

Market Disorder Within the Field of Sign Language Interpreting: Professionalization Implications

Anna Witter-Merithew and Leilani Johnson
Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center
Front Range Community College
Denver, Colorado

Abstract

This paper explores the degree to which the profession of Sign Language interpreting in the United States has achieved elements of professionalization as characterized by the Trait Theory (Winter, 1988). The strength of each trait will be considered in terms of how the current status of the trait contributes to market disorder (Phillips, 1997). From this analysis, some of the critical challenges impeding the completion of the professionalization process and contributing to a state of market disorder are discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations and remaining questions towards the goal of stimulating a broader dialogue within the field regarding the current state-of-the-art of Sign Language interpreting.

Introduction

A *profession* is defined as 1) an occupation or vocation requiring training in the liberal arts or the sciences and advanced study in a specialized field, and 2) the body of qualified persons of one specific occupation or field (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1998). A profession is born out of a societal need “to have available certain services that require specialized knowledge and skills” (Reynolds & O’Morrow, 1985, p. 6). *Professionalization* is defined as the process whereby occupations seek to upgrade their status by adopting the organizational and occupational attributes and traits attributed to professions (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Professionalization is not an acquired state, but rather a dynamic social process in a continual state of flux (Burbules & Densmore, 1991). The process is complex and typically extends over a long period of time. The field of Sign Language interpreting has been engaged in such a process for nearly four decades. Reflecting on the process to date by examining the current state-of-the-art provides important insight into the challenges currently facing practitioners and yields evidence that the field is in a state of market disorder.

Market Disorder

Market disorder is a concept used in the field of economics to describe those periods of increased uncertainty about the safety and liquidity of the economy arising from a wide range of market variables (Phillips, 1997). During these periods of market disorder, market participants look to government regulators to establish public policies and regulatory structures that will mitigate the negative effects of market disorder. Without such policies and structures, market disorder can lead to market disaster, such as the crash of 1987.

When this concept is applied to a specific aspect of the broader economy, a particular type of business or profession, it can describe the difficulties a business or profession has in securing and maintaining control over the variables that impact operations and delivery of goods or service. For the purpose of this discussion, market disorder in the field of interpretation is being used to refer to the current state of the interpreting market that reflects significant instability related to minimum standards for entry into the field and a lack of consistent and reliable professional control over the variables impacting the effective delivery of interpreting services (e.g., induction into the field, working conditions, job descriptions, role and responsibility, wages) (Karasek, R.A., 1979; Watson, 1987; DeCaro, Feuerstein, & Hurwitz, 1992; Dean & Pollard, 2001).

The field of Sign Language interpreting is faced with the need to reconcile the difference in standards set by the profession and those set by the marketplace. As an illustration, although the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) has set the Certificate of Interpretation (CI) and/or the Certificate of Transliteration (CT) as minimum standards for professional practice, an entry-level credential or academic standard for entry into the workplace has yet to be defined in most state or federal regulations relating to interpreters. Consequently, practitioners can and do work without a credential or academic degree and the definition of who is qualified to perform the task of interpretation is subject to a wide range of views and standards.

This conflict between professional and market standards is further impacted by a proliferation of credentialing systems purporting to evaluate interpreting competence (e.g., RID, National Association of the Deaf [NAD], Mid-America Quality Assurance Screening Test [QAST], Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment [EIPA], Texas Commission for the Deaf Certification System [TCDC], Utah State Interpreter Certification System, Virginia Quality Assurance Screening). For the purpose of this paper, in an effort to reduce confusion regarding the labeling of the various credentialing systems, the term credential will be used when speaking of the terms certification, licensure, and assessment systems. While it is the position of the authors that the RID certification system has functioned as the leading authority in the formal credentialing of interpreters, it is recognized that other credentialing systems are gaining or have gained recognition in the marketplace, particularly the EIPA and state government operated credentialing systems (e.g., Utah, Virginia, Texas).

Creating further market disorder is the fact that credential requirements for employment vary. As an example, consider that the Colorado Department of Education requires an EIPA score of 3.5 to work in the K-12 settings, the California Department of Education requires an EIPA score of 4.0, the Kansas Department of Education requires an EIPA score of 3.0, and the school district in Albuquerque, New Mexico requires RID Certification for interpreting in the same setting. As a result, the marketplace is faced with the challenge of distinguishing the difference between these various systems. There is a lack of consensus between the profession and market place as to the common attributes an entry-level practitioner must possess.

Also contributing to market disorder is the fact that there is insufficient consumer and public awareness, appreciation, and value regarding the complex work of interpreting practitioners. Stakeholders often work independently of each other to assert or maintain control over various aspects of the practice of interpretation. For example, interpreter referral centers may send individuals without a credential to fill a request, in order to meet contract demands related to the provision of interpreting services. The end-user of the service, deaf consumers, have limited input into the employment standards used within many settings.

These issues are not unique to Sign Language interpreting. In an article related to the professionalization of Spanish-English interpreting, Mikkelson (1996) reflects on similar issues of market disorder in the field of spoken language interpretation. Mikkelson draws on the work of Joseph Tseng who explored the professionalization of conference interpreting in Taiwan as the focus of his thesis work. According to Tseng (1992) market disorder is the first in four phases associated with the professionalization process.

Tseng's (1992) observations about the four different phases through which an occupation must move to achieve professionalization differ in sequence from the phases as they have emerged from the efforts to professionalize Sign Language interpreting. Whereas Tseng suggests that market disorder typically occurs early in the professionalization process and credentialing occurs at later stages of the process, the field of Sign Language interpreting sought to establish certification standards and procedures relatively early in the professionalization process, and only now is dealing with market disorder.

A Shift in Direction

One significant factor contributing to the emergence of market disorder several decades into the initial efforts towards professionalization of Sign Language interpreting was the unanticipated increase in the demand for interpreting services created by the 1975 passage of the PL 94-142, the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* (now known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]). This law stipulates that all handicapped children should be educated in the least restrictive environment, interpreted

by some educators to mean local public schools (Marschark, 1997). The implementation of this law resulted in a major paradigm shift from educating deaf children in centralized schools with educators specifically trained to teach deaf children to the placement of deaf children in public school classrooms supported by interpreters (Padden & Humphries, 1988; Lane, Hoffmesiter & Bahan; 1996, Marschark, 1997; Ramsey, 1997).

Prior to this event, the RID had effectively established itself as the acknowledged professional organization of the field, beginning in the mid-1960's. The RID certification exam was viewed as the authority for determining the standards of professional service. However, with the passage of this law, the demand for Sign Language interpreters to work in K-12 settings increased at such a rapid and dramatic rate that the profession was not prepared to respond. Accordingly, an entirely new generation of people began assisting with the sign communication used with students who were deaf and hard of hearing in local schools. They began well outside the norms of the profession, were uninformed about the profession, and could not satisfy the performance standards as set initially by RID (Stuckless, Avery & Hurwitz, 1989; Witter-Merithew, Taylor & Johnson, 2001). Consequently, the educational environment put into place standards of practice, compensation packages, and other elements of market control without the benefit of the field's expertise and experience.

Because of the number of individuals working with insufficient qualifications (Hurwitz & Witter, 1979; Witter-Merithew & Dirst, 1982; Stuckless, Avery & Hurwitz, 1989; Johnson & Witter-Merithew, In Press), the profession has been unable to gain control over the market elements impacting this group of interpreters. Unlike teachers and other professionals in education who function both as members of their profession-at-large and education employees, most K-12 interpreters function as education employees and forfeit the benefit of professional association. This reality has dramatically delayed completion of the professionalization process and perpetuated the market disorder.

Theoretical Framework for Assessing Professionalization

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1997), social scientists have historically distinguished a profession from other kinds of occupations based on the degree of expertise and complexity involved in the work. Recognized professions require completion of an officially sanctioned or accredited training program and passage of examinations in order to obtain credentials to practice. Collins (1993) notes that it is illegal to practice most professions without a license. It is generally assumed then that the work of professionals is acquired through formal study and involves a complex set of skills, higher order thinking and decision-making skills, and a body of technical knowledge. As a result, the skills and the knowledge associated with a profession are not widely held by the general public.

The process by which an occupation achieves accredited training programs and credentialing standards is framed by several theories. Mikkelson (1998) discusses two dominant theories that emerge in the literature on professionalization. These two theories are discussed and applied in Tseng's (1992) thesis as the *Trait Theory* and the *Theory of Control*. Further exploration of these two theories provides insight into the current context in which the work of Sign Language interpreters exists. This paper will focus specifically on reporting an analysis of the field of Sign Language interpreting in relationship to the Trait Theory.

Trait Theory

Trait Theory proponents hold that certain characteristics distinguish a profession from an occupation and that recognition of a profession denotes social and academic status (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall, 1968, Larson, 1977; Soder, 1990; and Hodson & Sullivan, 1995). One can measure the degree of professionalization an occupation has achieved by determining the number of characteristics an occupation can evidence, and the relative strengths of the characteristics within the occupation. According to Winter (1988), the trait theory has dominated the literature about the sociology of professions because it is based on the following three logical assumptions:

1. Traits are stable and enduring within established professions;
2. Traits are consistently evidenced across professions; and
3. There are individual differences in the strengths, amount and number of traits each profession evidences.

Thus, exploring the amount and number of traits, as well as the strength of the traits of any given occupation, allows for the degree of professionalization achieved to be defined. Applying these assumptions to the exploration of Sign Language interpreting is the focus of this paper. The degree to which the current state of any given trait contributes to market disorder will form the basis for assessing the strength of the trait within the field of Sign Language interpreting.

Sociology is among the most prominent disciplines to study the traits of professions and to define a series of organizational and occupational characteristics used to distinguish professions and professionals from other kinds of work and workers (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990). According to this body of literature, the most commonly referenced traits/characteristics of a profession are represented with a brief explanation in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Trait Theory Characteristics and Definitions

Trait	Definition
Systematic Theory	A set of abstract concepts that describe the focus of professional service
Authority	Extent of collective influence practitioners have over the

	policy making & practice
Credentials	Acquisition of academic & professional recognition to satisfy established standards
Induction	System of transitioning new practitioners into the profession
Code of Ethics	Public statement regarding service mission & duty owed by the profession
Compensation	Range of salary & benefit options
Continuing Professional Development	System of ongoing availability & acquisition of contemporary knowledge & skills
Community Sanction	Public recognition of services defined in practice standards
Culture	Evidence of collective identity via formal & informal networks

Common Traits Applied to Sign Language Interpreting

The following is a discussion of the common traits of professions and how they apply specifically to the field of Sign Language interpreting.

Trait 1: Systematic Theory

All fully developed professions have an established body of *systematic theory*, which is learned by the profession's students, passed along through formal processes and institutions, and expanded upon in scholarly publications (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990). Professionals apply knowledge and skills to service-related demands. According to Houle (1983) an important trait of professionalization is that:

Formal procedures are established to transmit the essential body of knowledge and technique of the vocation to all recognized practitioners before they enter service and throughout their careers. In the modern era the placement of specialized courses of study in universities or other higher education institutions...has become such a dominant method as to be, in the opinion of many people, the hallmark of the profession itself (pp. 51-52).

It is unclear exactly how many Interpreter Preparation Programs (IPPs) exist in the United States; reporting ranges from 79 (American Annals of the Deaf, 2003) to 150 (RID, 2003). The discrepancy may be due to the fact that many programs listed as Interpreter Preparation Programs are actually American Sign Language (ASL) and/or Deaf Studies programs that offer some interpreter-related coursework or a minor in interpreting. The lack of clear identification of what constitutes an IPP is another example of the market disorder that exists around standards. Approximately two-dozen of these programs are housed in universities, the remainder in community colleges.

As well, the curricula of these IPP programs vary significantly, and only three programs have pursued Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) program review and approval to date: Gallaudet University, Washington D.C., University of New Hampshire, and Central Piedmont Community College, North Carolina (CIT News, 2003). CIT is the professional association of interpreter educators that has established a well-defined system of program review and accreditation.

The fact that a system of program review exists, is managed by an appropriate entity and is being implemented provides evidence of emergence of the systematic theory trait. However, until there is collective agreement about entry and exit criteria for IPP programs, scope and sequence of what should be taught supported by an appropriate length of study, whether accreditation of training programs is mandatory versus voluntary, and what constitutes minimum market-entry competence, the trait of systematic theory will be unable to move beyond emergent.

Trait 2: Authority

The extent of influence collectively wielded by practitioners over the policy making that impacts the work of practitioners, and the degree of individual autonomy exercised by practitioners is a measure of the amount of *authority* possessed by the field's practitioners (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990). A profession's authority evolves from the body of knowledge developed by theories and scientific investigation, acquisition of academic and practitioner credentials, and the ability of the profession to create a high degree of specialization that distinguishes it from the uninitiated. Both Levine (1988) and Darling-Hammond (1987) view the existence of agreed upon standards of professional practice shaped by practitioners as a critical element in the professionalization of an occupation.

Professions with a high degree of control demonstrated individually and collectively at both the internal and external level, such as those that are fully professionalized, are able to establish strong alliances with government and therefore, exert their authority and expertise to define public policy. "Professions that are perceived as performing a service that benefits the public are typically granted special privileges and independence by the state. The result is that the profession is more likely to be self-regulated than other occupations, and this autonomy enhances the public's trust in the profession" (Wilding, 1982).

The field of Sign Language interpreting does not have an agreed upon standard related to what constitutes minimal competency of an entry-level practitioner, and consequently wields only limited impact on policy-making and the furthering of professionalization. Primarily non-practitioners wield authority regarding interpreting and who is hired into the position of an interpreter; as identified previously, this is particularly true in K-12 public

school settings (Stuckless, Avery, & Hurwitz, 1989; Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan 1996; Marschark, 1997; Witter-Merithew, Johnson, & Taylor, 2001).

Additionally, a significantly high percent of interpreters are unable to exercise effective autonomy in many of the settings in which they practice due to insufficient 1) linguistic/interpreting competence and 2) critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills (Dean & Pollard, 2001; Johnson, 2003). The fact that interpreter practitioners wield very limited authority or power over the working conditions and standards that are established severely limits the collective authority of the field. The work of Dean and Pollard (2001) relating the application of Demand-Control Theory to the work of interpreters offers great promise in enhancing the ability of interpreters to exercise more effective internal and external control during the actual work of individual practitioners. However, it is only through collective efforts between the profession, consumers, and employers that the general working conditions of interpreters can be improved collectively versus randomly.

When this lack of adequate performance among practitioners is compounded by the lack of consistency in certification and employment standards, a cycle is created that diminishes the potential for the field to achieve collective authority. Consequently, the emergence of collective authority in the field is limited. The result is that the field has little control over policy-making that impacts the work of practitioners, or the degree of individual autonomy exercised by practitioners. Thus, there is low emergence of the authority trait.

Trait 3: Credentials

Credentials relate to the acquisition of academic and professional recognition that satisfies established and recognized professional and governmental standards (Houle, 1983; Soder, 1990). Professions require credentials—the objective is to protect the interests of the public by assuring that practitioners hold an agreed-upon level of knowledge and skill, and by filtering out those with substandard levels of knowledge and skill (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). The ultimate purpose of academic and credentialing standards is to establish control over who can enter the field and to create a reliable standard of practice for consumers.

As previously discussed, the absence of an agreed upon academic and credentialing standard has significant implications for the further professionalization of the Sign Language interpreting field. An analysis of numbers of practitioners currently within the system of credentialing helps to illustrate this further.

As of 2002, RID estimated approximately 25,000 individuals possess some level of RID membership at a national, state or local level. This estimate

does not represent those individuals who may be working as interpreters, but are not members of the professional organization at some level. Although the reliability of this estimate in relationship to the total number of actual working practitioners is difficult to determine, it serves as a speculative reference point from which the current state of credentialing can be illustrated.

Table 2 is an estimated compilation of practitioners with some type of credential through one of the various systems. The number of credentialed practitioners is contrasted with the estimated number of practitioners by RID.

Table 2: Estimated Numbers of Credentialed Practitioners

Estimated RID-affiliated practitioner base		25,000
# of practitioners awarded credentials		
RID	4,009	
NAD	2,200	
Texas Commission Interpreter Certification	1,600	
EIPA	1,000	
Utah Interpreter Certification	175	
Virginia Quality Assurance System	350	
Miscellaneous	2,000	
Estimated # of interpreters w/ some credential		11,334*
Estimated # of interpreters w/o some credential		13,666

***Note:** Overlap in data due to dual or multiple credentials is not known, but overlap does exist. Data attributed to specific entities (e.g., RID, NAD, EIPA) are taken from published reports from the organizations. Data reported by state government agencies (TX, VA, UT) are taken from personal interviews with agency employees responsible for the coordination and/or implementation of the credentialing system. Miscellaneous data compiled based on estimates provided by RID Affiliate Chapter representatives (AL, FL, KS) or State Commission for the Deaf staff (MO) during personal interviews.

Using these numbers as a reference point, a best-case scenario results in about 45% of the identifiable workforce meeting some credentialing standard. Given some degree of overlap due to dual or multiple credentials, the actual number of practitioners with a performance credential is estimated by the authors as being lower.

Additionally, the variation in standards between the various credentialing systems is a concern. A number of the systems award a 1-3 or a 1-5 assessment level depending on a percent of accuracy score determined by rating an extensive list of performance criteria. For example, the Utah system involves a three level assessment system, while the EIPA, NAD and Texas system each have a five level assessment system.

Consider for example the EIPA score of 3.5, which indicates that an interpreter conveys approximately 75% of the message, with random errors and misunderstandings. Dr. Brenda Schick, one of the authors of the EIPA indicates that this means that children who depend on interpreting services from an interpreter with a 3.5 EIPA score likely could expect to receive approximately 75% of the message—and have minimal assurance that what is conveyed is the most important portion of the message and is coherently rendered (Personal Communication, March 2003). This reality may have significant implications for students who already enter the educational

system with language and/or academic deficiencies (Marschark, 1997; Traxler, 2002).

It is also troublesome that within the multiple-level systems, such as implemented in Utah and Texas, most of the awards are made to individuals with performance assessed at the lowest level. Mr. Mitch Jensen, Director of the Utah State Interpreting Services with the Utah Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, reports that 117 individuals currently hold the novice level and the majority of these individuals have been unable after a three or six year interval to upgrade to an intermediate level of performance—the level viewed by the state as the minimum standard for working in the K-12 setting (Personal Communication, February, 2003). A cap of three years was established by the state for individuals awarded a novice level to transition to the intermediate level. Utah is now faced with having to decide how to handle those practitioners who have failed to upgrade after two extension cycles (six years). This reality exists in spite of a large variety of skill development activities and resources being available to practitioners in the state.

Furthermore, Jensen reports that of the 19 individuals at the Master Interpreter level, the majority does not work as direct service providers. Rather, they are working in supervisory, teaching or administrative positions within the field and provide only occasional interpreting services. How to attract and sustain a qualified workforce is a concern.

This reality is not limited to Utah. Mr. Billy Collins, of the Texas Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, reports that the Bureau of Interpreter Evaluation, under the direction of the Commission, began testing in 1979 and at present has approximately 800 individuals holding the novice level (Level 1). Many of these individuals have been unable to transition into Level 2 within the required three-year period. Level 2 is the minimum standard articulated by the Texas Department of Education for working in the K-12 setting (Personal Communication, March 2003). Like Utah, a cap of three years was established for practitioners awarded a Level 1 to upgrade to a Level 2. After one extension, individuals who are unable to upgrade are being exited from the certification system—these individuals are losing their designation as a novice and, in many cases, losing their positions as educational interpreters. Ms. Laurie Malheiloris, Director of Interpreter Evaluations for the Virginia Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, indicates that a similar experience has also occurred in that state (Personal Communication, November 2002).

The practice of recognizing the developmental progress of individuals towards competence by awarding some degree of status within a credentialing system could be misleading. It gives the appearance that the pool of interpreters is being increased, when in reality, the pool of qualified interpreters may remain relatively static or only modestly increase. Further, extending recognition for emerging skills fosters the perception that individuals who fall below entry-level standards of competency are ready to work.

The need to foster emerging skills and provide feedback to individuals working towards competence is vitally important to the growth of the profession. However, when the mechanism for achieving this is embedded in a credentialing system, it contributes significantly to marketplace confusion and disorder.

Consider these important realities related to the trait of credentialing.

- Within leveled systems, the majority of certificates are awarded for performance at the lowest end.
- Even with the proliferation of credentialing systems, it is estimated that approximately 55% of the identifiable workforce remains uncertified.
- Employment as an interpreter is not contingent on being credentialed. Since individuals without credentials can and do work in the field, and since the marketplace does not consistently require certification or provide additional compensation for certification, there is diminished incentive to become certified.

So, although the RID certification system has been in place for over 30 years and efforts to credential practitioners do exist, the strength of the credential trait is unstable. Thus, the credential trait is considered to be emergent at a moderate level.

Trait 4: Induction

The process of transitioning new practitioners into the profession through mentorship, supervision, and direct guidance, and the effectiveness of the assistance provided to new practitioners is referred to as *induction* (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990). Levine (1988) argues that to become a self-governing profession an occupation must have a “structured induction experience conducted under the supervision of outstanding practitioners who can and will attest to the competence of new inductees to practice” (p. 2). Therefore, induction and authority are closely related traits. It is difficult to have one without the other.

Within the field of Sign Language interpreting, there is no systematic way for new practitioners to transition into the profession. This is a critical issue due to the gap that exists in the competencies of Interpreter Preparation Program graduates and the minimum standards of certification as articulated by the RID. One way to close this gap is through close supervision, support and guided continuing education. The lack of direct supervision and an induction process devalues the complexities and importance of the work being performed by interpreters and potentially marginalizes the field.

Current efforts to mentor and supervise new practitioners are inconsistent and often conducted by individuals who are not practitioners (e.g., teachers

of students who are deaf and hard of hearing, school administrators). As well, participation in induction processes is typically optional (e.g., working with a mentor upon graduation from an IPP), although encouraged. It is also common that interpreters who mentor entering practitioners volunteer some portion, if not all, of their time. Regular and direct supervision of new practitioners during the implementation of their duties by competent and experienced interpreters is rare.

This has particularly serious implications in K-12 settings where frequently the practitioners with the least skill (e.g., recent IPP graduates, individuals without credentials) are working in isolation and without supervision (Witter-Merithew, Taylor, & Johnson, 2001). Even more distressing for all concerned, these practitioners are typically working with students who have insufficient language mastery to self-advocate and negotiate for recovery from the gaps in interpreted information (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan 1996; Marschark, 1997).

Because the effectiveness of the interpretation can only be fully assessed by someone who is bilingual and can evaluate the value of the interpretation in terms of equivalency between the source and target languages (Cokely, 1984), errors and gaps typically go unmonitored and/or uncorrected. The reality is that interpreters who are not yet sufficiently qualified are working in isolation without adequate supervision and continue to work without the benefit of direction for improvement. The result is that their patterns of error become formed into habits that are increasingly difficult to correct or mitigate. Once these patterns become formed habits, short-term training efforts, such as weekend workshops, are less effective in contributing to remediation of skills. As well, currently, there are only limited opportunities for longer strands of in-service training.

The current situation may change with shifts to the provision of long term mentoring provided by qualified mentors. More training for mentors is being offered—including some courses at the graduate level. Mentorship relationships are being forged in various communities or through efforts of an IPP to place graduates in appropriate settings within the community. What is lacking is a systematic mechanism for consistently transitioning IPP graduates into the field, where working with a mentor is a requirement of induction versus a voluntary activity. Therefore, in terms of induction, the field has low trait emergence.

Trait 5: Code of Ethics

A *Code of Ethics* refers to the public statement regarding the service mission of the profession. It reflects the profession's commitment to uphold the ideals and standards set forth by the profession for practitioners. The code must also be enforceable through a mechanism for monitoring practitioner compliance and through an accessible grievance procedure (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990).

The code of ethics trait has been evidenced within the field of Sign Language interpreting since early inception. The basic values articulated in the profession's code relate to the rights of consumers to privacy and confidentiality, the right to equivalent messages that are not skewed by the interpreter's competence or bias, the right to language choice, and the right to have communication access. There are currently efforts to provide a broader framework for the existing code of ethics that will address the application to areas of specialization, distinguishing between ethical tenets and business standards and practices, and providing a more complete discussion of the application of the ethical tenets to the practice of interpreting (Cokely, 2000; Hoza, 2003; NCI, 2003; Stewart & Witter-Merithew, In Press).

In addition, a system of grievance and review has been instituted and is working effectively. These efforts are important and serve to strengthen the value and enforceability of the current RID Code of Ethics.

The primary downfall to this trait as it is applied to Sign Language interpreting is that there is no mechanism for holding accountable individuals who work as interpreters but are not credentialed by the profession. Although the field has a high emergence of the ethical standards trait as part of the professionalization process, the low emergence of other traits—particularly collective authority, credentials, and systematic theory, and the consequences of market disorder—impact the potential contribution of the ethical standards trait to the overall professionalization process.

Trait 6: Compensation

The trait of *compensation* refers to a range of salary and benefit options that enable practitioners to secure and maintain gainful employment and to be self-supporting (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990). The assumption is that given the complexity of knowledge and skills required, relatively high levels of compensation are necessary to recruit and retain capable and motivated individuals (Hodson & Sullivan, 1995). Advanced, or end-of-career salary levels, in particular, provide an indication of the ability of certain occupations to foster ongoing motivation, commitment and retention of capable practitioners (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Payment for interpreting services has been a long-standing trait in the field. However, as indicated in the discussion about credentials, recruiting and sustaining a qualified workforce is one of the challenges that impact the current state of market disorder. Often salaries associated with positions are insufficient to attract competent practitioners. A market that values the complex work of interpreters with higher levels of compensation and benefit packages could reduce this challenge and move the field forward in its professionalization efforts.

There are pockets of the workforce, primarily in urban areas, that are able to create a sufficient degree of market value to result in competitive earnings; however, this is not a widespread reality. This particular trait is impacted by a combination of factors—such as market standards, value for the work of interpreters, and limited practitioner authority or control over market standards and value. Although there is evidence of the compensation trait, competitive salaries are emergent primarily in urban areas. Thus, overall, this trait is considered as only moderately emergent.

Trait 7: Continuing Professional Development

One of the strongest and most consistent traits evident in the professionalization process of the field of Sign Language interpreting is the trait of *Continuing Professional Development*. This trait refers to the availability and extent of participation in learning events that promote acquisition of contemporary knowledge and application of current best practices and the availability of sponsorship for qualified applicants. Houle (1983) advocates that, “practitioners of a vocation should, throughout their years of pre-service learning and work, seek new personal growth of knowledge, skill, and sensitiveness by the arduous study of topics not directly related to their job” (p.47).

The field has a strong system of Continuing Professional Development—in part due to the recognition of the need for continuing training for practicing interpreters by the federal government. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) at the U.S. Department of Education authorized training funds through the RSA Act of 1973. Approximately \$1.5 million dollars annually is awarded by RSA to support in-service training of interpreters. These funds are awarded directly to ten Institutions of Higher Education for distribution of training on a regional basis.

RID has a comprehensive system of certification maintenance that requires each certified interpreter to accrue eight continuing education units (CEUs) per four-year cycle. Each CEU represents ten contact hours of instruction for a total of eighty hours of instruction during each four-year cycle. The result of this requirement is a frequent and diverse menu of in-service training programs available at the local, state, regional and national level, offered by a growing list of RID-approved sponsors.

An ongoing challenge with this system is the offering of advanced training for experienced practitioners that will enable the continuing advancement of the field. Such trainings are currently limited, while entry level trainings are prevalent. Generally, the trait of continuing professional development is well evidenced in the field of Sign Language interpreting.

Trait 8: Community Sanction





Professionals strive to gain public recognition for services defined in practice standards. This comes through accreditation of educational programs and through control over entry to the profession by credentialing practices and mandating standards (Houle, 1983). This trait is referred to as *community sanction* (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall 1968; Snizek, 1972; Soder, 1990).

Elements of this particular characteristic of a profession have been addressed in the credential section of this document. There are few real sanctions that are imposed on unqualified practitioners by society-at-large or consumer organizations. Consider that since approximately half of the workforce is uncertified, it is difficult (if not impossible) to hold them to ethical standards and practices established by the field. This reality might be further manifested by trends in the composition of membership in the professional association.

There has been a shift in the membership composition of the RID during the last decade. For many years, the RID was seen as the professional association of certified practitioners. According to the 1994 RID Membership statistics published in the Membership Directory, there were approximately 2,220 certified interpreter members and approximately 700 associate members. An associate member is defined as an individual who is working as an interpreter but is not yet certified (RID Bylaws, 2002). This results in a certified to non-certified practitioner ratio of 3.1:1.

The 2003 RID membership statistics of the RID reported by the National Office (Personal Communication, March, 2003) include 4,009 certified interpreters and 3,223 associate members. This is an increase of 1,789 certified members in the nine past years (81% growth rate), and an increase of 2,523 associate members in that same time period (260% growth rate). The certified to non-certified practitioner ratio is now 1.2:1. These statistics are represented in Table 3.

Table 3: RID Member Category Growth

RID Membership Composition	Data 1994	Data 2003	Total # Growth	% Growth	
Certified	2,220	4,009	1,789	81%	
Associate	700	2,523	1,823	260%	
Ratio of Certified/Associate					

Although the growth rate for both categories is impressive, it warrants further consideration. On one hand, the more members connected to the professional association, the more opportunity there is to foster movement towards certification and compliance with the established code of ethics. On the other hand, because there is no limitation on how long someone can remain an associate member, membership provides tacit credibility

(because consumers do not necessarily distinguish between RID membership and RID certification). Further, the cost of the certification exam may be a disincentive to becoming certified if tacit credibility already exists and/or there is no legal requirement to be certified in order to work.

The growth rate indicates that there is the potential for the number of non-certified practitioner members to grow beyond the number of certified practitioner members in a few short years. This may result in diminished value for certification.

It is unrealistic for the field to expect that the general society will enforce exclusion of unqualified practitioners, when only half of the professional association's working membership meet the minimum standard of competence set by the profession and have no requirement (other than personal motivation) to meet the standard within a defined timeframe. It is realistic to expect that the market will continue to seek the most cost-effective provider of interpreting services, in spite of the fact that it does not possess the ability to measure the effectiveness of the work. Deaf consumers will continue to suffer the consequences and market disorder will continue to prevail when market conditions devalue certification standards set by the profession.

Another aspect of community sanction relates to the accreditation of training programs. Accreditation efforts are just beginning through CIT in collaboration with the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA). The system is well defined and holds great promise for elevating the effectiveness of interpreter education; however, full implementation is likely to be slow.

One reason for the protracted adoption of accreditation relates to the composition of CIT. A cross-reference between the RID website listing of Interpreter Preparation Programs and college-affiliation as indicated by individual or institutional membership in CIT (2002-2003 CIT Membership Directory), reveals that 49 out of a possible 150 programs are represented within CIT; less than one-third of the existing programs. The recent CIT-ASLTA Task Force Survey (2002) indicated a lack of understanding of how the accreditation process works among the membership. It also denoted that although members were in full support of accrediting programs. Many members insisted it become a mandated activity of the organization. Yet, most members responding to the CIT-ASLTA Task Force Survey did not expect to pursue accreditation due to limited financial or faculty resources, or a general lack of incentive.

In the past two decades, CIT has invested over \$600,000 to develop the current program process and accreditation program. To date, only three Interpreter Preparation Programs have pursued program review and approval and only three more are in the process of applying (CIT News, 2003). As a parallel, consider that after 35 years of accrediting, Dr. Joe Finnegan, Executive Director for the Conference of Executives of American

Schools for the Deaf (CEASD) reports that CEASD has accredited only about 40% of the School for the Deaf/education programs for deaf and hard of hearing students (personal communication, September 2002).

Another important consideration in the interpreting field related to community sanction is the historical origins of Sign Language interpreting and long-held pathological perceptions about deaf people. The fact that Sign Language interpreting is an occupation dominated primarily by women and that the legal foundation for interpreting services is based in disability law creates a continuing perception and expectation that service-providers are caretakers, organized volunteers, or non-professional service providers. The composition of practitioners is still represented by a notable number of volunteer workers (marginalized workers), or those who are on the fringe of the profession due to lack of credentials, lack of affiliation with the professional association, and lack of enforceable compliance with ethical standards of practice.

As a result of a variety of complex factors, such as the intertwining of gender and work, the source of the legal foundation that creates the work of Sign Language interpreters, the high number of marginalized workers, as well as the lack of demarcations between unpaid, underpaid, and paid workers, there is a profound impact on the incomplete professionalization of the interpreting profession. Thus the emergence of the community sanction trait is low.

Trait 9: Culture

Culture is the nature of community within the profession as evidenced in the formal and informal networks of practitioners designed to promote and perpetuate a shared mission. Professional associations represent a manifestation of the culture. These networks—and the associated norms within these networks—are instrumental in the professionalization process as practitioners work together to title and practice controls, further define theory and knowledge base, define best practices, etc. (Houle, 1983; Wilensky, 1984; Tseng, 1992).

This is one of the two most evident traits, along with Continuing Professional Development, within the Sign Language interpreting field. The RID has a strong network at the national, state and local level that encourages and maintains contact with a large percent of the workforce. The RID has worked with members to title and publish position papers on Best Practices for various settings. This same network fosters a great deal of the in-service training and constitutes the political mechanism for affecting further change.

This network could be further motivated and developed to impact some of the traits that are currently lacking or at a low level of emergence in the field. Leadership training has been and continues to be invested in this network and there is tremendous promise in regards to what could be accomplished

if this network is sufficiently developed and motivated to collaborate towards further professionalization. The current degree of evidence of the professional culture, along with the potential for continued growth in this trait, results in a high emergence of the culture trait within the profession.

Summary Regarding the Trait Theory

Wilensky (1984) suggests that although many occupations have sought professional status, few have attained all the described attributes and accompanying recognition ascribed to highly regarded professions; thus, only a few professions can be considered fully professionalized. If the professionalization process is distributed on a continuum, it is the highly regarded and learned professions, such as medicine and law, which would appear at the fully professionalized end of a continuum, while newer occupations, like therapeutic recreational therapists and social workers, would appear as emerging professions.

There are also occupations that function on the fringe of professionalization, reflecting some of the characteristics and traits attributed to a profession, while lacking others. Examples include foster parenting and child-care provision. Often lacking is a systematic theory, social/community sanction, credentials, and authority. These occupations are considered marginalized, meaning they may aspire to be fully professionalized, but have been unsuccessful in attempts to advance the occupation to a professional status. This is represented in Figure 1.

Figure1: Professionalization Continuum



The Trait Theory analysis of the field of Sign Language interpreting provides evidence that although the interpreting profession has some emergence of the traits of a profession, such as educational programs, certification, a code of ethics, and a culture, some of the remaining essential traits are missing or unstable—particularly systematic theory, authority, induction, and community sanction. The gains towards professionalization of the field to date are not systemic. Thus, in this state of market disorder, Sign

Language interpreting is best characterized as an emerging profession. It is distinguished on the continuum from other emerging professions because an academic and certification requirements are not mandatory in order to work as an interpreter. These two traits are required for the other emerging professions. Further, Sign Language interpreting could potentially become marginalized if the state of market disorder continues without improvement or if those traits currently exhibited are further diminished by conflicting standards between the field and marketplace.

Table 4 rates the degree of emergence of each trait as assigned by the authors. The overall result of the ratings is what determines the placement of the field of Sign Language interpreting on the professionalization continuum.

Table 4: Emergence in the Field of Sign Language interpreting

Trait	Definition	Degree of Emergence
Systematic Theory	A set of abstract concepts that describe the focus of professional service	Moderate – lack of consistency in educational standards (e.g., IPPs, in-service training, entry-to-the-profession standards)
Authority	Extent of collective influence over the policy making & practice	Low – only limited involvement in policy making & varying degrees of authority over practice
Credentials	Acquisition of academic & professional recognition to satisfy established standards	Moderate – certification standards well established (except in K-12 setting) but inconsistently due to multiple systems. Academic standards not yet consistently established
Induction	System of transitioning new practitioners into the profession	Low – no formal systems, some random efforts to mentor new practitioners
Code of Ethics	Public statement re: service mission & duty owed by the profession	High – code publicly recognized but difficult to enforce due to high number of non-certified practitioners
Compensation	Range of salary & benefit options	Moderate – difficult to earn competitive salary in many areas
Continuing Professional Development	System of ongoing availability & acquisition of contemporary knowledge & skills	High – RSA Regional programs for over 25 years & RID CEU system well established
Community Sanction	Public recognition of services defined in practice standards	Low – Legal mandates in place but social acceptance & support low, many work with limited or insufficient competence
Culture	Evidence of collective identity	High – for other than K-12

Evaluating Professionalization as the Goal

The preceding analysis raises many questions for the field. One primary question relates to whether the goal of professionalization is desirable. Not everyone agrees that professionalization is a goal to be sought. Critics of professionalization have seen a shift from the notions of altruism and service to a pursuit of power and prestige. Instead of the original goal of professionalizing to meet a societal need “to have available certain services that require specialized knowledge and skills,” the goal becomes to “sustain the academy” (Reynolds & O’Morrow, 1985, p. 6). Noddings (1990) notes that,

With the pursuit of power and prestige, professions have taken on characteristics inimical to service: hierarchies of power; less and less direct contact between professional and client; highly specialized languages; great monetary expenditures required in preparatory education; an increase in internal talk as contrasted to interaction with the larger community; and an overall exclusivity marked by racism, sexism, and classism (p. 402).

It is not uncommon within the Deaf Community to hear expressions of frustration by deaf consumers who perceive the efforts towards professionalization as a shift from service to the community and needs of deaf people, towards the self-serving goal of more recognition, autonomy, compensation, and status for practitioners (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996; Witter-Merithew, 1996; Marschark, 1997; Mindess, 1999). The 9-to-5 interpreter who is unavailable after hours or lacks commitment to the Community’s agenda, or the interpreter who books assignments so closely together as to make it impossible for any interaction required by cultural norms, or the interpreter educator who administers a local program but is never visible within the Community, are familiar referents in the Deaf Community’s discourse (Witter-Merithew, 1996; Mindess, 1999). Concerns expressed represent a departure from the original and primary purpose for which the Deaf Community organized interpreters: to serve the communication access needs of deaf people and to serve as allies in the efforts of deaf people to be self-actualized.

One of the most common comments about interpreters made by deaf consumers relates to what is coined *interpreter attitude* (Witter-Merithew, 1996; Mindess, 1999). The ‘right’ attitude often takes precedent over skills when consumers are given choices about interpreters. The ‘right’ attitude seems to be one that is expressed through an abiding respect and regard for deaf people, their language and cultural experiences, involvement in the community, and a commitment to serving the interests of deaf people (Mindess, 1999; Smith and Savidge, 2001). This issue illustrates that the manner in which consumers determine who is competent goes beyond what might be evidenced through a credentialing system.

Sociologists have been careful to distinguish *professionalization* from *professionalism*. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, (1997), the former refers to the degree to which occupations exhibit the *structural* traits, characteristics, and criteria discussed in this article as attributed to professions. The latter refers to the *attitudinal* attributes and ideology of those who are considered to be, or aspire to be considered as, professionals. These include a belief in the value of expertise, rigorous standards and a public-service orientation. "Although professionalism is often considered part of the professionalization process, it is not considered a reliable indicator of whether a profession has in fact achieved professionalization" (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997, p.84).

On the one hand, some occupational groups that express the ideas and ideology of professionalism, in reality, may not be very advanced in regards to professionalization. This statement seems to apply to some areas of specialization within Sign Language interpreting, such as court interpreting. Practitioners in this setting ascribe to high standards of professionalism, but the professionalization of court interpreting is still incomplete. Perhaps there is less need to professionalize this area of specialization because practitioners in this setting are cloaked by the full professionalization of the field of law. This cloaking would not be available to interpreters in a K-12 setting because teaching is still an emerging profession based on trait theory analysis (Zeichner, 1991; Rowan, 1994; Hodson & Sullivan, 1995). On the other hand, some established professions that are advanced in regard to professionalization, in reality, do not widely exhibit the ideology and attitudes of professionalism (Hughes, 1965; Vollmer & Mills 1966; Hall, 1968).

Recommendations and Remaining Questions

How then does the field of Sign Language interpreting move forward in its efforts to advance the field, while instilling in practitioners the attitudinal attributes and ideology that best serves the interests of consumers? Houle (1981) considers the professionalizing process as complex along with the lifelong learning to which it gives rise.

Those who seek seriously to professionalize an occupation try in many ways to establish its collective identity by building systems and structures that foster and maintain conceptual and competency characteristics. Form is important in all such endeavors, **but less so than the spirit with which those who seek professionalization try to suffuse it.** For example, restricted membership associations, accreditation of instructional programs, licensure of practitioners, and similar devices and procedures are common to many crafts. The professionalizing occupations are distinctive from these other vocations because their leaders seek to encourage and regulate standards of practice **based on a profound**

central mission and on advanced and esoteric bodies of knowledge (p. 49). (emphasis added).

Perhaps this gives insight to a starting place for the next phase of the journey towards advancing the field of Sign Language interpreting. Consensus regarding the *profound central mission* associated with the field of interpreting and recommitment to the central mission for which the first efforts to professionalize began can be sought.

Since the field of practitioners, its educators, and consumers of interpreting service have the most to gain from the advancement of the practice, it seems logical that it is through the collective efforts of these stakeholders that the leadership must emerge to address the issues resulting from market disorder. In an effort to initiate dialogue regarding a possible framework for such a collaborative endeavor, the following recommendations are offered.

Recommendation 1: Establish Communities of Inquiry and Practice (COIP)

There are many questions to be explored related to the issue of market disorder in the field of Sign Language interpreting. COIP (Wenger, 1998) offer a mechanism where practitioners, educators, and stakeholders can explore and work towards consensus on the critical questions. The leadership for such an endeavor could be collaboratively contributed by RID, ASLTA, CIT, NAD, and National Alliance of Black Interpreters (NAOBI)—as leading stakeholders—and some Institutions of Higher Education that offer undergraduate or graduate degrees in interpreting. The following is a sampling of potential questions to address.

Regarding Central Mission

- Is the central mission one that is shared through a collective identity?
- Is it modeled and taught by the field's leaders and teachers?
- Is it manifested in the work and attitudes of practitioners?
- Are there ways in which we can create a service orientation that does not advance the self-interest of the professional at the expense of deaf consumers?

Regarding Authority

- What's theoretical knowledge?
- What's the difference between common knowledge and esoteric knowledge?
- Ideally, where is this knowledge gained? Rationale?
- What are some implications for this extensive knowledge gained from increasingly lengthy training?
- What's professional authority and, ideally, what's this based on?
- Ideally, what's the "limit" of this authority? What are some exploitive "spill-overs"?
- How do professionals attempt to maintain and expand this authority?

Regarding Standards and Training

- What's an "Ideal Professional"?
- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes would she or he possess?
- How do we achieve consensus regarding entry-level competence and how it should be measured?
- How do we achieve consensus regarding IPP entry and exit standards and curricula for IPP?
- How do we create the mechanism for transitioning to a length, scope, and sequence of study necessary to achieve workplace, entry-level standards?
- How do we create consistency in the standards by which interpreters are employed?

Regarding Induction

- What is induction and why is it necessary?
- What might the process of induction look like?
- Who has responsibility for this process?
- How do we create a systematic approach to induction?

These are some of the possible questions the field and its stakeholders need to consider and answer in order to tackle the challenges relating to the current state of market disorder and established a strong foundation for the advancing of the profession.

Because a COIP, by definition, is a "group of professionals bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embody a store of knowledge" (Johnson-Lenz, 2001, p. 3), it can stimulate the theoretical foundation from which a national plan of action can be formulated. As well, technology offers a wide range of software packages and systems for networking COIP during the course of the work of such communities. This same system could be used to distribute the work of these communities to a larger audience for review and feedback.

The work of a COIP could provide a foundation for acquisition of a higher degree of collective authority, which will in turn wield the political clout needed to initiate community sanctions.

Recommendation 2: Distinguish between para-professional and professional practitioner competence.

A number of other professions, such as nursing, teaching, medicine and law, have determined that there is a need for two levels of service provider and have established a distinction between the knowledge, skills and standards that must be satisfied by each level. Perhaps the need for such a system has emerged in the field of interpreting—or already exists but has not been formalized. Again, leadership for the major stakeholders could

collaborate such an effort, such as RID, CIT, NAD and the Institutions of Higher Education.

There could be several potential benefits to distinguishing between para-interpreter and professional-interpreter competencies and standards. First, standards would clearly articulate that individuals working at the para level could only work under the supervision of a qualified professional, much like teacher aides, paralegals and physician assistants. Additionally, the limitations of the para's role would be delineated clearly. Secondly, because the para would have the supervision of a qualified professional practitioner, the issues relating to a lack of induction would be reduced. The professional practitioner would foster continuing growth and development and monitor the implementation of work responsibilities.

This approach would also address issues related to educational standards and entry-exit criteria for each level. This has implications for how the exit competency of each level would be measured and verified (e.g., completion of an accredited program, certification requirements) and foster clearer definition of what constitutes entry-level/minimum level of competence. As a result, the use of multi-level testing systems (1-5 or 1-3 levels) could be reduced to two level systems. All other performance not satisfying one of the two levels could be classified as developmental feedback towards the two standards. This would greatly reduce the confusion regarding credentials that currently contributes to market disorder.

Finally, this approach would contribute to authority within the field—the scope and nature of authority of each level would be defined and established. Social sanctions could follow easily.

Recommendation 3: Education Standards

The field of Interpreter Education needs to act on what is already known relevant to the preparation of practitioners. There is ample evidence that there needs to be: 1) a bachelor's degree requirement to enter the field; 2) clearly defined model articulation agreements between two- and four-year schools; 3) acknowledged expectations regarding the proper role of community college as language development programs that matriculate into undergraduate baccalaureate programs; 4) more stringently enforced academic and interpreter qualifications of instructors—deaf and hearing; 5) quality controls imposed, possibly through a peer review process, on the materials, resources, instruction and technology utilized in the nation's Interpreter Preparation Programs; and, 6) compulsory CIT accreditation of IPPs in order to be listed in any professional materials (e.g., RID Website, *American Annals of the Deaf*), or to receive federal funding for instructional endeavors.

During the 2003 RID Convention, the field did take a position on the necessity for a degree before certification eligibility (Convention Motion C 2003.5). An associate's degree is required beginning in 2008 and a

bachelor's degree is required beginning in 2012. This is an important first step.

Furthermore, the profession needs to establish a model core curriculum for a bachelor's degree with entry and exit level criteria. This curriculum must have multiple entry points in order to accommodate practitioners who are already in the field without the benefit of a formal course of study. A mechanism for documenting and giving credit to prior learning and work experience must be established. The authors propose the development of an agreed upon set of entry-into-the-field competencies (DO IT Center, 2004) that can be integrated into IPP curricula and then assessed through a portfolio assessment process. This portfolio assessment process could be used to guide working practitioners seeking recognition for prior learning and work experience, and should provide valuable information for the interpreting student, the IPP, and the field.

Finally, there is a need to approach the implementation of in-service training programs in a more informed and systematic way. In-service training should not be used as a substitute for a program of study with appropriate scope and sequence. In-service training should be training provided to working practitioners who desire to polish or sharpen their skills, or who desire specialization. "Continuing Education Units" is a misnomer; there is no "continuing education" until there has been a foundation established through formal education documented in a college degree transcript.

When the first educational requirement has been satisfied through the completion of a degree program, the current in-service system should be re-assessed. The current practice of making materials, packages of materials, or even modules of instruction should be seriously re-evaluated. The "weekend workshop" needs to be replaced with a longer strand of study that provides several sessions focused on a topic with a requisite performance component to be assessed by a qualified instructor, before RID CEUs are awarded. The Rehabilitation Services Administration has funded almost thirty years of the workshop circuit. The results are predictable in that there is no documented evidence that random short-term training significantly improves interpreter competence. The return on this investment cannot continue to be justified with the field's current knowledge of what is required to provide quality interpreter services (Johnson & Witter-Merithew, in press).

Recommendation 4: Educating the Community-at-Large

RID's local, state and national network gives evidence to the culture trait. Though this is an essential step to handle the characteristics that require the field's efforts (i.e., Code of Ethics, Continued Professional Development, Induction), it is the education of the community-at-large that will impact Community Sanctions. This requires collaborative and creative approaches among practitioners and consumers of interpreting services

For example, some individuals or entities have established specific compensation stipulations as if Compensation were the primary determinate of a professional. Two common conditions are two-hour minimum billing, regardless of the length of the interpreting assignment, and interpreting teams for jobs over an hour in length. Rather than inflexible demands, it would be more effective to educate the community-at-large to evaluate the situation, and then engage interpreters in professional negotiations to establish appropriate working conditions and compensation.

In some instances when a good deal of drive time or preparation is required, a two-hour minimum may be the best practice for billing. However, setting a two-hour minimum for a job that is clearly planned for less than an hour leaves consumers with a less-than-positive reaction to the interpreted event. Another option to consider would be a “service fee” that would cover time (e.g., preparation time, travel time), job and materials needed for the specific task.

In the second instance, rather than a team of interpreters for a 9-noon booking, another alternative might be to educate consumers about the physical and mental fatigue factors, giving them the choice of how to handle it. It is possible to interpret for a block of time if adequate breaks are taken. At that point the consumer could decide with the interpreter whether to extend the meeting time to accommodate the break and incur the expense of the additional time, or to hire a team of interpreters to complete the business more quickly. In that cooperative process, the employer of the interpreter services has learned about the demands of the task, and there is a gained appreciation and value attached to the service. The end result should be a win-win situation that leaves all participants of the interaction with a sense of accomplishment. If interactions with practitioners result in a rigid directive, the hiring entity is more likely to be left with a sense of being manipulated and having limited recourse.

A practitioner’s attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to secure status and compensate for other market variables does not forward professionalization of the field. Rather it encourages competition among practitioners, with the consequence of continued market disorder. Each practitioner must do his or her part, but ultimately, it is the collective voice of the field that will move the efforts forward. Educating the community-at-large has to become a priority that is acted upon by the profession as a whole.

These recommendations are not intended as all-inclusive, but rather, as a starting place in the hopes of fostering discussion within the field related to the issues of market disorder.

Conclusion

Houle (1981) identifies a key element in a professionalizing occupation is that its practitioners seek to be able to use theoretical bodies of knowledge to deal with a category of specific problems that arise in the vital practical affairs of the vocation.

The ultimate test of the success of a professional is the ability to solve problems (or to decide that they cannot be solved), and those problems usually involve vital and deeply significant outcomes. Thus, the practitioner must be psychologically prepared to live in a world of uncertainty. Knowledge is growing at a far more rapid pace than is the capacity of the human mind to absorb it. As this expansion occurs, new frontiers requiring further study are discovered. The professional's essential task is not to apply a specific fact or principle to a particular case but to deal with it by the use of a synthesis of all relevant knowledge. As each problem presents itself in its own way (even though it may fit into a familiar general category), the professional must take account of the total pattern of circumstances presented and treat it in a unique fashion, with an awareness that the outcome is always in doubt (p. 43).

This approach to problem solving can also be applied to a collective effort as well. It is possible for the leadership of the field (e.g. RID, NAOBI and CIT), in collaboration with various stakeholders (e.g. ASLTA, NAD, American Deaf-Blind Association, Black Deaf Advocates, Institutions of Higher Education), to revisit and recommit to the profound central mission, and to establish a national and comprehensive plan of action that will address the central issues of authority, credentials, induction, and community sanction. Addressing these issues will help the field and the market to move beyond the market disorder now experienced. Doing so is critical because market disorder ultimately has serious impact on deaf consumers who are subjected to enduring the consequences of a workforce that is insufficiently qualified to do the work it has committed to do.

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