deafblind community can be invited to the program to share with students their expertise and perspectives in a variety of ways: as guest lecturers, language models, language mentors, interpreting lab staff, office staff, and more. These contributions must be sought, recognized, and compensated appropriately and should be considered in addition to, not in lieu of, employing qualified Deafblind instructors as part of the program faculty.

5.2 Program prerequisites

The WASLI Interpreter Education Guidelines—as mentioned above, created by the Task Force on Education and Training and available at www.wasli.org-- provides an expanded list of prerequisites to studying interpreting. A summary list of those prerequisites is included here, with additions in italics showing where Deafblind topics may be added throughout. Readers are referred to the WASLI Interpreter Education Guidelines for more information on each general prerequisite. Note the planned and sequenced approach to infusing Deafblind interpreting throughout the prerequisite courses and program curriculum.

Prerequisites

- Advanced signed language study—to include *Deafblind signed language models*
- Linguistic structures of (local) signed language—to include *Deafblind linguistic adaptations (tactile, restricted space, etc.)*
- Advanced spoken language study
- Deaf cultural studies—to include *Deafblind cultural studies*
- Service learning in the Deaf community—to include *service learning in the Deafblind community*

5.3 Program content

Once students possess foundational knowledge and skills in the subject areas listed above, the following components—taken from the WASLI Interpreter Education Guidelines and expanded upon there—constitute the interpreter training portion of their education. Suggestions for incorporating Deafblind topics have been added in italics.

General courses

- Comparative linguistics—*to include linguistics of tactile (local) signed language*
- Introduction to professional practice—*to include Deafblind topics*
- Translation and discourse analysis skills—*to include Deafblind language models*
- Intercultural communication—*to include Deafblind culture*
- Interpreting skills and techniques (multiple courses)—*to include skills and techniques for working with Deafblind consumers*
- Ethics, professionalism, and decision-making—*to include scenarios involving Deafblind consumers*
- Internships—*to include placements with Deafblind consumers*
- Specialized settings—*Note that some programs choose to address Deafblind interpreting in this type of course. However, populations and settings are not comparable. Indeed, interpreting with Deafblind people happens in any and all specialized settings.*
- Team interpreting—*to include team interpreting for Deafblind consumers and in Deaf-hearing teams*
- *(added) Advanced elective(s) or a track further focusing on Deafblind interpreting*

A list of specific topics that might be included in Deafblind interpreter education follows. Note that this list is not exhaustive, nor is it appropriate to assume that programs in all countries should include every topic. Such decisions must be made at the local level, with international consultation if needed or desired.

Deafblind interpreting topics

- Communication methods and interpreting within each one
 - tactile signing
 - visual frame signing, including restricted space signing and close-vision signing
 - tactile manual alphabet
 - tracking
 - pro-tactile/social haptic communication
- Environmental description
 - physical surroundings
 - people
 - happenings

- social exchanges
- Guiding techniques
 - orientation and mobility
- Ethics
 - assessing communication match
 - determining preferences
 - issues of power
- Roles
 - interpreter
 - support service provider
 - guide interpreter
 - intervener
- Environmental conditions
 - lighting
 - attire
 - background
 - scents
 - seating arrangements
- Community issues
 - Deafblind culture and perspectives
 - organizations and resources
 - technology

6.0 Concurrent activities

In addition to the curriculum content outlined in the previous section, countries should consider additional activities, described below, in conjunction with developing and implementing Deafblind interpreter education.

6.1 *Adapting and creating resources*

The “Deafblind Interpreting” section of the WASLI web site contains resources that interpreting programs may find useful as they develop or enhance their offerings. In its role as a resource for sharing information, WASLI recognizes the importance of countries developing their own materials for use within the context in which their educational programs are situated. Again, approaches and materials successful in one region or community may not be directly applicable to another. In light of this reality, interpreting programs are encouraged to review existing approaches, curricula, and materials for Deafblind interpreter education, then to determine what can be adapted to their needs and what would best be created from within their own programs and resources.

6.2 *Community connections*

An option that some interpreting programs have found helpful is to establish an advisory group to assist in the design and overall operation of a program. Again,

a collaborative approach between the local Deafblind community and other stakeholders is critical to the acceptance, support, and success of educational efforts. Therefore, Deafblind involvement—including opportunity for leadership roles—is recommended as part of any interpreting program advisory board that is established.

Consumer organizations are another type of community partner that can influence the direction and success of Deafblind interpreter education efforts. Deafblind people's access to education, employment, and services in their communities depends largely on the availability of a pool of qualified interpreters. As interpreters are being trained, Deafblind organizations—alongside Deaf and hearing interpreters and other stakeholders from the health, education, employment, and legal sectors—should develop a plan for advocating for the infrastructure needed, including ongoing funding, to provide stable and reliable interpreting and related support services within the Deafblind community.

6.3 Consumer training

Important to the success of the consumer-interpreter relationship—and thus to the success of interpreted communication—is the ability of Deafblind persons to effectively use interpreting services. (The term *consumer* is used here to refer to a Deafblind person who communicates through an interpreter with non-signers or with anyone who does not share a communication method.) Regardless of whether professional Deafblind interpreting is a relatively recent development in a country or has been established for some time, regular opportunities should be provided by the local Deafblind community for their members to learn about and practice with interpreters in a supportive environment. This will help ensure that consumers and interpreters have similar expectations of their working relationship and will also allow trust to develop so that communication is optimized.

7.0 Final thoughts

This document has described WASLI's overall approach—both philosophical and practical—to incorporating and enhancing Deafblind interpreter training in existing signed language interpreting programs. WASLI is not endorsing one pathway instead of another; too many local variables are involved to prescribe a single approach. Rather, the committee seeks to share what we have found, intending that programs will find something valuable here that will help them include or improve Deafblind interpreter education. Ultimately, each country must move forward with Deafblind interpreter education from its own starting point, keeping at the forefront the importance of developing collaborations between local stakeholders and others in the wider profession. The role of WASLI is to provide an international means of supporting these local efforts so that Deafblind communities everywhere benefit from having a sufficient number of knowledgeable, skilled interpreters.

In addition to once again thanking the WASLI Task Force on Education and Training for the direction provided by their Interpreter Education Guidelines, WASLI thanks all of the contributors to this document for their valuable input. The sharing of their insights and perspectives was indeed a model of collaboration.