

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

Anna Witter-Merithew, B.P.S., Marty Taylor, Ph.D., and Leilani Johnson, Ed.D.

### **Background**

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

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

The EICP instructional staff members are hired for their expertise in specific areas of study (e.g., child development, tutoring techniques, teaching and linguistics related to sign and spoken languages, and interpreter education), their experience with distance

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

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

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

Leilani Johnson, Ed.D., Director of the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center (DO IT Center) wrote and received a federal grant to implement the EICP pilot project in Montana and Wyoming (1996-1999) that resulted in a curriculum specifically designed and delivered through various technologies to educational interpreters throughout a multiple-state geographic area. The EICP pilot project was evaluated as demonstrating best practices of distance learning by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications. Based on this success, a 13-member partnership was forged that sponsored the next cycle of EICP (1998-2001). Eight State

Education Agencies and the Bureau of Indian Affairs underwrote the EICP as part of their Comprehensive System of Personnel Development required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Public Law 101-476). Three regional centers, two for interpreters under the Rehabilitation Services Administration and one for the U. S. Office of Special Education, are also involved in the Partnership. Currently, five years (2000-2005) of funding is provided through a collaboration including the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, ten (10) state education agencies, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Front Range Community College.

The purpose of this article is to detail one element of this program—student assessment of their interpreting work.

### **Delivering Coursework Through Distance Education**

Prior to discussing the specific method utilized within EICP for guiding students into self-assessment of their interpreting work, it is important to acknowledge some of the assumptions that drive the program related to distance education. Teaching in a distance education program is both complex and challenging. It requires an appropriate theoretical perspective to frame because students and instructional staff in EICP have limited face-to-face contact, and a high level of dependence on text-based communication (on-line discussion groups, print materials, written analysis). It is essential that a strong community of learning and inquiry be established through a collaborative construction of knowledge. As distance learners, EICP participants are not actually in the presence of a teacher for most of their learning and must be empowered with the tools and strategies to create new learning independently.

Blended technologies (ranging from videotape exchange, to on-line discussion and WebCT coursework, to videoconferencing, to print materials and to face-to-face instruction) are used to deliver EICP. This approach is not deemed as ‘better’ than traditional interpreter education programs (IEP), but rather a necessary and promising alternative for delivering coursework to learners who live in rural communities, do not have access to a traditional IEP, or who prefer the benefits and options provided by a distance learning model. Given that the program is implemented through the use of

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

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

To this end, there are several assumptions related to learning that we bring to this discussion of student self- assessment; two in particular are central to the EICP foundation. First, is the assumption that knowledge creation and learning are social processes and the role of instructional staff is to precipitate and facilitate learning that has purpose and is focused on essential concepts and worthwhile goals (Garrison and Archer, 2000). Accordingly, instructional staff who teach ‘at a distance’ must find new and different ways to engage students in connecting to each other and the content.

The second assumption is that collective IQ increases as people with diverse experiences and ways of knowing are involved in collaborative activities (Jones, S., 2000). In other words, EICP learners benefit from a discussion of their work with peers and colleagues who engage in the same work, and who bring diverse experiences. The diverse experiences relate to how deaf and hard-of-hearing students use language, how they acquired signing and interpreting skills, how they perceive and implement the role of an educational interpreter, and how they perceive the world in general.

It is important to remember that EICP learners in asynchronous distance coursework work at computers miles apart at varying times of the day and night. The feeling of ‘being alone’ can only be overcome when learners join together in a community of learning where they support one another (Brown, 2001). The process of forming a community of learners is an important issue in distance learning because it can affect student satisfaction, retention of information, and learning.

As well, the process of forming a community of learners is an important part of equipping EICP graduates with the ability to overcome the isolation many interpreter practitioners experience in their day-to-day work. Learning to self-analyze and discuss their work enables them to collaborate more effectively, related to linguistic issues, with members of the educational teams in which they function, and to self-monitor for the purpose of continuing their professional development after completion of EICP. So, the ability to self-assess is seen as an essential part of participating in a distance learning community. Guiding students to effectively self-assess is central to the success of their overall learning experience, both during EICP and after completion.

### **Student Self-Assessment: The Theoretical Framework**

Assessment is an on-going process within EICP. The purpose of assessment is to gain information about the effectiveness of learning and how to improve learning. Any assessment process should involve collecting relevant information and a thoughtful review of that information for the purpose of making decisions about learning that are based on informed judgment (Genesee and Upshur, 1996). Different types of assessment are needed at different points of the learning process. The degree to which students can participate and contribute to the assessment process depends on many factors—not the least of which is the manner in which teachers engage students in assessment.

Bruner (1960, 1986, 1990) states that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so. Cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental models) provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to "go beyond the information given".

As far as instruction is concerned, according to Bruner (1990), instructional staff should try and encourage students to discover principles by themselves. Instructional staff and students should engage in an active dialog (i.e., Socratic learning). The task of the instructor is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding. Curriculum should be organized in a spiral manner so that the student continually builds upon what they have already learned.

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

### **Assessment of Language and Interpreting Skills: The Theoretical Framework**

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

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

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

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

### **EICP Skills Development Coursework**

During the first year of EICP, learners focus on improvement of language skills. Students work on enhancing their interpretation skills for the remainder of the program. However, even the interpreting skills coursework often involves the further development of ASL skills. Although the students are already working as educational interpreters in K-12 settings, as mentioned in the background section of this article, many have never participated in formal coursework related to American Sign Language or interpreting. And, as evidenced by the work of Taylor (1993), the majority of errors in interpreted performance are related to language features and insufficient mastery of American Sign Language (ASL). Taylor states, “Throughout the research and validation process, ASL competency was identified as a key area of concern related to the consumers’ ability to comprehend the interpretation.” ( p. 6). The body of data collected by Taylor demonstrated that regardless of the number of years of experience or the certification held by practitioners, the majority of errors observed appeared related to ASL

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

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

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

### **Student Self Assessment: The Process**

For the purpose of this discussion, student self-assessment is defined as a dynamic and on-going reflective analysis and discussion process for the purpose of self-discovery, skill development, and professional growth. It is characterized as a process which; occurs at planned intervals, involves a structured approach to analysis, includes interactive and collaborated elements, is goal-oriented, focuses on both performance that was effective and less-than-effective, and is on-going.

Students are introduced to the process of self-assessment during the first skills class they take in the program, although some of the foundation skills—such as transcription and feature analysis—are taught prior to skills coursework. The skills associated with the self-assessment process are introduced and practiced throughout the first skills class, and continue to evolve throughout the remainder of the EICP skills development coursework. In other words, once introduced, the skills associated with

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

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

### **Analysis of Source Text**

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

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

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

a videotaping of their signing performance. This re-telling becomes the foundation for engaging in self-analysis. This phase of skill development is supported by deaf individuals who serve as language mentors.

In the subsequent semesters of EICP, students complete the additional steps of 7-10, so that the videotape sample they produce is of their interpreting performance. This phase of skill development is supported by practitioners and educators who serve as interpreting mentors.

Whether the sample to be analyzed is of their signing performance or their interpreting performance, the preparation leading up to the production of the sample involves the prediction, evaluation and organization of information from the source language text. This preparation is essential for the effective delivery of an equivalent message in the target language. This process also helps to reinforce the requisite foundation skills needed to effectively interpret.

### **Videotape Production of Signed/Interpreted Sample**

The videotaped sample of work is the basis of the transcription and analysis. Therefore, it is important that it be produced in a manner that allows the sample to be accessible for assessing. This is also important because the videotape becomes the common reference point for students and their mentors when work samples are being exchanged via the US Postal Service.

When generating the signed sample or the English to ASL interpreted portion of the performance (depending on what semester it is in EICP), the camera should be on the student filming them from just below the waist and up. It is important to make sure the camera provides adequate signing space. If students are taping an interpreted sample, they should be able to see and listen to the TV monitor, so they can observe the English speaker while s/he is talking. If the sample being taped is an interpreting sample, the microphone on the camera should be on so it can record the English speaker at the same time the camera is recording the interpreting. This will allow the student and mentor to hear the English speech while observing the interpretation simultaneously.

When generating the spoken English sample the camera should be angled so it records the student while they are speaking. When generating the ASL to English

interpreting task, the camera should be angled so it records the TV monitor while the ASL speaker is signing. In either case, the angle should be straightforward and the picture on the monitor should fill up the entire lens of the camera. When taping ASL to English interpreting performance (this occurs in later semesters of EICP skills work), the microphone on the camera should be on and able to pick up the voicing while the student is interpreting. In this way, the tape of the interpreting will show the ASL speaker with the voice interpretation overlaid. This allows for the performance to be discussed in terms of real time behaviors. As a back up, using an audiotape player to record the voice interpretation simultaneously with the videotaping provides a record that can be used to create the verbatim transcription of the ASL to English performance. However, the real-time behaviors will be out of synch.

### **Transcription of Signed or Interpreted Performance**

The process of transcription is an important step in developing self-analysis skills. The act of recording each and every behavior associated with the students' sample of performance reveals many of the successes and errors that occurred. Teaching transcription however, is a very challenging process. To begin, students must have had ample experience in transcribing accurate and natural ASL samples before beginning to transcribe work that is less-than-accurate or less-than-natural.

The basic system of transcription used in EICP is the system detailed in the text, *American Sign Language: A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture* by Baker-Shenk and Cokely (1996). This is not the only system of transcription available, but is the most widely used in North America by individuals who seek a common way to record and discuss signed information.

In Appendix B, there is a sample of a written transcription of an ASL text entitled, "Air Fresheners". This text was transcribed from a videotape entitled, *The Pursuit of ASL: Interesting Facts Using Classifiers* (1998). The native signer of the text, Angela Petrone Strativity, discusses a variety of scientific and informative topics in a consultative register. Her academic style and linguistic fluency make this tape an excellent resource for transcription practice. The length of the texts on this tape is short, and this too is an advantage when practicing transcription.

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

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

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

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

symbol system for ‘error types’. The challenge for instructional staff is helping students to distinguish between recording behavior and evaluating behavior. The purpose of the transcription is to record what actually occurred in the signed message.

When recording errors, it is important to avoid evaluating the error as part of the transcription process. For example, a student might note that a sign was produced incorrectly and want to record a note on the transcript to the effect, “My palm orientation was wrong on the sign for COOK. It should have started with dominant palm down, not up.” Such a notation shifts the transcription process to the analysis process. Instead, students should be encouraged to describe and record the palm orientation as it was observed and withhold the discussion of the error for the written analysis.

It should be noted that initially, getting students started in transcribing their work could occur in many forms. The system proposed in the previous paragraphs is the system used in EICP after several different approaches have been tried. Ultimately, the important thing is to engage students in the process. It may prove useful to engage students in recording what they observe without attention to the form of transcription. For example, Appendix C provides a sample of a student’s first effort at transcribing signed performance. This approach of using a written narrative enabled the student to document what she observed in a manner of her own choosing and was used as a starting place for moving towards a more formal transcription process.

Regardless of how transcription is introduced and practiced, it is important that instructional staff provide detailed feedback about the accuracy of the transcript as it relates to the signed and/or interpreted performance. The feedback enables the student to recognize and incorporate additional information in future transcripts, thus enhancing the accuracy of the written description of performance.

This discussion focuses on transcription of signed performance. A note should be added about spoken English transcription. The transcription of spoken English work must also be verbatim. That means that each pause, false start, hedge, filler, or mispronunciation is documented. Although the process of creating a transcription of spoken English work is much easier than a transcription of signed work, the information it provides is equally valuable.

Transcription is a tedious process for both students and instructional staff. However, it is an extremely valuable tool in helping students learn to recognize and describe behavior in standardized terms that enable them to begin identifying patterns related to their signing, speaking and/or interpreting performance. It is the first step in the self-analysis process.

### **Analysis of Performance**

As is true with transcription, there are some pre-requisite skills necessary for students to effectively engage in the analysis of their signing and/or interpreting performance. The pre-requisite skills involve the ability to recognize and categorize specific linguistic behavior. Again, as with the transcription process, this skill should be acquired through the analysis of natural ASL or naturally spoken English samples prior to the analysis of less-than-natural samples or samples potentially filled with linguistic error.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the analysis process used in EICP is based on the work of Taylor (1993, 2001). The pre-requisite skill of recognizing and categorizing specific linguistic behavior is introduced by engaging students in the analysis of the Major Features discussed by Taylor. Students analyze texts for the purpose of isolating skills and behaviors that relate to each of the Major Features and then categorizing these behaviors accordingly. This process has multiple benefits.

- Students have exposure to natural ASL discourse samples. For many EICP participants, these activities are their first exposure to deaf adults.
- Students increase their recognition of specific behaviors and learn to assign the appropriate 'label' to the behavior. This helps them to distinguish various features of the language.
- Categorizing behaviors under the appropriate Major Feature enables students to see the inter-relationship between linguistic features. Documenting a classifier construction, for example, may include identifying the spatial construction as well as the verb incorporated in the movement of the sign. This process enables students to appreciate the structure of the language at deeper levels.

- Analyzing language samples to isolate Major Features also helps students appreciate the occurrence of knowledge-rich versus knowledge-lean skills.

In summary, feature analysis is an important pre-requisite skill for self-analysis. In addition to the model transcription for the *Air Freshener* text found in Appendix B, there is also a model feature analysis of the same text. Again, the *Pursuit of ASL: Interesting Facts Using Classifiers* tape is an outstanding resource for engaging students in this process. As well, similar type of texts generated by a broader number of ASL users would increase students' exposure to a range of linguistic performance. This will contribute positively to the development of their language foundation.

With the ability to engage in feature analysis, the students are ready to apply a similar analysis to their own work. Students produce a written analysis of their performance by relating behaviors they observe to the Major Features identified by Taylor and identifying the associated error type, describing the error and offering insight into how the error could be corrected. Initially, the process is rather formulaic. The following is an example of how the formula might be applied.

**Major Feature:** Numbers (Taylor, 1993, p. 23)

11. DEF: Numbers are precise elements of information. There is often a lack of context in which to remember the information. Therefore, often numbers can be either incorrect or deleted. Skill #11 addresses the accuracy of the number only.

**Observed Behavior:** The signer produced the numbers 37 for the number 376 indicated in the source text. This behavior is noted on line 43 of the transcript.

**Associated Error Type:** 11.B. Numbers are deleted.

**Proposed Correction:** This behavior could be corrected by adding the deleted number after the formation of the 7. The interpreter continues to be challenged in accurately conveying numbers (particularly a group of numbers) and will continue practicing with the *ASL Numbers* series from Sign Media to enhance overall fluency. As well, the interpreter will practice isolating numbers in a variety of texts, reproducing these numbers in isolation, and then integrating them into retellings and/or interpretations of the text as a whole.

Appendix C provides an additional example of a student's self analysis of a signed retelling of the *Air Freshener* text. The materials in Appendix C. include the

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

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

### **Ideas for Self Improvement**

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

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

Another resource is a series of instructional sheets available through EICP that address common patterns related to language development and interpreting skill development. The program has available a package of approximately thirty (30) sheets that define a particular pattern and a series of exercises, strategies and resource material that target the various patterns. This package is not inclusive of all possible patterns, but provides direction for improving common patterns that emerge.

These instructional sheets are provided to the students near the end of the program and serve as a valuable resource for preparing a long-term professional development plan (PDP). A sample of one of the instructional sheets can be found as the last item in Appendix B.

Students work with instructional staff to review their PDP to ensure that it is a feasible and realistic roadmap for guiding their continuing professional development. Ultimately, it is this ability to translate observations into a plan of action for improving skills that makes self-assessment a worthwhile endeavor. It is the roadmap that empowers students to be effective interpreters long after their completion of EICP. When this ability to self-monitor progress is coupled with the increased ability to dialogue about one's work with colleagues, there is greater likelihood that EICP students will achieve greater job satisfaction and the profession will acquire and sustain a more qualified workforce.

### **Student Self-Assessment: Instructor Feedback**

Engaging students in self-assessment is a process that requires on-going effort. The amount and type of instructor feedback provided to students related to their self-assessment, particularly if self-assessment is incorporated into grading, will vary depending on the goal of the self-assessment process. Is the goal to evaluate student progress towards mastery of specific skills, to practice and apply specific skills, or to

introduce new learning? Another factor that will impact on the amount and type of instructor feedback is the amount of self-assessment experience the student possesses. Early in the program students may require more instructor feedback than would be necessary towards the end of the program.

Several approaches to instructor feedback have been used in EICP. One approach used as part of distance mentoring is the use of written narrative feedback. A sample of this type of feedback is in Appendix D, labeled mentor feedback. This type of feedback creates a written discussion about the work and the analysis of the work. Students report that they find this written discussion useful, as it provides a tool for on-going reference and reflection. It provides students with insight into the instructor's thoughts about the source text, as well as their individualized feedback about the student's performance in relationship to the source text. The instructional staff can prepare the general observations about the text in advance of receiving the student's self-assessment. This saves time when multiple students are working with the same instructor. Using a written narrative does require the students and instructional staff to have a shared and common language for discussing signing or interpreting performance.

Another approach to feedback from instructional staff that can be provided at a distance is the use of videotape. The instructional staff can be videotaped viewing the student's taped performance and provide signed or spoken feedback. This approach has worked very well during the first year of EICP when deaf individuals are used as language mentors. The videotaped feedback also provides students with a record of the feedback that they can use for on-going reference and review. As well, the use of videotape allows for modeling of certain concepts being discussed. For students living in rural areas, this exposure to language modeling and/or modeling of interpreting has the added benefit of broadening their language experience.

Face-to-face feedback can be a more dynamic means of providing feedback. It allows for interactive discussion of the work that is immediate and flexible. The instructor/mentor can facilitate the student's self discovery by asking questions and encouraging students to look at elements of their work they might otherwise not notice. The ability to promote the active involvement of the learner in reflection and dialogue is available in a face-to-face interaction. This approach also allows for modeling of certain

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

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

#### Transcription

- Thorough (all of the signed information recorded)
- Accurate (all of the signed information recorded accurately)
- Conforms to standardized conventions
- Includes line numbers for each line of the transcript
- Readable and easy to follow

#### Self-Analysis

- Addresses all the Major Features
- Identifies specific principles from the Taylor text
- Provides appropriate citation of each principle
- Isolates specific examples of how the principle was applied or not applied
- Provides reference to the appropriate line number in the transcription that references the specific examples
- Identifies how the analysis supports established mentorship goals
- Identifies strategies or resources for improving less-than-effective patterns

The instructional staff might also provide their own analysis of the student's performance by providing feedback on the following type of criteria.

- Incorporation of skills/behavior from the Major Features during the retelling or interpretation
- Incorporation of examples from the source text as modeled
- Clarity and production
- Equivalency of meaning to the original source language text

The benefit of using a checklist or rubric is that it provides a standardized approach to feedback, delineates all the criteria in a complete format, is an efficient tool

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

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

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

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

## **EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**

### **SCHEDULE OF COURSES**

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

### Summary

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

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