

RID-NCIEC MENTORING GRANTS

StoryBlend received one of the 2008 mentoring grants from RID and the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC). This is the first of two articles outlining the process and outcomes of the project.



StoryBlend 2008:

Front Row: Hilary Sostek, Paula Dalton, Sabra Carlin, Melanie Allickson, Rachel McBride, Robert Love, Jr.

Second Row: Jon Ainsworth, Joette Sadowsky, Cari Sibenaller, Patty Gordon, Jules Gosmann, Rachel McBride, Jennifer Nedegaard

Third Row: Sarah Vick, Nic Zapko, Tarra Grammenos, Cassie Lang

StoryBlend is a two-week language and culture immersion mentorship designed to enhance understanding and connection between interpreters and deaf people through storytelling, discussion, theater activities and performance. Deaf mentors and sign language interpreters engage in a series of improvisational activities designed to elicit stories of personal experience. The stories and themes that emerge from the activities are compiled into a “play” that is performed (in ASL and English) as a staged reading to an audience of deaf and hearing people.

This year, StoryBlend took place from July 14-21 at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, MN. This is the fourth year StoryBlend has been offered. StoryBlend was a past recipient of a mentoring grant from RID in 2005.

Many of the activities of StoryBlend are theater games adapted from the work of Augusto Boal, a performance artist who uses theater as mechanism to explore oppression, and Viola Spolin, a leader in improvisational theater techniques. Examples include:

- Improvisations based on daily experiences of deaf people and interpreters
- Small and large group discussion about Deaf and hearing cultural norms and expectations
- Games to build confidence, body awareness, teamwork and ASL fluency
- Translation activities that develop skills in artistic forms of English and ASL.

The focus of the first week is on activities and discussions. During the second week, the directors work with the group to choose those stories and experiences that resonate most with the group and craft them into a rough outline for a play. On the final evening, the participants and mentors present their “play” in draft form to an invited audience.

The skills required of the participants directly apply to the work of an interpreter. Activities and discussions conducted in ASL support second language acquisition. Development and refinement of translations supports the mental processes in interpreting and ability to evaluate the product of an interpretation. General theater games improve physical strength, agility, and ability to quickly represent specific emotional states with clarity. Discussions of culture and oppression improve the interpreters’ capacity to self-assess their roles and responsibilities in the Deaf, hearing and interpreter communities. Throughout the two weeks, the mentors develop skills in giving feedback, analyzing translations, and deepening their own understanding of interpreters and hearing culture.

StoryBlend is directed by interpreter, Patty Gordon, and deaf actor, Nic Zapko. The 2008 deaf mentors were Robert Love, Jr., a performing artist from Missouri; Sabra Carlin, a second-year student at Gallaudet University; Rachel McBride, a one-on-one aid at Metro Deaf School and performer in the 2008 Deaf "Vagina Monologues;" and Jon Ainsworth, a freshman studying acting at Gallaudet. This year we had 11 interpreters participating with a range of experience from new graduates to 19 years in the field.

More information can be found at www.storyblend.com. Our second article will report on the outcomes of StoryBlend 2008.