

## RESPONSE -- ENTRY LEVEL TO THE PROFESSION

### **Response Paper #4:** Internship, Practicum, Fieldwork, Mentoring

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This paper expands on an aspect of the gap between formal education and "readiness-to work" by summarizing recent writings on mentoring, as well as some of the pre-service instantiations of the same general idea, and then asks a series of pointed, not-so-rhetorical questions about how mentoring might fit in interpreter education and into program standards.

Having had the perspective of working within the National Interpreter Training Consortium in the late 1970's, teaching at colleges, universities, in workshops, undergraduate and graduate levels, and most recently participating as a rater for the FIPSE-funded field study of the program assessment tool developed jointly by RID and CIT, I have a deep appreciation for the many approaches we have found to bring competent practitioners of interpretation to the workplace. However, I have an even deeper understanding that we don't do the preparation reliably or consistently. Not all of the graduates of interpreter preparation programs go on to work as interpreters. We don't provide an institutional mechanism to support program graduates in their efforts to achieve certification. We don't have supervision for less experienced practitioners as other, comparable fields do. Our colleagues in clinical work (psychology, social work, speech pathology) who, like us, end up working solo, provide a bridge for novices through supervision. In social sciences, students do fieldwork under the guidance of academic or often working practitioner.

The current situation is that usually interpreters work in isolation from one another. We come to the occupation of interpreting with a variety of preparations. Most new interpreters complete a two-year community or technical college program. Many new interpreters have tried to learn a second language at the same time as acquiring interpreting knowledge and skills; they reach the end of their coursework feeling they haven't completed their learning in either arena. Many of us have had limited individualized education; we want to hone our skills under a coach. More experienced interpreters are likely to have had formal interpreting education primarily in professional workshops, and may come to a mentoring relationship to gain depth, as well as introduction to related areas of expertise.

Let's imagine the situation where every new interpreter has had the benefit of a year's internship or practicum, which would include many chances to observe working interpreters and discuss these observations with a supervisor, whether academic or working professional. The internship would also include the extensive opportunities to

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work under the semicontrolled condition partnered with an experienced and trained interpreter. If we make interpreting comparable to occupational therapy, for example, we would require that each course last 90 hours.

Mentorship formalizes a practice which previously might have arisen spontaneously or haphazardly in professional settings. In the past ten years, the mentorprotege' relationship has been promoted in a number of fields as a mechanism to extend education, to socialize new practitioners into the day-to-day decision-making and job requirements of a particular occupation; and to develop careers through extending the mentor's personal network to the protege'.

Rather than relying on chance or individual effort to initiate such a relationship, now mentoring is sponsored by educational institutions for their students, alumni/ae or their region, by professional associations for their membership, by interpreting agencies and employers for their contractors and employees.

Those who seek mentors may be novice practitioners seeking to address the gap between classroom learning and job readiness. Some will seek a mentor as they prepare to stand for certification or enter a new specialization of practice. Or, they may be seasoned professionals looking to a respected peer for a recharge in a particular area of weakness. There appears to be general agreement that a mentoring experience should begin with a mutual assessment of some particular issue that will be worked on. Issues which may be addressed during a mentoring experience include language-related issues (for both first and second languages, such as specialized vocabulary, cohesion and other discourse level mechanisms, comprehension or production of particular grammatical constructions), business practices, processing of assignment-related or ethical dilemmas. Those who become mentors clearly should feel confident about giving feedback on the particular issue to be addressed, and should have undergone special training or orientation.

Institutionalized mentorships have a specific duration and a defined meeting schedule. The mentorship programs around the U.S. are developing different "flavors" of the common practice, including diagnosis or assessment, followed by several weeks of shared practice and reflection, and a final evaluative review of how and whether the mentorship met the stated goals. As the recent issue of the *RID Views* (November 1993) made obvious, mentoring is a rewarding experience for both the person providing the guidance and for the one seeking it.

### The role of mentoring for IPPs

CIT is now reassessing its educational standards. Shall we require IPPs to be part of mentoring networks, for the benefit of their students and alumni? Can we afford not to require such an effort? Shall training mentors be the responsibility of some or all interpreting programs? What is the relationship of an interpreting program's practicum course and/or internship experience to a community-based or agency-sponsored

mentorship program? How shall we define a standard for educational institutions that accounts for the differences in resources, geography, expertise?

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