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Article 16

The Role of an Interpreter: Unique Dynamics in Teaching and Supervision

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The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) Mental Health Report (2007) estimates that there are over 5 million people who are Deaf in the United States who are in need of mental health treatment every year. Of these 5 million individuals, only about 2% receive appropriate treatment for their mental illness.

In the past, seeking mental health assistance has been too expensive for Deaf individuals, as they have been responsible for the cost of the mental health services as well as the services of the interpreter (Roe & Roe, 1991). As legislation continues to focus on individuals who are Deaf, more Deaf individuals are becoming aware of their right to equal access and accommodations to mental health counseling. As more Deaf individuals seek out professional mental health services, the need for individuals fluent in sign language and skilled in providing mental health services increases.

To respond to the increased demand for services, counselors and supervisors need to be highly skilled in providing services to the Deaf community. The increased demand for client-based services has been coupled with more Deaf individuals pursuing and excelling in

higher education programs (Pollard, 1996). Many counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators are unaware and lacking in knowledge of Deaf culture, thus leading to possible misunderstandings and frustrations (Peters, 2007). One way of alleviating some of the misunderstandings and lack of cultural awareness is to hire a qualified interpreter to assist in the counseling and supervision process. This article will address counselor educators' and supervisors' legislative and ethical obligations, how to find a qualified interpreter, creating an accommodating classroom environment, and creating an accommodating supervision environment.

Legislation and Ethics

Legislation has influenced accessibility to services in the realm of education and supervision (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). Because many universities receive federal funds, Section 504 directly impacts teaching and supervision practices as they relate to individuals with disabilities, including Deafness. Further, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandate extends to non-federally funded agencies to provide "reasonable accommodations" and to provide accommodations beyond just access. Therefore, it is the legal obligation of the university to provide reasonable accommodations and equal access to information for those individuals who are Deaf, whether that is by means of an interpreter or some other accommodation such as note takers (Pollard, 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

As supervisors recognize the legal requirements to providing services, ethical obligations arise and become another motivating factor to educate oneself about this unique supervisees' culture. According to the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision's (ACES) ethical guidelines for counseling supervisors (1993), supervisors are to promote the ethical and legal protection of clients' and supervisees' rights. In the matter of a Deaf counselor-in-training, Deaf individuals have the right to equal access and

reasonable accommodations (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). To be in accordance with these legal and ethical guidelines, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to protect the supervisee's rights by referring to another qualified professional who is fluent in sign language, acquire an interpreter to facilitate communication during the supervision process, or provide whatever accommodations appropriate for that Deaf supervisee that will assist in the communication process.

Counselor educators and supervisors are also obligated to adhere to the American Counseling Association's (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2005). Section F of the ACA Code of Ethics attends to the supervision, training, and teaching facets. Within this section, there are various references to multicultural and diversity competence. In regards to student diversity, counselor educators are to strive to attain a diverse body of students.

This specific section attends to the goal of recruiting and retaining a diverse student body with diverse types of abilities to engage in training to become counselors, including Deaf counselors-in-training. Section F.11.c. goes on to outline the role of counseling supervisors as evaluators of services and the need for supervisors to be aware of potential limitations of the supervisee. Communication is a key component to evaluating the skills and potential limitations of supervisees. This again emphasizes the importance of using a sign language interpreter in order for the supervisor to ethically fulfill his/her supervisory role with a Deaf supervisee. After becoming aware that accommodations are needed, the question of what types of services need to be rendered comes to mind.

Deciding to Use an Interpreter

When making the decision of what types of services need to be rendered to provide an accommodating environment, asking the Deaf individual is typically the best starting point. In the case of all students with a disability, accommodations are typically requested through the educational institution's ADA offices or Disability

Resource Centers (DRC). Without a formal request and resulting accommodation letter, counselor educators are not legally mandated to provide services. The accommodation letter will state which accommodations are most appropriate and needed for the student with the disability.

For supervisors of Deaf supervisees, this accommodation letter may not be provided, especially if the supervision is occurring post degree. With or without the presence of an accommodation letter, it is recommended that the educator or supervisor ask the student or supervisee what the educator or supervisor may do to help facilitate communication. For the purpose of this article, the assumption will be that the Deaf individual prefers to use a sign language interpreter for communication purposes.

Often times, the best practice for working with a Deaf individual in an educational setting is by way of an interpreter (Humphrey & Alcorn, 1995). Interpreters relay the information simultaneously to allow for a more natural communication interaction to occur. Interpreters incorporate the speaker's tone and nonverbal communication into their interpretations to allow the Deaf consumer access to the message in its entirety (Humphrey & Alcorn, 1995; Roe & Roe, 1991).

Frequently, individuals with the ability to hear assume that all Deaf individuals can lip read and understand what is being said (Roe & Roe, 1991). Jeffers and Barley (1975) assert that speech reading is insufficient as it is estimated that only 40% of English speech sounds are visible on the mouth while the other 60% of English speech sounds are not visible on the mouth (as cited in Roe & Roe, 1991). If the supervisee is working hard to understand what is being said instead of the meaning, the supervisee is not receiving the full benefits of supervision.

Writing notes back and forth has also been posed as a method of communication when working with a Deaf student (Haley & Dowd, 1988). This method of communication lacks in effectiveness and efficiency. As many have found through e-mails and text messaging, written communication can often be misunderstood due

to the lack of intonation, facial cues, body language, and nonverbal communication that add to the meaning. Because nonverbal communication is not transferred to our written words, misunderstandings often result. Consequently, ADA law also requires an interpreter to be employed if the communication is more extensive than just a few questions (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

Another benefit for supervisors engaging sign language interpreters is that the interpreters may also work as cultural mediators and may assist the supervisor in understanding some of the more subtle nuances that may emerge in the supervision process (Humphrey & Alcorn, 1995). The benefits and rationale for hiring an interpreter to assist in the supervision process are multifaceted, and they consist of time efficiency, respecting the native language of the supervisee, simultaneous communication, and cultural mediation.

Finding an Interpreter

When initiating services, finding a qualified interpreter may feel like a daunting task when one does not know where to begin the search. When working in an educational setting, the responsibility of finding a qualified interpreter falls on the shoulders of the ADA or DRC offices. Sometimes simply asking the Deaf individual if he/she has preferences or suggestions for interpreters will result in finding a qualified interpreter as well.

The benefit to asking the Deaf individual is that you convey a respect for his/her preferences. Caution should be used when going by word of mouth as there are no quality assurances with this method. The Deaf individual may prefer working with a specific interpreter, not because of their skills, but due to their open friendship. In the case of such a relationship, confidentiality may be readily breached. Word of mouth can be a great way to get in contact with someone who has a feel for the interpreting community in your area and that initial contact may be able to refer you on to other, more qualified interpreters.

For the purpose of supervision, it is important to find an

interpreter who is highly qualified. Just as we license individuals to counsel, there are governing agencies who certify individuals to advertise as qualified interpreters. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) have joined forces to create a national certification process to help ensure quality services (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf [RID], 2005).

There are a variety of certification levels and some specialty certifications (RID, 2005). To date, there is not a national specialty certification for mental health interpreting. That is why it is vital to interview the potential interpreter regarding past experiences to ascertain if the interpreter is qualified for the job. By hiring a nationally certified interpreter, there is a minimum level of expertise one can expect (Seleskovitch, 1998). There is also the reassurance of having a reporting board to which a disciplinary counsel can be held if a certified interpreter's behaviors are considered unethical (RID, 2005).

The Internet can be a great resource when searching for a qualified interpreter. RID has established a web site to assist in finding nationally certified interpreters in a variety of geographic locations (www.rid.org). Included on the web site are various certifications the interpreter holds, contact information, and other relevant information. When hiring an interpreter for a mental health supervision assignment, it is important to ask what specialties the interpreter may possess as well as previous experiences of assignments similar to that of the current supervision assignment.

Another Internet resource is to simply use an Internet search engine and type the term "sign language interpreter agencies." If you are in a metropolitan area, there are typically a variety of agencies available. Rural areas may have an agency that serves your area as well. If you are not able to locate a qualified interpreter through this avenue, contacting your local university's ADA or DRC office is another potential starting point for your search.

Classroom Recommendations

Within an academic setting, an interpreter will be assigned to your class. Assuming that the Deaf student has provided his/her accommodation letter to you stating the need for a sign language interpreter, the first order of business to address is that of logistics. As a part of the certification process, interpreters are tested on how well one understands interpreting logistics such as how to position oneself for optimal communication and minimal distraction (Frishberg, 1990).

Early discussion of how to optimally use and place the interpreter will help to reduce later struggles of the counselor trainee not being able to see the interpreter and clearly receive the message being interpreted. Interpreters will typically place themselves behind and to the side of the speaking individual in order to ensure that the Deaf consumer can see both the speaker and the interpreter (Humphrey & Alcorn, 1995). In regards of interpreting logistics, the interpreter is typically the expert and will take the lead in placing himself/herself in the most appropriate situation. If at any time there is discomfort with where the interpreter is positioned, a private and open discussion with the interpreter and Deaf student is appropriate.

When utilizing the services of a sign language interpreter, there are some general guidelines to consider that may assist the interpreter in delivering the optimal interpretation of the counselor educator's lecture. Providing the interpreter with the lecture material greatly assists the interpreter when he/she is preparing for class. If the counselor educator is uncomfortable with the idea of the student potentially receiving the lecture notes through the interpreter, a simple discussion between the counselor educator and interpreter will often remedy this concern. The counselor educator may simply ask the interpreter to give his/her copy of the lecture notes back at the end of lecture. By receiving the copy of the lecture notes, the interpreter has access to specialized jargon the counselor educator may be using or can gain a clearer understanding of the counselor educator's focus for that lecture thus allowing the interpreter to

provide a clearer interpretation for the Deaf student. This may be especially helpful if the interpreter is unfamiliar with this area of specialty.

Another way the counselor educator may assist in the interpreting process is by classroom management. By articulating the importance of speaking one at a time and raising one's hand to add to classroom discussion, the educator allows the interpreter time to identify for the Deaf individual who is speaking as well as allowing the student to have access to all comments. If more than one person is speaking, the interpreter must make a decision as to which comment to interpret first and the interpreter may have to drop the second comment due to the lack of time or inability of the interpreter to retain the other comment while interpreting the first comment.

Attending to the interpreter's mental and physical challenge of providing interpreting services in higher education is another recommendation for educators. If the class meeting time exceeds that of an hour, a ten minute break would be appropriate to allow the interpreter time to rest his/her hands and recharge mentally. A final recommendation for the counselor educator is to be aware of the content of the lecture and how often professional jargon is used. The counselor educator may want to discuss with the interpreter before class what specialized terms will be used to assist the interpreter in formulating an accurate interpretation. By attending to the needs of the interpreter, the counselor educator is working to ensure the Deaf student's equal access to the material.

Supervision Recommendations

Within supervision, an important step after acquiring an interpreter is to delineate roles (Bruin & Brugmans, 2006; Frishberg, 1990; Roe & Roe, 1991). This allows time for the supervisor and interpreter to create a working alliance that will enhance the supervisee's experience of supervision. After clearly discussing and agreeing on established roles, the supervision process is ready to begin.

Many of the classroom recommendations made previously

can also be useful within the context of supervision. The logistics of the supervision/interpreting environment is another point of discussion recommended to occur within the first supervision session. By discussing the logistics openly, both the interpreter and Deaf supervisee receive the message that the supervisor respects each of them and is willing to do his/her part to ensure a successful and beneficial supervision experience.

The supervisor may also want to allot time for a pre and post session review for the interpreter and supervisor. Bruin and Brugmans (2006) state that by conducting a pre and post session, those involved in the interpreting situation are able to communicate openly about the goals for the next session and how well the communication and interventions worked. Roe and Roe (1991) caution that a pre and post session may be detrimental to the relationship if the Deaf individual is not included in these sessions. When the Deaf individual is not included in these sessions, concerns about what the interpreter and supervisor are discussing may become a relationship and trust issue.

Conclusion

For counselor educators, supervisors, and practitioners, there are legislative and ethical requirements to consider when providing services for Deaf individuals. It is important to know how to access various accommodations for Deaf students and supervisees. By becoming more aware of logistical concerns as they pertain to Deafness, the educator/supervisor demonstrates a dedication to multicultural sensitivity and advocates for the Deaf student/supervisee by working to meet his/her needs. This article provided a discussion of the legal and ethical requirements as they pertain to serving Deaf students and supervisees. The process of locating and hiring a qualified interpreter as well as recommendations for educators and supervisors was provided.

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