# Deaf Language Mentors: A Model of Mentorship Via Distance Delivery

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## Abstract

This paper will describe a model of language mentorship that connects Deaf mentors to interpreter-students who are distance learners across the United States. The discussion will address three primary elements required to support this model: 1) An overview of the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program; 2) Distance and Mediated Learning; and 3) Language Mentoring at a Distance.

## Overview of the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program

The Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center (DO IT Center), housed at Front Range Community College in Denver, Colorado, offers a variety of customized trainings in areas of specialization (i.e., education, legal, medical/mental health) for working interpreters through the use of blended technologies associated with distance education. The distance education delivery system can offer students access to a wide range of language models and expertise that may not be available in their home communities.

EICP is a 30 credit hour program distributed over a three-year period. The curriculum is designed for working educational interpreters and contains both interpreting skills and the knowledge set to apply those skills in K-12 settings. 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. Each of the three summers there is a mandatory on-site Summer Institute. These three-week sessions focus on interpreting competencies, including the upgrading of sign language proficiencies. The intense skill building experience of the Summer Institute 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.

To date, EICP has served approximately 140 educational interpreters. Currently EICP is supporting an additional 150 educational interpreters in 16 states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Before describing the specific structure and implementation of the EICP language mentorship, it is important to establish a theoretical foundation for delivering instructional programs via distance technologies.

## Distance and Mediated Learning

Distance education—also referred to as Distributed Learning—offers necessary and promising alternatives for delivering coursework to students who live in rural communities, and do not have access to a traditional interpreter education programs, or who prefer the benefits and options provided by a distance learning model.

*Defining Distance Education*

Distance education occurs when students and teachers are separated by distance and sometimes time. It is an educational process that requires a communication medium—other than face-to-face—that will deliver information and provide a channel for interaction regardless of the students' and teachers' geography or time availability. The medium must provide consistent and reliable ways for interaction between students and teacher, between students and students, between students and the college and/or program, and between students and instruction/support resources.

The following features serve as a working definition of distance learning (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

> Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, and as a result requires special:
>
> - Course design techniques
> - Instructional technologies
> - Methods of communication by electronic and other technology
> - Organization and administrative arrangements.

According to Moore and Kearsley, there are several types of distance learning organizations—ranging from single or individual classes offered at a distance within a conventional institution to a consortia of institutions involved solely in distance learning that collaborate for the purposes of sharing costs, division of labor, and administrative functions. The DO IT Center constitutes what Moore and Kearsley refer to as a *Distance Learning Unit* because of the following criteria:

- The DO IT Center is a special or separate unit that exists within a conventional institution.
- The DO IT Center is dedicated solely to distance learning activities.
- The sole duties of the DO IT Center administrative staff are related to distance education programs.
- The DO IT Center has dedicated faculty (nearly 60 individuals throughout North America) who provide mediated learning for distance students.

*Mediated Learning*

Teaching in a distance learning program is both complex and challenging. It requires an appropriate theoretical perspective because students and instructional staff have limited face-to-face contact, and a high level of dependence on text-based communication (online discussion groups, print materials, written analysis). It is essential that a strong community of learning and inquiry be established through collaborative construction of knowledge. It is also essential that instructional staff possess the skills necessary to facilitate and moderate online learning. The skills required of instructional staff are unique and different than those applied when teaching face-to-face. For example, since distance students are not actually in the presence of a teacher for most of their learning, they must be empowered with tools and strategies to create new learning independently.

Blended technologies—such as videotape exchange, online discussion, WebCT coursework, video-conferencing, print materials, and face-to-face instruction—are used to deliver the DO IT Center programs. Given that the Center's programs are 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 students with experience, expertise and challenges engaged in the discussion of common issues for the purpose of discovering what they know. In sharing their knowledge with each other, they create new knowledge. The students are individuals with a shared purpose, good communication, and a climate with justice, discipline, caring, and occasions for celebration (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999). The DO IT Center programs are comprised of adult learners who are already working professionals. A tele-community of these students thrives when it fosters learning that is centered on the work they actually do, and the sharing of the learning tasks promote professional and personal development.

To this end, there are two basic assumptions related to learning that are central to the foundation of DO IT Center programs. First, is the assumption that knowledge creation and learning are social processes and the role of instructional staff is to precipitate and mediate learning that has purpose and is focused on essential concepts and worthwhile goals (Garrison & Archer, 2000). Accordingly, instructional staff that teaches "at a distance" must find new and different ways to engage students in connecting to each other and the academic content.

The second assumption is that collective IQ increases as people with diverse experiences and ways of knowing are involved in collaborative activities (Jones, 2000). In other words, DO

IT Center students 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 the interpreter-students acquired signing and interpreting skills, how they perceive and implement the role of an interpreter, and how they perceive the world in general.

*Role of the Teacher and Student in Mediated Learning*

Mediated learning is based on a constructivist perspective of teaching and stems from some of the unique aspects of distance learning. The standard in distance education is that the subject matter is typically prepared, organized and packaged by people who are *not* the same teachers who interact with students (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). The complexities of instructional design, development and delivery for online learning are most effectively addressed through a division of responsibilities within an instructional development team. Even in those instances where the teacher facilitating the learning is the same teacher who prepares and presents the course, the emphasis is on *interaction* among and with students, versus the teacher *transmitting* information.

Mediated learning involves helping students go beyond their current level of experience by using new academic knowledge they acquire to reflect on their current level of experience and create new understanding and interpretations of their experience—thus, creating new learning which broadens their perspective and changes the way they experience the world. Mediated learning also involves "grounding" new concepts in experience and frequent application of theory to practice before expecting students to be able to abstract and generalize new concepts to broader contexts. Application of knowledge cannot happen until the "grounding" has occurred by teachers mediating the learning process. This involves guiding students through planned and authentic (real world) learning activities, connecting students to instructional and support resources, and weaving discussion amongst students at critical junctures throughout the instructional process.

Table 1, on the next page, is taken from the work of Laurillard (1994, p. 85) in the textbook titled *Rethinking University Thinking: A Framework for the Effective Use of Educational Technology*, and describes the roles of both teachers and students in a constructivist, mediated model of learning.

As an example of the student and teacher roles in this model, consider the traditional way students gain insight into their language and/or interpreting performance. Typically, students of ASL and/or interpreting generate a sample of their language or interpreting performance. Afterward the teacher does an analysis of that performance and provides feedback to students on how their performance can be improved or enhanced. In a mediated learning context, students are guided into self-assessment of their performance using their current level of experience, coupled with new learning—a systematic framework for engaging in self-analysis—to reflect on their performance, making independent observations and judgments. These judgments are contrasted with those of other students and the teacher to expand perspectives on the sample. This expanded analysis allows students to re-evaluate their performance and incorporate new insights. Each time the process is repeated, students gain additional insight into their performance, discuss with other students and the teacher specific ideas and strategies for improving their performance, and are guided through the application of new strategies. The self-analysis process allows them to continue reflecting, discussing, and applying new insights into a broader range of contexts.

In order for students to be able to engage in this reflective process of recognizing patterns in their performance and to engage in discussion about their performance, they must be provided authentic opportunities to acquire a foundation in the following:

- Ways to frame what they do—knowing and recognizing what constitutes accurate language use and/or interpretation performance. This is the step that connects

**Table 1**

| **Aspects of the Learning Process** | **Student's Role** | **Teacher's Role** |
|---|---|---|
| Apprehending Structure | Look for the structure<br>Discern topic goal | Explain phenomena<br>Clarify structure<br>Negotiate topic goal |
| Integrating Parts | Translate and interpret forms of representation<br>Relate goal to the structure of discourse | Offer mappings<br>Ask about internal relations |
| Acting on Descriptions | Derive implications, solve problems, test hypotheses, etc. to produce new descriptions | Elicit descriptions<br>Compare descriptions<br>Highlight inconsistencies |
| Using Feedback | Link teacher's re-description to relation between action and goal and produce new description | Provide re-description<br>Elicit new description<br>Support linking process |
| Reflecting on Goal-Action Feedback | Engage with goal<br>Relate to actions and feedback | Prompt reflection<br>Support reflection on goal-action-feedback process |

students' learning to apprehend structures—the overarching framework from which to address the goal of generating effective signing or interpreting performance.

- A model or representation they can use to relate to their performance and to distinguish the difference between errors that relate to language competence versus interpreting process errors. This is the step that involves learning to integrate the various parts of linguistic analysis to the examination of language and/or interpreting performance.
- The ability to reflect on what they do. This step involves students applying the analysis process to a sample of their own work, and to be able to discuss their observations and judgments with others.
- "Tools" to make specific observations about their work. This step promotes the application of feedback from teachers and peers in order for students to gain a broader perspective on the sample of their signing or interpreting performance, as well as applying the feedback to generate more accurate samples of the next signing or interpreting performance.

It is important to remember that DO IT Center students work at computers miles apart at varying times of the day and night in asynchronous distance coursework. The feeling of "being alone" can only be overcome when students 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 students to collaborate more effectively, regarding 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 the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program. So, the ability to self-assess is seen as an essential part of participating in the EICP distance learning community. Guiding students to effectively self-assess is central to the success of their overall learning experience, both during program participation and after completion.

The amount of teacher presence in a mediated learning context varies depending on the experiences and abilities of the students. Initially, the teacher is more "visible" in guiding students through the steps and learning activities. As students gain skills and abilities and master their interactions with each other, the guidance and mediation offered by the teacher is less visible. As the teaching presence becomes less visible, the teacher still remains an active guide who continues to clarify, redirect, and foster exploration, negotiation, deeper levels of analysis and other critical thinking. The acquisition of the skills needed by distance teachers is an important part of faculty development and the training of distance mentors.

## Language Mentoring at a Distance

*Recruitment and Training of Mentors*

The EICP distance language mentors are hired for their expertise in specific areas of study (e.g., ASL instruction, linguistics, interpreter education), their experience with distance delivery technologies, and their commitment to the EICP mentorship goals and instructional design. Currently, about 30 Deaf individuals have been recruited and trained to function as EICP language mentors. These individuals are primarily ASL instructors in colleges and universities around the United States. EICP staff members have been instrumental in identifying and helping to recruit additional Deaf individuals to participate in the mentorship training.

The training of language mentors consists of two primary elements: 1) WebCT and online facilitation, and 2) the theoretical foundation and mechanics of student self-assessment. Additional elements of the training relating to policies and procedures associated with teaching online for the DO IT Center will not be addressed in this paper.

**1) WebCT and Online Facilitation**

The host institution of the DO IT Center, Front Range Community College, has licensed WebCT for all online courses. WebCT is one of over 60 software packages available for the design, development and delivery of online courses. A variety of software can be previewed and explored by going to the following websites: *www.c2t2.ca/landonline/* and *www.softarc.com/tour.*

The variety of tools available for students, teachers, and program administrators within the WebCT environment satisfies the majority of the DO IT Center needs. The connection of students and mentors via an online classroom is fundamental to the interaction, discussion, negotiation, and exploration needed to form a learning community. This tele-community supports EICP students during their learning activities.

One of the critical elements of the language mentor training is the introduction of the WebCT environment. Mentors must be comfortable navigating the environment and using the various WebCT tools. The ability of distance mentors to assist students in problem-solving technical difficulties is important since most of the EICP students have little or no prior experience with the technology or online learning. The DO IT Center has technical support staff that can

provide in-depth assistance to online students as needed. Many minor problems, however, can be resolved or avoided through the guidance of an effective online mentor.

Another reason that mentors need to be comfortable navigating through WebCT is that all the EICP distance mentors are connected in a private forum within the online environment. This forum allows the language mentors to discuss common issues and problem-solve, as well as to have general communication, support, and discussion.

In addition to learning to navigate and function within the WebCT environment, mentor training also addresses the art of online facilitating. Mentors and students connect within WebCT to participate in an active dialogue about course assignments and linguistic considerations. The task of the mentor is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to students' current state of understanding. Curriculum is organized in a spiral manner so that students continually build 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, mentors are trained to facilitate new learning by encouraging student's exploration of their own observations and ideas for the purpose of achieving greater degrees of self-discovery and awareness. This is done by training the mentors in the introduction and application of a model of guided mediation offered by Salmon (2000) in her textbook titled, *E-Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online.* Salmon defines five levels of online mediation that must be mastered by effective facilitators.

**Level 1: Welcome**
This initial level of interaction with students is essential as it serves the goal of getting students connected and navigating "the system." Research shows that if students are not successfully connected and interacting within the first 72 hours of the beginning of an online course, the attrition rate increases dramatically.

**Level 2: Induction**
During this level of facilitation, the mentor and students establish their online "culture" and identify the policies and procedures that will guide their use of the technology and manner of interaction. It is also the level of facilitation where the mentor fosters relation-building among distance students and the mentor, and generally supports students' acquisition and application of useful software skills.

**Level 3: Teaching**
During level three, the mentor is giving and receiving information about assignments, course content and resources that are available to assist students in their learning process. The mentor is regularly lurking (reading through the student interactions) and checking in with students to make sure they are on track and have the information and materials needed to work independently. The mentor actively weaves discussions, summarizes, corrects, re-directs student discussions, and assesses and grades student work.[1]

**Level 4: Knowledge Construction**
Level four of the facilitation process engages mentors in actively stimulating discussion and cross talk among students in an effort to shift more of the active learning to the

[1] "Weaving a discussion" refers to the process of cutting and pasting or restating portions of related comments among students in a manner that reflects the patterns that emerge in student thinking, the important key thoughts and observations that have been offered through student discussions, and posing new questions to foster deeper levels of discussion.

students. The mentors also foster the application of learning to real-world experience by creating case studies or real situations that students can discuss and explore. The mentor fosters collaboration among students through group assignments, research projects, division of tasks related to assignments; and students begin to interact in more exposed (authentic, risk-taking, critical analysis) and participative ways.

**Level 5: Development**

As students grow and gain confidence in their ability to contribute and construct new learning, students become responsible for their own learning and begin to require less and less visible support from the mentor in sustaining the online functions of the learning community. As students become their own "guides" and create a system of interdependence, the visible presence of the mentor is reduced. This level of student leadership takes time to cultivate and often develops over several semesters.

At all levels of facilitation, the mentor is trained to always function as a resource person to students engaging in problem solving. The mentor directs students to instructional materials (e.g., ASL dictionaries, videotapes, textbooks) and other sources of information that will assist the learner in finding answers to questions and content-related challenges.

**2) Theoretical Foundation and Mechanics of Student Self-Assessment**

The participation 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. Students are equipped to become life-long learners when they are empowered with the tools to seek self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-monitoring.

There are several steps associated with the process of self-assessment that both EICP language mentors and students learn. The following elements provide a sequential structure for student self-assessment: *A) The Theoretic Framework, B) The Process, C) Analysis of Source Text, D) Videotape Production of Sign/Interpreted Sample, E) Transcription of Sign/Interpreted Performance, F) Analysis of Performance, and G) Mentor Feedback.*

*A) The Theoretic Framework*

The theoretic framework used by mentors 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* (2002). These texts define the skills that are required to competently use ASL and to 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 language performance by providing a delineation of the criteria that distinguishes between novice and expert interpretations. As a result, students can use the criteria to engage in assessment of their own performance. They can identify patterns of accurate and appropriate skills, and patterns of error that impact on the degree of accuracy in their ASL use and interpreting performance. Students can then explore strategies and resources for improving effectiveness by reducing or eliminating patterns of error.

The skills identified for ASL and interpreting competence 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 process (referred to by Taylor as "knowledge-lean" skills) and those that are required frequently or

throughout the interpretation process (referred to by Taylor as "knowledge-rich" skills). Further, 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 (Taylor, 1993). The severity of the error relates to the degree to which the message is skewed. 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 were incomplete—such as the omission of the appropriate non-manual marker to indicate a wh-word question or a rhetorical question—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 and mentors to begin the analysis of ASL proficiencies. Students can examine their performance in relationship to the Major Features and the skills associated with each Major Feature. The isolated examples from the performance related to each skill can be examined for effectiveness.

As evidenced by the work of Taylor (1993, 2002), the majority of errors in interpreted performance are related to language features and insufficient ASL mastery. 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 the performance of EICP students.

It should also be noted that EICP students often, because of their rural locations, have very limited or no access to Deaf adults who can contribute to their acquisition and mastery of ASL. According to student evaluations, the contributions of the EICP Deaf language mentors have proved to be the single most beneficial resource in helping students improve their signing competence.

*B) 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 that:

- 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
- Is on-going.

Students are introduced to a systematic approach to text and discourse analysis

detailed in Witter-Merithew, Taylor, and Johnson (2002, pp.177-196). Essentially, during the language mentorship, this system engages students in a six-step process designed to examine the meaning of a text from different perspectives prior to the retelling of the text. Steps one through five of the process guide students in an appreciation of the meaning through prediction, mapping, and abstracting of the text. The sixth step involves students in a retelling of the text. This retelling becomes the foundation for engaging in self-analysis. This preparation is central to the effective delivery of an equivalent retelling of the text. The goal is for students to produce their "best ASL sample" of the retelling for transcription, self-analysis, and review and grading by the language mentor.

Students are introduced to the process of self-assessment during the first Summer Institute they attend in the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program. The skills associated with the self-assessment process—such as transcription and feature analysis—are introduced and practiced throughout summer onsite session, and continue to evolve throughout the language mentorship that occurs at a distance. In other words, once introduced, the skills associated with self-assessment are continually applied and refined throughout the remainder of the program.

*C) 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).

*D) 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 U.S. Postal Service.

When generating the signed sample of the performance, the camera should be on the student, filming her from just below the waist and up. It is important to make sure the camera provides adequate signing space, the angle should be straightforward and the picture on the monitor should fill up the entire lens of the camera.

*E) Transcription of Signed/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* (Baker-Shenk & 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.

When introducing transcription to students and mentors, 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. Students complete the template by adding the missing elements. So, for example, early in the template-building process, students receive a nearly completed transcription of an ASL text that lacks only a few signs and/or non-manual behaviors. Students then complete 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 EICP 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 mentors 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 then discuss the error in 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 have students record what they observe without attention to the form of transcription. For example, using a written narrative might enable students to document what they observed in a manner of their own choosing and provides a starting place for interacting with the mentor and moving towards a more formal transcription process.

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

Transcription is a tedious process for both students and mentors. 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, performance. It is the first step in the self-analysis process.

*F) Analysis of Performance*

As is true with transcription, there are some pre-requisite skills necessary for students to effectively analyze 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 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, 2002). The pre-requisite skill of recognizing and categorizing specific linguistic behavior is introduced to students and mentors by engaging them 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 categorize 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 among 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 skills within Major Features also helps students appreciate the occurrence of knowledge-rich versus knowledge-lean skills.

Feature analysis is an important prerequisite skill for self-analysis and mentors are trained in how to engage in this task, as well as how to evaluate the ability of students to apply this process.

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 ASL performance by relating behaviors they observe to the Major Features 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 signer 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 signer 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.

As students increase their ability to discuss their work in written form, and the mentor is satisfied that the important elements of the written analysis are present, the more formulaic approach can give way to a more natural discussion of observations.

*G) Mentor Feedback*

The EICP language mentorship requires students to create three samples of their ASL performance each semester. Topics relate to various K-12 core content—including math, language arts, social studies, history, and other related topics. The samples students create are "retellings" of texts generated in ASL by native signers. Each sample is transcribed and a written self-assessment, following Taylor's model, is done.

Once the three products are completed—the videotaped sample of the retelling, the transcription, and the written self-analysis, following Taylor's model—it is sent to the mentor for review, feedback, and grading. The mentor has approximately two weeks to return the materials to students, and then, students integrate the feedback into a re-do of the retelling, followed by another new retelling, transcription and written self-analysis of their signing performance.

Language mentors provide a combination of written and videotaped feedback to students. Accordingly, part of the training involves practice viewing student work samples, and recording—in written and videotape form—observations and feedback. Mentors are videotaped viewing the student's taped performance and provide signed feedback supported by written comments on the student's transcription and written analysis. This approach has worked very well during the EICP language mentorship. The videotaped feedback 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 has the added benefit of broadening their language experience.

The language mentorship coursework engages students in activities and documentation of learning as part of evaluating student progress towards mastery of specific goals. Accordingly, the use of a checklist or rubric can be an effective means of providing feedback to students and support the videotaped feedback from the mentor. Appendices A and B respectively contain a checklist and rubric that could be used to provide students with feedback about the quality of their transcription and self-analysis. The benefits of using a checklist or rubric are that it provides the mentors with 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.

## Further Considerations to Explore

As indicated earlier in this paper, student evaluations indicate that the language mentorship has been the single most useful resource in helping improve their ASL competence. Students state that the opportunity to interact regularly and directly with a Deaf adult—who is knowledgeable about teaching ASL/interpreting and discussing self-assessment—has provided valuable and meaningful guidance never before available to students. The ability to explore cultural, social, political, and educational issues with a member of the Deaf Community has enhanced the students' awareness of resources and solutions available to the Deaf and hard of hearing children in the K-12 settings for whom they interpret.

It has been interesting to note the differences in the online culture that has emerged among the Deaf language mentors and students versus the interpreting mentors (mostly non-Deaf) and students. There are four significant differences that merit considerations and warrant further data collection and exploration.

1. The manner in which discussion about the language occurs (e.g., signs, grammatical principles, etc.) differs between the two groups of mentors. The Deaf language mentors demonstrate a broader range of options for describing the language through a print-medium than do the non-Deaf language mentors. For example, the Deaf language mentors frequently engage students in discussing descriptions based on real-world orientations and perspectives while the non-Deaf mentors use more formal notation/transcription descriptions.

2. The Deaf language mentors demonstrate knowledge of a broader range of resources, activities, and materials that are recommended to support students in remediation of ASL performance than is demonstrated by the non-Deaf mentors.

3. The Deaf language mentors incorporate more strategies that promote community building among students than are demonstrated by the non-Deaf mentors. For example, more time is given to online discussion of personal experiences by both the Deaf language mentors and the students—resulting in more readiness for risk-taking and contrasting of perspectives related to new learning. Also, humor is used more frequently as a strategy to address sensitive and difficult issues that emerge within the online discussions. The use of humor appears to result in more sustained discussion among students and a willingness to work through conflict more quickly.

4. Within the Deaf language mentor forum, there is more active support and collaboration among the mentors than occurs within the interpreter mentor forum. Deaf language mentors more readily share ideas, offer encouragement, share personal experiences, and contribute time and leadership to building a professional community among mentors than is demonstrated in the interpreter mentor forum. In the latter forum, the supervising instructional manager "cuts and pastes" examples of contributions by individual mentors into the mentor forum versus having these suggestions offered directly by the mentors. As well, the amount of time the non-Deaf mentors spend in the mentors' forum talking, collaborating, and contributing to the formation of a professional community is significantly less than the Deaf mentors.

Further evaluation and exploration needs to be conducted to fully understand the origin and implications of these differences, and how they may relate to the learning experiences of EICP students.

Engaging students in self-assessment is an essential part of the EICP language mentorship coursework. 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. The overarching benefit of using Deaf language mentors is students' increased access to language modeling, enhanced respect and regard for members of the Deaf Community, and direct feedback and interaction with native language users.

The implementation of a distance language mentorship has been discussed in the context of one of the DO IT Center programs—the Educational Interpreting Certificate Program. However, the model is one that can be applied to improve the language competence of interpreters working in any context. The language mentorship process increases the ASL skills of students, promotes life-long learning and can foster greater job satisfaction.

## About the Authors

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**Leilani Johnson,** Ed.D., is the director of the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center (DO IT Center), housed at Front Range Community College in Denver, Colorado. The goal of the $7.5 million, grant-funded DO IT Center is to provide distance learning programs in specialty settings (e.g., K-12 education, American legal system) for sign language practitioners and educators. Utilizing her doctorate in Instructional Technology and Distance Education, Dr. Johnson administers a dynamic Center with a diverse distance student body of approximately 300, as well as a cadre of more than 50 distance faculty to facilitate the learning opportunities.

**Marty Taylor,** Ph.D. is the Director of Interpreting Consolidated, offering consulting, evaluation, research and publishing in the field of interpreting. She is the author of two textbooks I*nterpretation Skills: English to ASL* and the recently published *Interpretation Skills: ASL to English*. In collaboration with Angela Petrone Stratiy, she also produced the video, *Pursuit of ASL: Interesting Facts Using Classifiers*. Even though she lives in Canada, for the last six years, she has been involved in distance delivery of interpreter education through the DO IT center housed at Front Range Community College in Denver, Colorado.

**Betti Bonni,** M.A., ASLTA: Provisional, is currently the Instructional Development Coordinator of the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center at Front Range Community College in Denver, Colorado. She has been teaching ASL for over twenty years in a variety of college and university settings. Betti completed her masters in Educational Administration and Supervision from CSUN and completed a number of courses in the ASL Linguistics program at University of Colorado-Boulder.

**Rachel Naiman,** M.A., M.S. ASLTA, CDI, has been a faculty member in the Interpreter Education Program at Front Range Community College (FRCC) for over 17 years. As well, she serves as one of the Distance Instructional Managers for the Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center at FRCC. Rachel has been serving as a member of the CIT-ASLTA Task Force on Standards and Accreditation, as well as a member of NAD-RID Council on Interpreting written test committee.

## Appendix A

### *Checklist for Mentor Feedback*

**Transcription**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Thorough (all of the signed information recorded) | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Accurate (all signed information recorded accurately) | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Conforms to standardized conventions | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Includes line numbers for each line of the transcript | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Readable and easy to follow | Yes | No | Partial |

**Self-Analysis**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Addresses all the Major Features | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Identifies specific principles from the Taylor text | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Provides appropriate citation of each principle | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Isolates specific examples of how the principle was applied or not applied | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Provides reference to the appropriate line number in the transcription that references the specific examples | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Identifies how the analysis supports established mentorship goals | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Identifies strategies or resources for improving less-than-effective patterns | Yes | No | Partial |

**Performance**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Incorporation of skills/behavior from the Major Features during the retelling | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Incorporation of examples from the source text as modeled | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Clarity and production | Yes | No | Partial |
| • Equivalency of meaning to the original source language text | Yes | No | Partial |

## Appendix B

*Sample Rubric for Language Mentorship (30 points possible)*

| CATEGORY | Excellent (A= 27-30 points) | Good (B= 24-26 points) | Satisfactory (C= 22-23) | Needs Improvement (D= 20-21) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Timeliness | Late submissions will lose one grade level. | | | |
| **Written analysis of skills performance (1 pt.)** | Late submissions will lose one grade level. | | | |
| **Transcription document (4 pts.)** | All the signed and/or interpreted behaviors demonstrated in the videotape sample of the student's work are appropriately isolated and documented in the transcript and reflect a thorough understanding of the notation system associated with the transcription process. | Most all of the signed and/or interpreted behaviors demonstrated in the student's sample of work are appropriately isolated and transcribed and reflect a general understanding of the notation system associated with the transcription process. | Several of the signed and/or interpreted behaviors are not appropriately isolated and transcribed OR the transcription reflects a lack of general understanding of notation system used for transcribing. | Several of the signed and/or interpreted behaviors are missing in the transcript and the transcript lacks an understanding of the notation system for transcribing. |
| **Major Features from Taylor addressed (8 pts.)** | All the Major Features are addressed in the analysis with at least two (2) examples of each feature included. | Most of the Major Features are addressed in the analysis with at least two (2) examples of each feature included. | Most of the Major Features are addressed in the analysis but a few of the features have less than two (2) examples of each feature included. | Several of the Major Features are not addressed AND several of the Major Features addressed have less than two (2) examples of each feature included. |
| **Appropriate citation and reference to the feature and error type from Taylor (5 pts.)** | All of the appropriate citations and references are provided including; 1) statement of the specific feature being addressed, 2) the error type, 3) the line of the transcription that related to the example. Citations are accurate in terms of form and applicability. | Most of the appropriate citations and references are present in the analysis and are accurately in terms of form and applicability (e.g. associated with specific signed or interpreted behavior.) | Several of the appropriate citation s and references to are missing from the analysis OR are not accurate in terms of form or applicability. | Several citations and references are missing from the analysis AND are not accurate in terms of form or applicability. |

## Appendix B (continued)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Demonstration of critical thinking skills (5pts.)** | Discussion clearly relates to the required topic and demonstrates a strong understanding of the skills performance analysis by: 1) relating discussion of the features to real-life situations; 2) offers examples or, contrasts to, or probing questions about specific features; 3) relates discussion of the features to other aspects of the course. | Information clearly relates to the required topic. It demonstrates basic understanding of underlying function and benefits of skills performance analysis, but does not apply discussion of the features during interpreting in a thorough manner. | Information relates to the required topic, but does not demonstrate a though understanding or application of skills performance analysis as part of the interpreting process to the discussion. | Information has little or nothing to do with the required topic and lacks demonstration of an understanding of the function and benefits associated with skills performance analysis. |
| **Organization and mechanics of written analysis (2 pts)** | Information is very organized with well-constructed paragraphs and subheadings, is easy to read and follow, and relate. No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. | Information is organized with well-constructed paragraphs. Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors. | Information is organized, but paragraphs are not well constructed. A few grammatical spelling, or punctuation errors. | The information appears to be disorganized. Many grammatical, spelling. Or punctuation errors. |
| **Message accuracy (5 pts.)** | The voiced interpretation is an accurate and equivalent representation of the source language message and reflects appropriate semantic choice and register. | The voiced interpretation is an overall accurate representation of the source language message and generally reflects appropriate semantic choice and register. | The voiced interpretation contains a notable degree of error that impacts on the accuracy and equivalency of the message OR on the semantic choice and register. | The interpretation has a significant amount of error that impacts on the accuracy and equivalency of the message overall AND the semantic choice and register. |

Comments from Skills Specialist: _____

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**Assignment 1-3: _____/30 points**

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