

Guided Self-Assessment and Professional Development Planning: A Model Applied to Interpreters in Educational Settings

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Background

The Educational Interpreting Certificate Program (EICP) is one of the programs offered through the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center housed at Front Range Community College (FRCC) in Denver, Colorado. It is a customized training program offered at a distance for sign language interpreters who work in K-12 classrooms with students who are deaf and hard of hearing. EICP is a 30-credit hour vocational certificate designed for distance delivery to those individuals already working as interpreters in an educational setting. The program is delivered over nine semesters (3 calendar years) to selected cohort members. Approximately half of the EICP curriculum focuses on sign language interpreting skills and the rest emphasizes the requisite knowledge sets needed to apply these skills effectively in a K-12 classroom. EICP is designed as a cohort model, which is the most effective and efficient arrangement for this distance learning effort.

During the fall and spring semesters, knowledge-based courses are delivered to the educational interpreters' home communities utilizing a variety of support material, staff and a number of technologies. In addition, during three summers, there is a mandatory three-week Summer Institute at FRCC that focuses on interpreting competencies, including the upgrading of sign language proficiencies. Applicants are required to demonstrate their level of interpreting skills during an entrance screening to ensure appropriate placement in the program. The intense skill building component of EICP is sustained during the academic school year by means of distance mentorship experiences. Mentorship involves both deaf individuals who function as language mentors and interpreter practitioners who function as interpreting mentors.

delivery technologies, and their heart for educational interpreters. Currently, there are fifty (50) individuals throughout North America who have been involved in EICP instruction.

EICP has served approximately 250 educational interpreters in ten states: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Currently, 150 additional interpreters are being recruited for involvement in the upcoming regional cohort (Cohort 3) and a national cohort (Cohort 4).

Participants in the EICP are heterogeneous, coming from various age groups, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. They also have a range of experiences and backgrounds related to sign language interpreting in the classroom. Some have been in their position a few months, while peers may have eighteen years of experience. Approximately twenty-five percent of cohort members indicate that they have participated in an interpreter training program, but none have had a program with scope and sequence related specifically to educational interpreting. Ninety percent of the participants are female with dependents and additional responsibilities. School districts, cooperatives, and other arrangements (e.g., private contracts), employ the educational interpreters. The interpreters work at all levels of education, with diverse job descriptions, responsibilities and compensation packages. They demonstrate differing levels of competency in both interpreting skills and knowledge sets to apply those skills effectively in K-12 classrooms. Most live in rural communities and have no access to traditional interpreter education programs; neither do they demonstrate computer/technology literacy.

Leilani Johnson, Ed.D., Director of the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center (DO IT Center) wrote and received a federal grant to implement the EICP pilot project in Montana and Wyoming (1996-1999) that resulted in a curriculum specifically designed and delivered through various technologies to educational interpreters throughout a multiple-state geographic area. The EICP pilot project was evaluated as demonstrating best practices of distance learning by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications. Based on this success, a 13-member

blended technologies, it is imperative that the ‘building’ of a learning community be given high priority.

For the purpose of this paper, a learning community is defined as a group of learners with experience, expertise and challenges engaged in the discussion of common issues for the purpose of discovering what they know, sharing their knowledge with each other, and in the process creating new knowledge. The learners are a group with a shared purpose, good communication, and a climate with justice, discipline, caring, and occasions for celebration (Rourke, et.al., 1999). Since EICP is comprised of adult learners who are already working professionals, their connection through a tele-community thrives when it fosters learning that is centered around the work they actually do and the sharing of learning tasks that promote professional and personal development.

To this end, there are several assumptions related to learning that we bring to this discussion of student self- assessment; two in particular are central to the EICP foundation. First, is the assumption that knowledge creation and learning are social processes and the role of instructional staff is to precipitate and facilitate learning that has purpose and is focused on essential concepts and worthwhile goals (Garrison and Archer,

As well, the process of forming a community of learners is an important part of equipping EICP graduates with the ability to overcome the isolation many interpreter practitioners experience in their day-to-day work. Learning to self-analyze and discuss their work enables them to collaborate more effectively, related to linguistic issues, with members of the educational teams in which they function, and to self-monitor for the

Good methods for structuring knowledge should result in simplifying, generating new propositions, and increasing the manipulation of information. To this end, instructors facilitate new learning by engaging students in the exploration of their own observations and ideas for the purpose of achieving greater degrees of self-discovery and awareness. The engagement of students in the assessment of their own work is one way to foster greater self-discovery and awareness, which can lead to self-monitoring functions. When students are empowered with the tools for engaging in and seeking self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-monitoring, they are empowered to become life-long learners.

Assessment of Language and Interpreting Skills: The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide students in the process of self-assessment of language and interpretation skills is based on the work of Taylor, documented in two texts: *Interpretation Skills: English to American Sign Language* (1993) and *Interpretation Skills: American Sign Language to English* (2001). These texts define the skills that are required to competently interpret from English to American Sign Language (ASL) and from ASL to English. The goal of the texts is to provide a standardized format for viewing and discussing English to ASL and ASL to English interpretations by providing a delineation of the criteria that distinguishes between novice and expert interpretations. As a result, learners can use the criteria to engage in assessment of their performance. They can identify patterns of accurate and appropriate skills, patterns of error that impact on the degree of accuracy in their work, and explore strategies and resources for improving effectiveness by reducing or eliminating patterns of error.

The skills identified for each task are organized according to Major Features. The sequence of the skills is designed to move from skills that are required infrequently or only during portions of the interpretation (referred to by Taylor as ‘knowledge-lean’ skills) and those that are required frequently or throughout the interpretation (referred to by Taylor as ‘knowledge-rich’ skills). Further, Taylor indicates that knowledge-lean skills are both easier to identify and acquire/master than are knowledge-rich skills. As a result, skill development training and planning should provide a balanced approach to both types of skill.

Errors associated with each skill can be viewed and discussed in terms of the frequency of occurrence, and the severity of the error. The severity of the error relates to the degree to which the message is skewed (Taylor, 1993). Severity of error is more significant than is the frequency of the error. For example, if the error involves the habit of rubbing one's nose from time to time, the message is not likely to be skewed, even though the movement may be distracting or annoying. But, if sentence structure is incomplete—such as the omission of the appropriate non-manual marker to indicate a WHQ or a RHQ—this would have more severe implications for message accuracy. When the frequency of errors and the degree to which errors alter the message is determined, common patterns can be observed and strategies for improvement can be developed.

This theoretical foundation provides the framework for students to begin the analysis of their work. They can examine their performance in relationship to the Major Features and the skills associated with each Major Feature, isolating examples of performance related to each skill and indicating whether the examples are effective or constitute errors.

EICP Skills Development Coursework

During the first year of EICP, learners focus on improvement of language skills. Students work on enhancing their interpretation skills for the remainder of the program. However, even the interpreting skills coursework often involves the further development of ASL skills. Although the students are already working as educational interpreters in

competency rather than interpreting process competency. This observation is reinforced when reviewing performance of EICP students.

Currently, most interpreter education programs (IEP) are housed in community college settings (RID, 2001) with open-door policies. As a result, students frequently enter the IEP with less than fluent ASL skills. Thus, practitioners enter the workforce needing remediation and continued development of ASL skills. To this end, the EICP devotes the first year of skills development coursework to the further acquisition and mastery of ASL.

It should also be noted that EICP students may be utilizing one of a number of signing systems in their school districts. For example, some students may be utilizing Signing Exact English (SEE). Instructional staff who are fluent in SEE are employed to work with these students throughout the EICP. Additionally, the authors of SEE require the incorporation of ASL principles into the use of English signs for more effective communication (Gustason and Zawolkow, 1993). The majority of SEE signs are based on ASL. Unfortunately, most of the EICP students who use SEE did not possess mastery of ASL. Therefore, the attention given to the development of ASL principles enhances the effective use of SEE.

Student Self Assessment: The Process

For the purpose of this discussion, student self-assessment is defined as a dynamic and on-going reflective analysis and discussion process for the purpose of self-discovery, skill development, and professional growth. It is characterized as a process which; occurs at planned intervals, involves a structured approach to analysis, includes

self-assessment are continually applied and refined throughout the remainder of the program.

There are several steps associated with the process of self-assessment; analysis of source text, videotape production of performance, transcription and analysis of performance, and recommendations for self improvement. Each of these steps will be elaborated more fully.

Analysis of Source Text

In selecting texts for the EICP skills-based coursework, attention is given to factors related to the range and type of grammatical structures available within the text, the subject matter and degree of complexity of the text, the contribution of the text to the general knowledge base of the student, and the length of the text. These broad factors are applied to the selection of texts that can also satisfy the following criteria.

- ! Replicate the style and function of education-related lectures
- ! Provide students with the opportunity to predict information (anticipate the content and direction of a text in advance of signing or retelling the text themselves)
- ! Provide students with the opportunity to evaluate information (deciding what is important in a text)
- ! Provide students with the opportunity to organize information (determining how ideas relate to each other)

Students are introduced to a systematic approach to text and discourse analysis based on the work of Isham (1985), Colonomos (1992), Witter-Merithew (1997), and Winston and Monikowski (2000). Winston and Monikowski were involved in the initial application of the system to the EICP. The approach is detailed in an article entitled, “Understanding the Meaning of Texts and Reinforcing Foundation Skills Through Discourse Analysis” by Witter-Merithew (2001). This article can be found in Appendix A. Essentially, this system engages learners in a ten-step process designed to examine the meaning of a text from different perspectives prior to the re-telling or interpreting of the text. Steps 1-5 of the process guide learners in an appreciation of the meaning through prediction, mapping, and abstracting of the text. The 6th step involves the learner in a re-telling of the text. During the first year of EICP, the 6th step brings the student to

When introducing transcription to students, the symbol system and recording process must be frequently discussed, practiced, and reviewed. Beginning the recording process with short and simple chunks of information provides a framework on which more complex transcribing can be built. Promoting small group collaboration and review has proved useful in helping students apply the transcription symbols to the recording of ASL texts.

EICP has also used a template-building approach to transcription. This approach involves providing students with a sample transcription of an ASL text that has portions missing. The student completes the template by adding the missing elements. So, for example, early in the template building process, the students receive a nearly completed transcription of an ASL text that lacks only a few signs and/or non-manual behaviors. The student then completes the transcription by comparing it to the ASL rendition on video and adding the missing information.

As students increase their awareness of how information is recorded, and increase their ability to identify and record missing elements, the amount of information provided in the transcript is reduced. Sometimes all of the signed information is included and students must record the non-manual behavior. Other times, all of the non-manual information is provided and students must record the signed information. Some of the template-building involves a mixture of both of these strategies. Eventually, students are independently recording the information. The template-building is supported by providing students with model transcriptions to compare with their work, followed by small and full group discussions focusing on similarities and differences. Transcription is not a 'perfect' science and variations in recording of information will vary from person to person. The goal is to produce a thorough and accurate documentation of what was signed in a relatively standardized manner. This creates a shared basis for synchronous and asynchronous discussion by the members of the learning community.

When students begin to transcribe their own work, the most frequently asked question relates to how to record errors as part of the transcription process. The system offered by Baker-Shenk and Cokely focuses on a notation system for recording appropriate linguistic behavior, not erroneous behavior. The practice in EICP has been to encourage students to describe what they observe as opposed to looking for a standard

Transcription is a tedious process for

student's transcription of her signed retelling and her self-analysis of this sample. These materials represent work done by a student in the first semester she was introduced to the self-analysis process. As students increase their ability to discuss their work in written form, the more formulaic approach can give way to a more natural discussion of observations.

It is important to emphasize that this article documents only one approach used in EICP to engage students in self-assessment—the system that works most effectively ‘at a distance’. During on-site portions of EICP, students actively engage in peer review and discussion of interpreted work. Self-assessment is an on-going process that occurs both in face-to-face discussions, as well as formal written processes. Always, the goal is to enhance student self-awareness regarding the effectiveness of their work in relationship to established and recognized standards of effectiveness. As well, a secondary goal is to help students discover strategies and resources for improving the accuracy and quality of their work. It is this secondary goal that empowers students to function independently beyond completion of EICP and to participate in dynamic discussion with their interpreting colleagues. This fosters their ability to be life-long learners.

Ideas for Self Improvement

Ultimately, the most valuable part of self-assessment is the ability to use self-awareness and the new learning to improve interpreting performance. This step in the process involves knowledge of resources and strategies that will facilitate skill development. A variety of materials are made available to EICP students to assist them in identifying resource materials and strategies. Catalogs from companies producing videotapes and materials related to sign language and interpreting are provided to students for review and discussion. As well, a resource library is available on the college campus and during the on-site summer sessions, students can explore the materials and resources available to support their learning. In many instances, these materials can be loaned to the student through a lending library program offered by EICP. Students are also encouraged to interview working interpreters, and the instructional staff to identify resources that will target specific patterns they are trying to improve.

Students are also referred to the proceedings of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT). CIT is an organization of interpreter educators who explore the best practices in teaching interpretation. The convention proceedings often provide tremendous insight into instructional strategies and resources for targeting specific skills related to interpreting.

Another resource is a series of instructional sheets available through EICP that address common patterns related to language development and interpreting skill development. The program has available a package of approximately thirty (30) sheets that define a particular pattern and a series of exercises, strategies and resource material that target the various patterns. This package is not included in the list of resources available through EICP.

introduce new learning? Another factor that will impact on the amount and type of instructor feedback is the amount of self-assessment experience the student possesses.

concepts being discussed. There is no written or taped version of the interview, although the latter could certainly be arranged. During the on-site portions of EICP, the face-to-face approach is used effectively.

When self-assessment is a part of evaluating progress towards mastery of specific goals, the use of a checklist or rubric can be an effective means of providing feedback to students. For example, consider the following checklist that could be used to provide students with feedback about the quality of their transcription and self-analysis.

Transcription

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for grading, and provides a record for student review and reference. It is not the only type of feedback students receive, but is a useful tool for certain grading functions.

Student Self-Assessment: The Relationship to Course Design and Sequence

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the process of engaging students in self-assessment is on-going and evolving. It should begin early in the course sequence and be reinforced throughout skill development coursework. The role of the student in managing the self-assessment process should increase as the student moves through the curriculum, with the ultimate goal being the student's ability to independently discuss, monitor, and correct their work. The ability of the student to move to this level of self-awareness and critical analysis will depend on the frequency with which they have the opportunity to apply self-assessment skills, the quality of the feedback they receive about the process from instructors/ mentors, and their ability to utilize the information to achieve greater degrees of interpreting competence.

The following chart demonstrates the sequence of courses in EICP. Those courses with an asterisk (*) denote courses where either the pre-requisite skills of transcription and feature analysis are introduced and practiced or self-assessment is an integral part of learning.

EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

SCHEDULE OF COURSES

Fall ED I 101: The Interpreting Field ED I 113: Public and Deaf Education ED I 114: Educational Interpreting	Spring ED I 111: Child and Language Development ED I 121: Language and Signed Systems I (*) ED I 112: Language and Learning (*)	Summer ED I 123: Language and Sign Systems II (*) ED I 131 Interpreting Lab I (*) ED I 238: Portfolio I
Year 2 – Fall ED I 122: Discourse Analysis – Education (*) ED I 211: Curriculum Methods and Materials ED I 132 Skill Development Lab II (*)	Spring ED I 223: Communication Assessment (*) ED I 212 Tutoring Techniques ED I 133: Skill Development Lab III (*)	Summer ED I 231: Educational Interpreting: Content Areas (*) ED I 232: Educational Interpreting Non-Content Areas (*)
Year 3 – Fall ED I 234: Professional Educational Interpreter ED I 297: Internship I (*)	Spring ED I 238 Portfolio II (*) ED I 298: Internship II (*)	Summer ED I 233: Diagnostic Lab IV (*) EICP Exit Screening

Summary

Engaging students in self-assessment requires on-going planning, time, and commitment. The benefits of student self-assessment are that it promotes self-awareness, self-monitoring and professional growth. These are essential tools for interpreters who work in isolation with little or no direct supervision. Self-assessment also serves as the foundation for planning professional development activities and for collaboration with colleagues about the interpreting task. The overarching benefit of self-assessment is that it promotes life-long learning and can foster greater job satisfaction and a more qualified workforce.

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