

Toward Competent Practice:

Conversations with Stakeholders

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The Gap



- A gap exists between the completion of interpreter preparation and competent practice, as evidenced by satisfaction of certification standards (among other qualifiers).
- Stakeholders express perceptions about the gap in various ways.

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Deaf Consumers....

Interpreter Attitude

“There is a community-wide concern among Deaf people regarding the attitude of interpreters. It shows itself in a sense of powerlessness among deaf consumers. Interpreters convey the impression to deaf consumers that interpreters are “owed” or that the Deaf Community is obliged to the interpreter. This expression of superiority that is expressed by some interpreters makes many deaf people uncomfortable and perpetuates the notion that interpreter’s attitudes are not inline with the expectations of the Deaf Community—their behavior is not based on mutual respect, or a mutual goal of improving communication access. This sense of entitlement impacts the entire interpreting dynamic.”

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Deaf Consumers....

Interpreter Attitude

“There is concern in the Deaf Community that interpreters do not consistently reflect attitudes consistent with Deaf Community norms. I believe this situation could be reduced by screening individuals in advance to ensure that they possess qualities of empathy, compassion, interest in humanity, and improving society, and open-mindedness. Although these qualities can be inspired through life experiences and exposure to deaf people, they cannot be totally learned and must be inherent in the individual to some degree.”

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Deaf Consumers....

Interpreter Attitude

When I think about what constitutes an appropriate attitude for an interpreter, I think of many things—the most important being respect for the right of deaf people to be self-determined. Entering interpreters need to appreciate the importance of power as a part of interpreting and how their attitude can foster the right of deaf individuals to take control of the little decisions involved in the process (e.g., what language will be used, where the interpreter will sit or stand, introduction of the interpreter) as a precursor to taking control of the bigger decisions involved in the process (e.g., comprehensibility of the interpretation, turn-taking, power imbalances)."

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Employers....

Gap in Competencies

"As an employer of interpreters, I am concerned about the gap in competencies possessed by IPP graduates. There has definitely been improvement over the past 22 years, but the job of getting entering practitioners certified still falls heavily on the shoulders of the marketplace. We get an overwhelming number of requests to provide entering practitioners with supervised work experience, and we can not possibly meet all the need. We are in the business of providing interpreting services, not conducting training that we see as belonging to pre-service programs. But, in reality, we find ourselves still having to contribute to the foundational skills of entering interpreters."

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Employers....

Gap in Competencies

On occasion we provide opportunities for students to gain internship experience within our agency because we are keenly aware of the importance of preparing more qualified interpreters. We can definitely see a difference between the work of certified interpreters and the students who are approaching graduation. The implication for us is that working with students takes more time and a level of supervision that we do not have the expertise to provide. It is not a matter of commitment to students, but rather, a matter of available time and expertise. We believe it is imperative for students to be placed in internship experiences with direct supervision by a teacher or certified interpreter.”

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Employers...

Customer Service

“Agencies providing interpreting services, as well as free-lance interpreters, would benefit from creating more goodwill with businesses that seek to hire interpreters at three different levels— fees and related costs, public education, and customer service. For example, it is common for agencies or interpreters to bill us for a 2-hour minimum, even when the interpreter is not available or needed to stay for the full 2 hours. Also, the cancellation policies are not realistic. I know of no other human service provider that will bill a customer for failing to cancel an appointment at least 72 hours in advance. Health care professionals don’t. Therapists don’t. Hairdressers don’t. Electricians don’t. This feels punitive to businesses; particularly since often the cancellation is the result of the deaf person’s conflict versus the business’. Why is the cost passed on to my business? When I have tried to discuss this issue, my remarks are met with threats of ADA violation. There is no commitment to customer service or respect for the implication of the cost on my business. “

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Employers...

Customer Service

"I am not sure why, but we on the educational team find interpreters a difficult group to work with. They always have a lot of complaints about how they are treated in our school—although we provide them with time to prepare for the classes they interpret and schedule professional development days. One of the complaints is they are not treated like professionals in terms of pay and status. We have discussed this issue with the school district's human resources director several times. The difficulty is that most of our interpreters only have an associate's degree, or in some cases, no college degree. We have discussed the fact that obtaining the same status and pay as the professionals in the education system, will require that they have comparable qualifications evidenced by degrees and certification or licensure. But this usually leads to more blaming about how the school does not value their work and the interactions usually feel adversarial. It has not been easy supporting the needs of interpreters even though they work as our fulltime employees."

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Employers...

Work Environment

"It is exciting to be part of a business model that promotes excellence and can offer competitive salaries and benefit packages for interpreters. In exchange, we expect competence and commitment. We hire only certified interpreters, and also require additional training and a period of supervision before they begin working. The video relay service model brings together a group of interpreters working at the same time in close proximity to one another, all committed to excellence. Everyone wants everyone to be successful and so there is lots of support and encouragement. And, because the nature of the work involves long periods confined to a work cubicle, we want to make it a fun environment to work in—we look for opportunities to celebrate our success, to support and encourage one another, to provide break periods where interpreters can relax or play a bit, and generally foster an upbeat environment built on respect and quality service provision."

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Students of Interpreting....

Expectations

“There is another layer of curriculum that isn’t talked about in the program literature—it is the learning that occurs outside the classroom through personal association in the Deaf Community. No one told me when I entered the program that to become a fully competent practitioner, I would have to invest time and personal resources well beyond what was the result of the ‘required’ coursework—and no one prepared me for the fact that this unspoken curriculum could have such an impact on the grades I was able to achieve in the classroom. When I look around at other programs in my college, I know of no other human services field major that is challenged with similar expectations.”

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Students of Interpreting....

Expectations

“I was unprepared for the amount of time required for learning that was over and above the class assignments—the expectation for community involvement. This added a whole other layer of demand to being a part of the program. It is difficult to be as involved in the community as I would like: family obligations, location of some of the events, time of the events. Yet, I can see that community involvement enhances language learning. In my case, I had to look for other alternatives to supplement my language exposure. For example, during one semester some other students and I shared the expense of our own private tutor who was deaf to help with language acquisition.”

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Students of Interpreting....

Expectations

"I have gone to as many socials and volunteer opportunities as possible. And, doing this was not easy. It is intimidating to go out into the community with no one acting as your guide. And, the language access in these settings can be fairly superficial due to a student's limited command of ASL. Maybe working regularly with a language mentor would help. What I feel I lack is exposure to the language in more natural settings with a broader range of language users. This level of exposure would help me to better understand the stylistic differences. There just isn't enough time to learn it all within the program."

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Interpreter Educators....

Entry-to-practice Competencies

"Most occupations in modern societies, especially those given the status of a profession, have defined the competencies that are necessary to practice in their respective fields. The occupation of signed language interpreting will move toward claiming professional status by distinguishing what competencies are necessary for readiness to work. Having a clearly articulated set of competencies is a way of insuring consumers that they are receiving services from practitioners who have achieved the requisite knowledge and skills which have been established and endorsed by members of the profession. A key step in attaining the privileged position of a professional is for both practitioners and the public to have a shared understanding of the expected competencies for interpreters."

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Interpreter Educators....

Entry-to-practice Competencies

"It is pretty widely accepted among interpreter educators and members of the Deaf community that interpreting program graduates are not ready for the demands of working as professional interpreters. The first step is moving programs from two- to four-year institutions, but this transition in itself will be insufficient. We don't give them enough time to really master ASL before we ask them to begin learning to interpret. We rush them through the process of language development, and we rush them through the theoretical foundations. Sometimes I feel that I am forced to move on to the next topic even though I know that they need more time to digest a topic and to really chew on it for awhile before they get a chance to practice it and master it. I constantly struggle to find the right balance between challenging them as much as possible while still encouraging them and building in a feeling of success."

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Interpreter Educators....

Entry-to-practice Competencies

"An essential step towards closing the gap would be for interpreting programs to provide a good transition to real world practice within a structured and supervised internship arrangement. Very few internship or practicum programs really get students into the thick of interpreting with the support of a qualified supervisor. I think we need funding for programs that promote and provide mentoring and internship situations in order to make sure interpreting graduates can make the leap from the classroom to actual practice."

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Interpreter Educators....

Entry-to-practice Competencies

“There are several important challenges facing the field in our effort to achieve competent practice. First, we, as practitioners, have to become more professionalized. This means becoming more competent through additional education, and creating a system to support entry-level interpreters as they seek to close the gap between graduate outcomes and entry to the profession. I see the gap as being the responsibility of the field, consumers, employers and educators collectively. It will not be possible to close this gap without everyone working together.”

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Interpreter Practitioners....

Entry-to-practice Competencies

“I feel like my skills have been at the same level for a number of years—nothing is happening that helps me get better. I have heard several students say their teachers have told them that they will get better “with experience”, but I wonder if that is true. I have lots of experience, but feel like I have hit a ceiling in terms of my ability to get better—even though I go to training after training. I think part of the problem is I lack the appropriate foundation. And, I feel capped out in terms of job mobility as well. For example, a lot of the new positions with the video relay providers require RID certification.”

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Interpreter Practitioners...

Certification

"I admit I am very anxious about the raising of expectations and the reality that those of us who have been working for some years might lose our jobs if we don't meet the state standard. Imagine being fired after all these years, and after having graduated from an IPP. I am not even sure what I need to do to improve my skills, or what specific resources exist to help me get there. I tried taking the RID exam a while back, but didn't pass. I had one RID certified interpreter tell me recently that if I haven't been able to gain certification after all this time, maybe it was an indication I wasn't cut out for this profession. Maybe I am not ever going to be good enough to get RID certified. Wish someone had told me that sooner!"

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Distance Opportunities for
Interpreter Training Center

Entry-to-Practice Competencies Project

Defining the 'Starting Place'

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Funding Source



Rehabilitation Services Administration
National Distance Learning Center
for Interpreter Education

- ◆ Ascertain the current state of the art of interpreting and interpreter education
- ◆ Define a model interpreter preparation program
- ◆ RSA Grant #160B000003

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Primary Project Members

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Ms. Marie Griffin (TN)
University of Tennessee | ■ Dr. Laurie Swabey (MN)
College of St. Catherine |
| ■ Ms. Jona Maiorano (NC)
Central Piedmont
Community College | ■ Dr. Marty Taylor (Canada)
Interpreting Consolidated |
| ■ Ms. Marilyn Mitchell (NY)
NTID @ RIT | ■ Dr. Leilani Johnson (CO)
DO IT Center |
| ■ Dr. Carol Patrie (MD)
Language Matters, Inc. | ■ Ms. Anna Witter-Merithew
DO IT Center |

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The Challenge

What is the 'target'?



- ◆ How do we define a 'ready-to-work', entry-level practitioner?
- ◆ What are the competencies in explicit terms?

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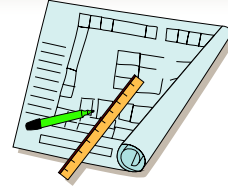
Shared Vision



Articulate competencies of entry-level practitioners and share broadly with stakeholders

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Framework



To facilitate a collaborative process resulting in an entry-to-practice competencies document that explicitly articulates what interpreters need in order to successfully practice

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The Competencies Define...

- Essential **competencies**
- **Generalist** versus specialist
- Entry-level, **workforce-ready** practitioner
- Low-risk, **routine** situations
- Ability to interpret for a **range of consumers**
- Ability to work **autonomously** (professional versus paraprofessional)
- Ability to pass national written and performance **exams**

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A Bit More Regarding Competent Autonomy

What is Autonomy?

- the hallmark of a profession
- the “freedom to act on what you know”
(Kramer & Schmalenberg, 1993)
- and freedom (and knowledge) to seek
whatever input into decision-making is
required

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Competent v Default Autonomy

Autonomy  Competence

Competence involves not only knowing, but also
“**knowing that you know**”.

It is your **professional responsibility** to identify what you
know or don't know and accordingly, seek consultation
or provide service under the direction of an available
and qualified colleague.

As the complexity of the tasks increase, there may be
more need for **consultation and supervision**.

Kramer & Schmalenberg, 1993, p. 7

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Factors Impacting Degree of Autonomy

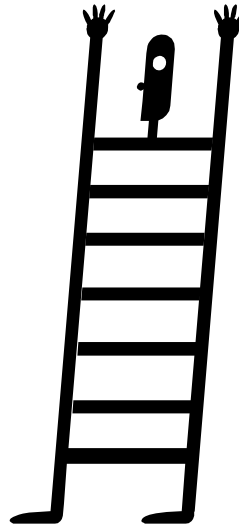
Level of risk/liability and potential for a negative outcome.

Technical requirements associated with the tasks;

Cognitive requirements necessary to provide the tasks;

Predictability of outcome;

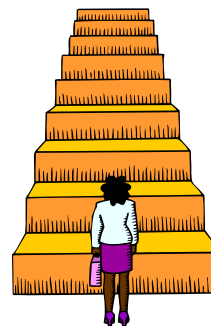
Complexity of communication demands;



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Steps in the Collaboration

1. Authority Opinion Group
2. Model-Building Team
3. Literature Review
4. Trait Theory Analysis
5. Exit Competencies Analysis
6. Literature Review
7. Expert Work Group
8. Stakeholder Interviews
9. Focus Groups
10. Expert Work Group



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What is "Professionalization"?

Professionalization is the process by which occupations seek to upgrade their status by adopting the organizational and occupational attributes and traits assigned to professions.

National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997

Sign Language Interpreting Professionalization



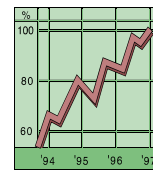
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Major Shift in Professionalization Process



PL 94-142
IDEA

Practitioners outside norms of the profession



Demand for
Interpreters

Delayed Professionalization

Stuckless, Avery & Hurwitz, 1989; Witter-Merithew, Taylor & Johnson, 2001

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Trait Theory Analysis

- Occupation
- Profession



- Traits are stable and enduring within professions.
- Traits are consistently evidenced across professions.
- There are differences in the strengths, amount and number of traits in each profession.

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Trait Theory Analysis

- Occupation
- Profession

These characteristics help define the degree of professionalization in a field.

- Traits are stable and enduring within professions.
- Traits are consistently evidenced across professions.
- There are differences in the strengths, amount and number of traits in each profession.

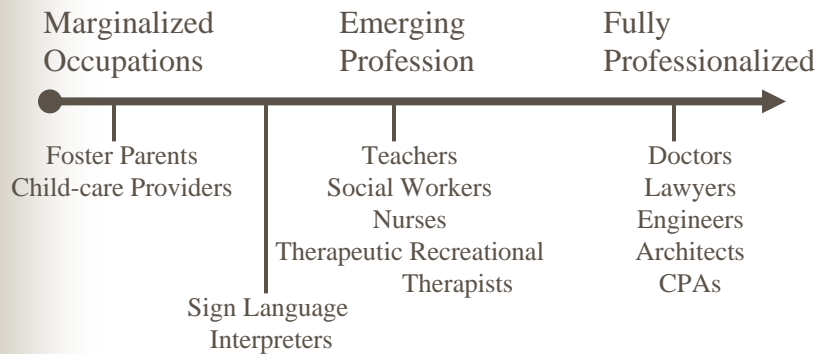
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Emergence of Traits in Sign Language Interpreting

- Systematic Theory —————> ■ **Moderate**
- Authority —————> ■ **Low**
- Credentials —————> ■ **Moderate**
- Induction —————> ■ **Low**
- Code of Ethics —————> ■ **High**
- Compensation —————> ■ **Moderate**
- Professional Development ———> ■ **High**
- Community Sanction —————> ■ **Low**
- Culture —————> ■ **High**

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Professionalization Continuum



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Implication...



The illustration shows two teams of three people each, pulling on a rope. The team on the left is labeled 'Profession' and the team on the right is labeled 'Marketplace'. The rope is taut, suggesting a struggle or competition between the two groups.

Profession Marketplace

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Market Disorder in Interpreting

Interpreting market reflects **instability** regarding



The illustration shows two hands shaking, symbolizing an agreement or a deal. The hands are simple line drawings with fingers spread.

- Minimum standards for entry and certification
- Consistent and reliable profession and practitioner control over **variables** impacting effective delivery of services

Karasek, R.A., 1979; Watson, 1987;
DeCaro, Feuerstein, & Hurwitz, 1992; Dean & Pollard, 2001

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Market Disorder in Interpreting

Interpreting market reflects **instability** regarding

- Minimum standards for entry and certification
- Consistent and reliable profession and practitioner control over **variables** impacting effective delivery of services

Such as:

- Induction to the field
- Decision-making
- Working conditions
- Roles and responsibilities

Karasek, R.A., 1979; Watson, 1987;
DeCaro, Feuerstein, & Hurwitz, 1992; Dean & Pollard, 2001

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Houle (1983)

Important trait of professionalization:

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). (Emphasis added.)

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Five Domains of Competence

1. Theory and Knowledge
2. Human Relations
3. Language Skills
4. Interpreting Skills
5. Professionalism



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Competencies Project Process

Method	# of Individuals Participating
Focus Groups	Seven focus group sessions involving more than 275 stakeholders were held with various groups across the United States.
Interviews	In total 65 individuals were interviewed and provided their feedback on the competencies.
Surveys	Approximately 40 individuals were invited to submit email feedback. 11 individuals responded with feedback.

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Stakeholder Identified Values

- Respect and courtesy
- Effective attitude
- Cultural competence
- Bilingual competence
- ASL-English interpreting competence
- English-ASL Interpreting and transliterating competence
- Professional decision-making skills
- Discretion and professional judgment
- Team work
- Quality Interpreter Preparation Programs of appropriate scope and sequence
- Induction system
- Consistent employment standards

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Main Points

1. Align our standards/vision with our practice
 - Competent vs. Default Autonomy
2. Distinguish between para-professional and professional practice
 - Ensures appropriate levels of supervision
3. Advance interpreter education
 - The GAP is unacceptable
4. Engage Deaf people at all levels
5. Create a system of induction

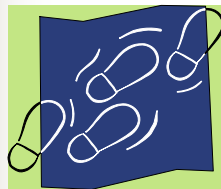
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Possible Solutions

- Build consensus re: the profound central mission through stakeholder collaboration
- Define a National Plan of Action
 - Distinguish between para-professional and professional practitioner competence
 - Create articulation agreements between 2 and 4 year institutions
 - Implement program/accreditation standards
 - Educate the community at large

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Future Steps...



For the DO IT
Center

- Translate competencies into a model, competency-based, bachelor's degree curriculum for preparing professional interpreters
- Create an electronic Learning Object Repository of teaching resources

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Specific feedback welcome....

- Submit remarks to
Competencies Project Manager

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Thank You for participating!!

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