

# The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education

**Cynthia Roy<sup>1</sup>**

*Freelance Interpreter and Consultant / Independent Scholar*

**Elizabeth Winston, Editors**

*TIEM Center, Director*

**Contributors: Paul Harrelson, Annie Marks, Chan Yi Hin, Jeremy Rodgers, Kimberly Bates, Kimberly Boeh, Stephen Fitzmaurice**

## Abstract

A new generation of researchers is examining teaching practices and learner experiences integrating evidence-based research practices into education. Paul Harrelson, Annie Marks and Chan Yi-Hin provide a meta-review of evidence-based practices that support role-play activities in interpreter education. Jeremy Rogers, Kimberly Bates, and Kimberly Boeh guide us through explorations of learner experiences: Deaf student interpreters' experiences in existing interpreting programs; 2) hearing students' experiences dealing with and managing anxiety and success; and 3) mentees experiences with and valuing of mentoring. Stephen Fitzmaurice shares the success of infusing self-assessment throughout an interpreting program. These presentations share a common theme-the experiences and learning environments of students as they progress toward entry into our field. Each of the authors represents a new group of educators who represent a growing mastery of the set of standards for interpreter educators, including a knowledge of adult education, interpreter education, and research practices.

**Keywords:** interpreting education, role plays, Deaf interpreter education, critical thinking, self-efficacy, mentoring

---

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence to: [cynthiaroy50@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiaroy50@gmail.com)

# The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education

## Introduction

This volume builds on two traditions in education and research—long standing traditions in general, and traditions that have taken root and continue to spread through our field of interpreter preparation. These are the traditions of integrating evidence-based research practices into education, and of mentoring new teachers and researchers into the field. The tradition of infusing evidence-based practices into sign language interpreter education, while not new, has taken a long while to take root, spread and grow. In 2013, the volume *Evolving Paradigms in Interpreter Education* (Winston and Monikowski, 2013) reviewed many interpreter education practices, both those based in some type of evidence, and those based in “that’s how I was taught” superstition and myth. Now, some five years later, we see the continuing evolution of education with ever-growing foundations based in research, evidence, and practice. This evolving “shift has the potential to move us beyond teaching based on what we have always done or on the latest commercial product that may have little or no research underpinnings.” (Russell 2013, p. 188).

As Angelelli reminds us, “Interpreter education (like interpreting itself) cannot be discussed in terms of an art or a craft. It has a foundation. It is a field of inquiry based on research and principles. It is this foundation that makes for a sound practice and allows teachers to justify their choices.” (Angelelli 2013, p 195). And it is research such as is represented in this volume, *The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education*, that builds and strengthens that foundation. We see the nascent efforts of mixed methods research in a field long dominated, at least in the US, by quantitative dogma, where numbers and statistics rule, while human interaction has long been downgraded to secondary relevance, if not total irrelevance. The move to mixed methods is a welcome shift, and the glimpses of true action research, research that contextualizes teaching and learning, assessment with applied practices, are refreshing insights into potentially effective strategies, especially in contrast to the many long-standing “practices” (“because that’s how I was taught”), myths founded in out-moded philosophies (I, the teacher, will tell you what is correct) and rote repetition of prior classroom and apprenticeship experiences (I was humiliated, so you need to experience that too).

To move forward, it is essential to first understand the terms and types of evidence we might explore. Three terms that need consideration are:

1. *Standard practices*—practices which exist, with no evidence or theoretical foundation serving as a basis for predicting their success;
2. *Best practices*—practices which are research-verified, research-based, or followed by exemplary institutions;
3. *Effective practices*—practices that are verified by research as yielding target outcomes. (“Effective Practices,” 2010). These labels help interpreter educators assess and determine which approaches they might adopt, and how best to infuse evidence-based practices into every moment of interpreter education.

---

## Next Generation of Research in IE

Questions to be asked about every practice include:

- Is it theory-based in any way, and if so, on which theory or theories (those from a related field, from interpreter education, from sign language interpreter education)?
- Is a practice used by respected institutions or individuals (which individuals and how credible are they? which institutions and how many? how many graduates have successfully completed the interpreter preparation program and become certified? how long is the period between graduation and credentialing)?
- Has the practice been evaluated in research studies (has the practice been evaluated/researched? what is the credibility of the methodology? extent of audience? number of replications by whom and with whom)?

In addition, we must consider not only the level of evidence that supports a teaching strategy, but also its practicality. Questions about practicality include:

- Is it easy of use (how much training does an educator need to use the practice? does it require equipment, resources, personnel, and how many and how much)?
- Can it be applied in a range of educational environments (can it be used for diverse audiences, across a range of settings? face-to-face, online, and blended venues)?
- Are there methods of ensuring fidelity (if it is used, will it always be done appropriately? will educators “use” it ineffectively)?
- Are there associated materials for implementation (do teaching support tools like manuals, stimulus materials, rubrics exist)?
- Is implementing the practice feasible (how much will it cost? are there adequate resources? relevant value to cost/time)? (Winston 2013, p. 175)

## Applying Adult Learning Theory to Role Plays

Researchers Paul Harrelson, Annie Marks, & Chan Yi Hin explore role play strategies, their place in our interpreter preparation classrooms, and notions of authenticity when using role-plays. Role plays have long been a part of some interpreter education courses, and these authors demonstrate how and why these can be so effective for developing real-world interpreting skills. They analyze and apply three theories of adult education to the practice of role-playing scenarios in our classrooms: Situated Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Experiential Learning. Their discussion of students observing each other in order to learn from each other, complements the self-assessment strategies implemented with such success in the Fitzmaurice chapter. Indeed, the descriptions of video review are practices that lead to effective self-assessment by students, as discussed by Schön (1987). He discusses an approach to reflection in learning in which students move through stages in a *ladder of reflection*. They participate in an activity, reflect on the activity, and then reflect on the reflection, thus climbing the ladder of reflection. Later they act on the basis of previous reflection, which Schön describes as climbing down the ladder. In interpreting classes, students receive feedback from their peers and teachers, reflect on role-play activities, and then integrate discoveries into subsequent practice activities. The researchers share with us a rich meta-exploration of the theories and research. The chapter offers compelling evidence that strongly supports the wide-spread incorporation of role-play activities into sign language interpreter education.

As educators, we would do well to learn from this chapter, and incorporate effective role-play strategies into our work. Further, extending the foundation, it would behoove us to extend the research into our own classrooms, and share the results of our further analysis about the effectiveness and practicality of employing them in successful interpreter education.

---

## Next Generation of Research in IE

### Exploring Deaf Interpreter Education: Narratives From Students and Practitioners

Jeremy Rogers begins his investigation into teaching practices with deaf student interpreters by offering a broad literature review that provides a clear discussion of existing research. The purpose of this research study was to identify existing practices in interpreter preparation as it relates to Deaf interpreting students and working Deaf interpreters. In an effort to identify patterns in curricula, instructional approach, and formative experiences, Rogers aimed to distinguish effective instructional approaches for Deaf interpreting students. Working Deaf interpreters were interviewed to offer their perspective on existing preparation practices, both in formal academic settings and formative training. Secondly, Deaf interpreting students currently enrolled in Interpreter Preparation Programs (IPPs) were asked to reflect on their academic experiences and identify the most effective practices employed in their training programs, as well as the least effective practices. It was discovered that there are several inconsistencies in IPPs across the nation related to modifying skill development exercises for Deaf students, including but not limited to: lack of Deaf presence in the classroom, limited access to Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs) for mentoring partnerships, lack of appropriate resources for students, and instructors' unpreparedness for effectively training Deaf interpreters. It was concluded that existing IPP curricula need revisions to incorporate a stronger presence of Deaf professionals as interpreter educators in the classroom and that programs need to work toward increasing the numbers of enrolled Deaf interpreting students. Additionally, Rogers found that it might be more effective for Deaf interpreting students' development if certain courses and skill development exercises were completed independently of hearing classmates.

Interpreter education for Deaf students and working interpreters needs to take heed of the insights shared through this research based in an exploration of the experiences and needs of Deaf learners. It reflects the theories and research of our field around the world, and provides the strong argument many institutions require documenting the need for and needs of interpreting education focused on Deaf students' needs as Deaf interpreters. The author also shares practical approaches to the revision and expansion of existing curricula, which may often be more practical for institutions to implement, and for communities to support in terms of teachers and students.

### Anxiety and Self-efficacy in Novice Interpreters

Kimberly Bates provides an extensive review of the concepts of stress that many educators have noted but not yet defined or successfully managed in their own classrooms, and that many students experience daily. Literature on foreign language anxiety and interpretation anxiety suggests such anxieties negatively impact student and practitioner performance in language and interpreting classrooms and in the field. Self-efficacy has recently been identified as a potential anxiety-mitigating factor. However, there is little research on techniques aimed at increasing self-efficacy in an interpretation context. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine what impact a combination of SMART goal-setting and Mastery Rehearsal script writing may have on novice American Sign Language-English interpreters' levels of self-efficacy and anxiety in relation to interpreting tasks. There are three participants, two receiving the specified intervention and one engaged in mentorship, who completed the study. For the one participant who completed the entire research period, results suggest setting SMART goals and writing Mastery Rehearsal scripts were as effective as mentorship in increasing self-efficacy and self-confidence, as well as reducing overall interpreting anxiety. Further research with a larger sample size is needed to support these findings.

Looking to the table above, it is clear that this chapter is based on theory and research across the fields of education, interpreting, sign language interpreting and interpreter education, and is international in scope. In addition, it extends our understanding using student experiences and input, revealing insightful understandings and potentially practical approaches that can help students in our programs achieve their goals.

---

## Next Generation of Research in IE

### Practitioners' Perspectives on Mentoring

Kimberly Boeh reports on findings that further support the acknowledged need for mentoring and provides additional evidence based on the group of participants surveyed. Signed language interpreters who begin work soon after graduating from interpreter education programs are vulnerable to challenges for which they may be inadequately prepared (Walker & Shaw, 2011). *A lack of interpreter competence upon graduation has created a gap in college to work readiness (Maroney & Smith, 2010; Resnick 1990; Winston, 2006; Witter-Merithew, Johnson, & Taylor, 2004)* and mentoring may be a method to decrease this gap (Smith, Cancel, & Maroney, 2012; Winston, 2006). This study investigated what working interpreters thought about the perceived benefits of mentoring.

A total of 443 interpreters (and four students) responded to survey questions via email and social media. The respondents vary in age, sex, ethnic backgrounds, work experience, and certification levels from the United States and Canada. They responded to various questions regarding feelings of preparedness to enter the field, the perceived benefits for entry-level interpreters, and the overall benefits of mentoring.

As with the previous chapters, the results here come from the experiences of learners themselves, and is founded on wide-spread theory and research about the potential impact of effective mentoring practices. The findings indicate that a vast majority did not feel prepared and qualified to work in most settings upon entry into the field of interpreting; that mentoring would be beneficial for entry-level interpreters; and the majority of the respondents, including experienced interpreters, acknowledged that they would take advantage of having mentoring services if available. Mentoring can provide guidance, build individual confidence, and build rapport within any profession; and it can do the same for future of signed language interpreters. A question that is often raised rests on the practicality of such wide-spread mentoring options. Questions of finding qualified mentors in large enough numbers, of supporting both mentors and mentees as they pursue their continued learning, and the professional rewards of mentoring all require resources that are often difficult to find in our field.

### Teaching to Self-assess: Developing Critical Thinking for Student Interpreters

Stephen Fitzmaurice addresses a sea-change in the way educators can improve critical thinking skills and why they should. He discusses the importance of critical thinking, self-assessment and how shifting or focus from direct “other” input to self-directed input impacts interpreting skill development. He also addressed, albeit indirectly, the shift in interpreter education from “miscue analysis” of early evaluation strategies to broader, balanced assessment of the big picture. To teach critical thinking skills for interpreting students, Fitzmaurice worked with faculty of the educational interpreting program to change their teaching by no longer providing direct feedback on interpreted student work. With an operational understanding that as independent practitioners, interpreters need to be skilled at self-assessment rather than relying on external ratings of their performance, the faculty taught students to self-assess. For the final two years of their program, students were graded on the efficacy of their own assessment of their work. To see if the students were learning and progressing, the study analyzed the mid- and final EIPA ratings of students who were provided direct feedback versus students who were taught to self-assess. Findings indicate while both groups of students essentially started at the same baseline level, the students who were taught to self-assess yielded statistically significant higher final EIPA ratings. These findings suggest that a shift in how interpreter educators teach and assess student work can significantly improve their actual interpreting performance and potentially better prepare them as life-long learners.

The documented results of infusing a curriculum and program with learning-centered, self-assessment principles is exciting for our field, and is imminently practical, if seriously challenging. It requires simple acceptance of the need; it also requires a deep understanding of learning-centered assessment, and the extensive, persistent application of it across every course, every activity, and from every faculty member and each learner.

---

## Next Generation of Research in IE

### Summary

The field of sign language interpreter education in the US has a long way to go! But the chapters in this volume demonstrate that it is on the move, with fresh minds willing to acknowledge past learning, build on it, expand it, and most importantly move forward from it, to infuse interpreter education with exciting and innovative approaches so needed by consumers and stakeholders. Each chapter brings a new and different perspective that takes us further along the journey to effective, evidence-based teaching and learning strategies. Each explores evidence and practices and each advances our emerging understanding of teaching and learning interpreting; moreover, each is within, the realm of the potentially practical, while highlighting the on-going need for more teacher education and teaching materials that support the pursuit of effective teaching and learning.

What is missing? Deaf educators of interpreters. This reflects longstanding misconceptions that Deaf people cannot be viable partners in interpreter education, misconceptions held equally by both deaf and hearing people. Deaf people have actively participated in teaching ASL, but rarely interpreting. Why? Because they do not hear part of the discourse? Yet they must understand ALL of it, and as invested stakeholders, their input is fundamental. Interpreter education must begin to include ASL instruction as part of interpreter education, instead of separate from it!

Ironically, while Deaf ASL teachers are not considered part of "interpreting education" they are held to higher standards than interpreter educators hold themselves to. ASL teachers are expected to hold ASLTA certification. And interpreting programs even have standards (CCIE Accreditation Standards 2014). Even their "offspring," the graduates of their programs are held to acknowledged standards of interpreting certification. Yet, in 2017, although a set of interpreter educator standards exists, interpreter educators require no certification nor demonstration of them. As a field, we espouse no standards of quality for ourselves (Winston 2017). The chapters in this volume, and the ideals of evidence-based interpreter education that they espouse, represent the future potential for effective, quality interpreter preparation in the US. The authors represent the knowledge and skills that interpreter educators must demonstrate as educators, and that the field of interpreter education must embrace if we wish to serve our stakeholders effectively.

---

## Next Generation of Research in IE

### References

- Angelelli, C. (2013). Big Elephants in the Room. Commentary. In E. A. Winston & C. Monikowski (Eds.), *Evolving Paradigms in Interpreter Education* (pp. 191-195). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- CCIE Accreditation Standards. (2014). Retrieved November 2, 2017, from [http://ccie-accreditation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/CCIE\\_Accreditation\\_Standards\\_2014.pdf](http://ccie-accreditation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/CCIE_Accreditation_Standards_2014.pdf)
- Effective Practices. (2010). Retrieved November 2, 2017, from <https://tiemcenter.org/experience/consortium-work-2005-2010/programming-teams/effective-practices/>
- Maroney, E., & Smith, A. (2010). Defining the nature of the “gap” between interpreter education, certification and readiness-to-work: A research study of bachelor’s degree graduates. *RID Views*, 27(4), 35–37.
- Resnick, S. (1990). The skill gap: Is mentoring the answer? In L. Swabey (Ed.), *The challenge of the 90’s: New standards in interpreter education: Proceedings of 8th National Convention of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers*. Pamona, CA: Conference of Interpreter Trainers.
- Russell, D. (2013). Convergence and a Call to Action. In E. A. Winston & C. Monikowski (Eds.), *Evolving Paradigms in Interpreter Education* (pp. 188–190). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.
- Smith, A. R., Cancel, P. D., & Maroney, E. M. (2012). Creating innovative opportunities for interpreter education program graduates: Transitioning to the professional world. In L. Roberson & S. Shaw (Eds.), *iCore: Innovative and creative opportunities for research education. Proceedings of the 19th National Convention of Interpreter Trainers* (pp. 35–54). Charlotte, NC.
- Walker, J., & Shaw, S. (2011). Interpreter preparedness for specialized settings.
- Winston, B. (2006). Effective practices in mentoring: Closing the gap and easing the transition. In *A new chapter in interpreter education: Accreditation, research, & technology* (pp. 183–191). San Diego, CA.
- Winston, E. A. (2013). Infusing Evidence into Interpreting Education: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. In E. A. Winston & C. Monikowski (Eds.), *Evolving Paradigms in Interpreter Education* (pp. 164–187). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Winston, E. A. & Monikowski, C. (Eds., 2013). *Evolving Paradigms in Interpreter Education*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Witter-Merithew, A., Johnson, L., & Taylor, M. (2004). A national perspective on entry-to-practice competencies. In E. M. Maroney (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 15th National Convention of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers* (pp. 23–42). Washington, DC: Conference of Interpreter Trainers.