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Breakout Session B9 • 1:30-2:30pm • Grand Ballroom D/E

## Interpreter or Intervener? Identifying the Best Role for Communication Support in the Classroom

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### Presenter Information

Susanne Morgan Morrow, MA, CI, CT. Susie is a nationally certified interpreter and is the Project Director for the New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative, a federally funded grant for children who are deaf-blind. Over her almost 25 years of service in the field she has learned very intimately, through direct experience, the communication needs of children and adults who are DeafBlind. She has designed training materials and provides professional development on this particular topic among many others. Additionally, through her many years of coordinating interpreters and support providers at the International CHARGE Syndrome conference and other large-scale events, she can speak very familiarly on strategies to accommodate the varying needs of individuals in the community.

### Presentation Abstract

An educational interpreter and intervener have overlapping roles in the classroom, which may cause confusion to parents of children with CHARGE Syndrome, thus leading to challenges when advocating for the best means of communication support in the classroom. This presentation will explore the differences and the similarities in the roles and assist families in identifying what role would best suite their child. Detailed examples will be provided to understand the variables that impact various types of communication needs. A case study approach will be used to assist in understanding.

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the differences and similarities between an educational interpreter and an intervener.
- Identify the principles of behind the roles of an educational interpreter and intervener.
- Apply these concept to the communication needs of their child.

**Supporting individuals who are DeafBlind: Interpreters, interveners, and support service providers**

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Text & ASL version can be found at <https://rid.org/supporting-individuals-who-are-deafblind/>

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## **Comparing the Roles and Responsibilities of Interpreters, Interveners and SSPs**

Individuals who are DeafBlind interact with their environment in unique ways. To provide access to the environment and encourage empowerment, there is a need for trained professionals with a comprehensive skill set to meet the needs of individuals who are DeafBlind with varying life experiences. For this article, the focus will be on examining the roles of interpreters, interveners, and support service providers (SSPs).

### **Interpreter**

Interpreters can anticipate working with individuals with varying degrees of vision and hearing loss throughout the course of their career. This variation will affect the mode of communication and preferred reception of the individual. Some DeafBlind people use tactile sign language that is received through a hand-under-hand method of communication. Additional tactile input is provided through various methods, such as Pro-Tactile (PT) and haptics (Edwards, 2014). Much advancement and comparative study is currently being conducted to indicate the grammatical differences between visual and Pro-Tactile ASL (PTASL). If engaging in a PT means of communication, full access is provided to the receiver through touch ([protactile.org](http://protactile.org)) in various locations on the body and is a shared, interactive experience. Interpreters working with DeafBlind people can either be Deaf or hearing and work across all environments. DeafBlind interpreting is not a specialty, such as medical or legal interpreting, it simply refers to a means of access for a large amount of community members.

### **Interveners**

Many school districts hire paraprofessionals to provide support to students with disabilities in mainstream education (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002) in response to the ratification of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004. Paraprofessionals who work

with DeafBlind students are referred to as interveners (Blaha, Cooper, Irby, Montgomery, & Parker, 2009; Montgomery, 2015). Naturally, this role requires a specific set of knowledge and skills to provide adequate access to communication and the environment (Alsop, Killoran, Robinson, Durkel, & Prouty, 2004).

Interveners work under the supervision of certified education professionals, typically classroom teachers, and provide consistent access to communication, while facilitating social and emotional development (NCDB, 2013). They provide access to sensory information that would otherwise be unavailable due to limited vision and hearing and empower children to have control over their lives (NCDB, 2012). Access to a qualified intervener is crucial to support many DeafBlind students in their educational development (Probst, 2017). This role is still evolving and gaining recognition in the US with training and certification options at the national level.

### **Support Service Provider (SSP)**

An SSP is someone who is trained to support DeafBlind individuals to lead a more self-determined life. This is done by facilitating communication and acting as a human guide in such instances as running errands, accessing social events, etc.. An important feature that is different from an interpreter is that the SSP role can be more fluid based on the established relationship between the two parties. At times, transportation and other supports are provided on an individually negotiated basis. Currently, this role can be either volunteer or is a remunerated service. Much lobbying has been done by the adult DeafBlind community to gain federal recognition of this role, however, efforts continue to be made to gain formal acknowledgement.

### **Comparing Services**

To further describe the roles and responsibilities of interveners, interpreters, and SSPs, please see the table below.

<b>Role Responsibilities</b>	<b>Interpreter</b>	<b>Intervener</b>	<b>SSP</b>
Ages Served	<i>All Ages</i>	<i>Primarily children and young adults</i>	<i>Youth and adults capable of making independent decisions</i>
Communication	<i>Interprets visual and spoken information into sign language (visual, low vision, tactile, PTASL, etc.) and vice versa</i>	<i>Provides access to and/or assists in the development of receptive &amp; expressive communication skills May use sign language as one of the communication modalities</i>	<i>Supports an individual by encouraging independence (e.g., facilitating communication, acting as a human guide, and providing transportation). May use sign language or other means of communication access</i>
Information/Learning	<i>Channels information and delivers it to the individual (not responsible for the learning of the individual)</i>	<i>Facilitates learning and skill development</i>	<i>Facilitates interactions between the individual and the environment; empowers the individual to advocate for him/herself</i>
Training	<i>Has obtained a Bachelor's Degree in order to pursue national certification. May also obtain state</i>	<i>Training/coursework is required. Both national certification and credentialing are available, but often not required</i>	<i>Encouraged to receive training in strategies for communication access and human guide for DeafBlind people</i>

	level certification/ licensure		
Work Environment	<i>A variety of settings (e.g., school, church, recreation, medical)</i>	<i>Primarily educational settings, but can also provide services in the community Participates as an active member of a student's educational team</i>	<i>A variety of settings</i>
Employer	<i>A variety of employers (e.g., adult service agencies, independent contractors, local education agencies)</i>	<i>Primarily local education agencies, but could also be employed by a community provider</i>	<i>Typically a volunteer, unless funds have been secured</i>
Confidentiality	<i>At all times</i>	<i>Expected to share relevant information with educational team</i>	<i>At all times</i>
Relationship	<i>Professional distance</i>	<i>Educational relationship, but must establish a trusting relationship with the individual</i>	<i>Professional, but may develop a personal relationship</i>

Adapted from Morgan, 2001

A clear understanding of these three roles is essential for interpreters who work with DeafBlind individuals. Educational interpreters may work alongside interveners in classrooms and may pursue further education to extend their knowledge of deafblindness. Interpreters

working with DeafBlind people in community settings may need to coordinate their services with SSPs. Finally, although not all DeafBlind people use tactile sign language, many do, making this (and, at times, PTASL) an essential skill set for interpreters.

Each of these roles is different from the other, but collectively they fulfill the unique communication, social, learning, and relational needs of DeafBlind people. For more information on interveners, contact the National Center on DeafBlindness ([nationaldb.org](http://nationaldb.org)). For information on DeafBlind interpreting, contact the DeafBlind Interpreting National Training and Resource Center ([www.dbinterpreting.org/](http://www.dbinterpreting.org/)). And to learn about SSP services in your state, contact your Helen Keller National Center Regional Representative ([www.helenkeller.org](http://www.helenkeller.org)).

## Resources

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