

Effective Practices in Mentoring: Closing the Gap and Easing the Transition

Betsy Winston

National Interpreter Education Center, Northeastern University, Boston, MA

Abstract

Mentoring is touted as a way to close the gap, and to ease the transition to work for interpreting students. It is also used by seasoned interpreters who value on-going growth and life-long learning. This presentation presents information about current and effective practices in mentoring that are being offered nation-wide.

Introduction to Our Goals

Mentoring has become a familiar buzz word in recent years, with workshops, courses, and academic programs becoming available for interpreters. As students continue to graduate from interpreting programs with gaps in their skills, and with the transition from program to profession sometimes difficult to make, mentoring has been touted as a way to close the gap, and to ease the transition. It is also used, albeit much less frequently, by seasoned, certified interpreters who value on-going growth and life-long learning.

The term, mentoring, is applied to many different behaviors, actions, and goals. People have been “mentoring” for many years. In fact, few people agree about what “mentoring” really

means, who should do it, or what the people who in engage it should be called. The National Consortium of Interpreting Education Canters (NCIEC) is in the process of identifying current mentoring resources and practices, with the goal of establishing effective practices in our field. The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers is a recently established institution in our field. Formerly a group of loosely affiliated grant programs that provided regional and local workshops and trainings in the US, the group has joined forces to provide more extensive and effective education, training and programming opportunities to interpreters and interpreting educators across the US.

A major goal of the NCIEC is to identify effective practices in our field, and an important initiative is the area of mentoring. The NCIEC mentoring team is conducting several inter-related activities that 1) identify current and/or potentially promising practices; 2) evaluate them for effectiveness in mentoring; and 3) implement them appropriately across the US, meeting the needs of the field across a variety of settings and populations. To this end, several activities have been launched, including the dissemination of two surveys targeting mentors and mentees, focus groups, and materials and resources reviews. At the time of writing, most of these activities have not concluded, and reporting results is not possible. In this paper, the types of activities are described, and preliminary findings from a few are shared. Results of these activities, as available in October, will be reported during the CIT conference presentation, and will be available to augment this paper thru the Mentoring Resource website.

At the time of this writing,¹ nation-wide needs assessments were being disseminated and analyzed, and focus groups consisting of mentoring experts were being convened around current and effective practices in mentoring. The conference presentation will provide information about results of these investigations into effective practices in mentoring, and will engage participants in explorations of mentoring, mentoring needs, and mentoring services in their areas. We look for those administrators and program directors who attend to discuss how such practices as mentoring, peer mentoring, diagnostics, tutoring toward credentialing, and coaching, are being and can be integrated into interpreting programs, into practicums and internships for interpreting students, and into continuing education for working interpreters. Results of the CIT discussion

¹ This Proceedings paper was written to meet the publication deadlines for the 2006 CIT conference. Updated information will be provided during the presentation at the CIT conference in October, 2006. For copies of all additional information presented, please contact the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) at www.asl.neu.edu/nciec

will be available at the NCIEC website. Readers are encouraged to access the site to add to the information provided in this paper.

Identifying and Assessing Effective Practices in Mentoring

The process of identifying and assessing effective practices in mentoring requires extensive investigation and study, both inside our field, and outside. It is essential to understand the broader context of mentoring in education and business, current practices and expectations in our field today, to assess the effectiveness of those current practices, to investigate and stimulate new ideas, and to implement those practices that are effective. In an on-going cycle, the assessment of the effectiveness of practices continues after implementation, with the goal of providing continuous feedback that informs and results in improvement in mentoring and mentoring practices.

Reviewing Existing Information

There are several sources of existing information to explore. The first step in our process is to identify those practices that are happening, and then to evaluate them for their effectiveness. The NCIEC Mentoring team is currently identifying the many existing sources of information available about mentoring, both within our field and outside of it. We are compiling this information through materials and resource searches, local, regional and national focus groups, and through two nationally disseminated surveys, one targeting mentors and one targeting mentees.

In addition to identifying existing resources and information, we are collecting input from participants in the focus groups, and on the surveys, about their opinions, beliefs and expectations for mentoring. As we identify existing practices, we will begin to evaluate them for their effectiveness for improving the quality of interpreting in our field.

One of the first sources of existing information about mentoring to be reviewed is the Standard Practice Paper (SPP) from RID. The Professional Standards Committee of RID, between 1993-1995, developed the Standard Practice Paper about mentoring, publishing it in 1996. RID is currently updating this paper. It should be understood that the RID SPP's are explicitly intended to reflect existing practices happening at the time the papers are developed. They make no claim about the effectiveness or adequacy of the practices that exist. Thus, while

the current, and up-coming SPP on mentoring will provide a mirror reflecting what IS happening in our field, it will not claim that such practices are effective or adequate.

The current SPP for mentoring states that, for our field, "...mentoring is a goal-oriented relationship between two interpreters; a mentor and a second individual...who seeks to learn and grow through association with that mentor. The mentor has more experience, skill or knowledge, either of interpreting in general, or of some specific aspect of interpreting" (RID 1996). RID describes mentoring as a way to augment, but not substitute for, formal interpreter education programs.

RID further states that "each mentoring situation is unique, depending on the individuals involved and the goals of the relationship....Common to all successful mentorships is mutual commitment to professional growth." (RID 1996)

At the time of this writing, RID was just beginning to convene a new group to review and revise the SPP for mentoring. Their work will provide valuable input for our own activities as we strive to evaluate mentoring practices that currently exist for their effectiveness. With an increased understanding of mentoring as it is currently being offered, and a set of established practices in mentoring, interpreters, both novice and seasoned, will be able to continue to learn and grow, and as a result, offer more effective services to consumers who rely on the highest quality of interpreting.

NCIEC Mentor and Mentee Surveys

The NCIEC mentoring team developed two surveys for and about mentoring. The first, the Interpreter Mentor Survey, has been successfully piloted and is being prepared for national dissemination. The second, the Interpreter Mentee Survey, is being prepared to pilot, and will be disseminated nationally after that. Due to their length, neither is duplicated in this paper; however, each may be accessed through the NCIEC website at www.asl.neu.edu/nciec.

Interpreter Mentor Survey

This survey is exceptionally long (74 questions), and required approximately 15-20 minutes to complete it. Yet input from open-ended comments consistently indicated that respondents were eager to complete it, and appreciated the opportunity to provide input in this somewhat isolated area of expertise. This survey was initially tested on 8 mentors, revised based

on feedback, and piloted on a group of 22 mentors around the US. These mentors were identified by the six interpreter education centers as leaders in mentoring practices in their respective regions.

The survey collects information in several essential topics: mentor demographics, training in mentoring, experiences as a mentor, opinions about effective mentoring, and finally, mentor's own experiences being mentored. Although the entire survey is not reproduced here, the section asking opinions about effective practices is offered for your review. During the CIT presentation, we hope to cover these questions, and the entire survey, in our discussions with participants.

Your Thoughts Regarding Effective Practices in Mentoring

55. Several terms have been used to describe the individual who receives mentoring services. How do you refer to the individual you mentor?
- mentee
 - protégé
 - other _____
56. Is there a term other than mentee/protégé that is better suited to the individual receiving mentoring services?
- yes, it is _____
 - no, satisfied with the term I currently use
57. What top three factors do you feel contribute to an individual's reluctance to utilize mentor services?
- personal insecurity about one's interpreting ability
 - not enough trained mentors in the area
 - interpreter's perception that skills are fully developed and not necessary of improvement
 - lack of understanding of the mentorship process by the mentee/protégé
 - lack of understanding of the mentorship process by the IEP educators
 - lack of self-perception of the need to enhance skills
 - negative past experience as a mentee/protégé
 - lack of understanding on how to obtain a mentor
 - lack of financial resources
 - inadequate/insufficient advertising of mentorship services
 - other _____
58. What do you feel the minimum qualifications should be for a mentor (check all that apply)?
- experience as an interpreter educator
 - certification
 - mentor training
 - a minimum number of years working the field How many years? _____
 - academic credentials:
 - AA/AS
 - BA/BS
 - M.A/M.S.
 - other _____
59. What do you feel is the minimum number of training/credit hours required for an individual to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to conduct effective mentorships?
- an intensive weekend course is adequate
 - while an academic quarter or semester course would be desirable, 20-30 hours of intensive training is adequate
 - no less than one semester is adequate
 - no less than two semesters is adequate
 - no less than a certificate program of at least two semesters is adequate
 - other _____
60. In which formats do you feel training of mentors is most effectively offered?
- face-to-face training only
 - online only

Effective Practices in Mentoring: NCIEC Report

	<input type="checkbox"/> blended training
	<input type="checkbox"/> any and all formats can be effective
61.	Do you feel that mentors should undergo a certification process similar to interpreter certification?
	<input type="checkbox"/> yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> no
62.	Do you believe that a formal, objective diagnostic process should be a part of the mentorship process?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentorships should have the latitude to be structured between the mentor and mentee/ protégé without outside influence.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Diagnostic information would be helpful as the mentor and mentee/protégé design a mentorship.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentorships should always use trained diagnosticians and diagnostic information as the guide to the development of a mentorship.
	<input type="checkbox"/> other _____
63.	If someone were to ask you, what the state of the mentorship experience is today, how would you answer? (Check all that apply)
	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown to most interpreters in the field
	<input type="checkbox"/> recognized as “existing” but misunderstood by most
	<input type="checkbox"/> perceived by many as an excellent way to improve skill but most would not seek it out
	<input type="checkbox"/> an activity more and more interpreters seek out on a regular basis
63.	Do you agree with this statement? “Mentorship is considered one of the best methods or tools for enhancing skills of working interpreters and closing the readiness gap for recent graduates.”
	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
	<input type="checkbox"/> agree
	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree
	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
64.	What do you believe are the trends in the supply and demand for mentors?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring is an activity that has seen its time and the supply is greater than the demand.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Today’s mentors are able to meet tomorrow’s demand for mentorships.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring services will grow at a slow and steady pace and therefore an additional cadre of mentors will be needed.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mentorship requests far outpace the supply of trained mentors and will only continue to grow at a rapid pace.
65.	What do you consider to be key elements in effective practices in mentoring? (Please list)

66.	What additional philosophies do you bring to mentoring?

The Mentee Survey covers similar topics, and is looking for information from the Mentee's perspective. We look forward to your input during our presentation.

NCIEC Focus Groups

The NCIEC Mentoring team is also planning and conducting focus groups around the country. As of this writing, one national focus group has been held. Mentors from around the US were identified by the Regional and National Interpreter Education Centers and invited to participate in the discussions. Approximately 40 mentors were identified for their leading work in mentoring, and attended a 3-day discussion in Boston in June 2006. Topics of the focused discussions included an extensive discussion about existing practices, identification of practices that appeared effective, and some emerging definitions of what mentoring is and is not. This group is continuing in an online discussion of these topics, and will be involved with identifying additional mentoring resources within their home areas. This national focus group, with many mentoring leaders attending, serves as the first of many that the NCIEC will host on this important topic. If you are interested in learning more, or in participating in some way, please join us at our presentation, or contact any of us through the NCIEC website at www.asl.neu.edu/nciec.

About the author

Betsy Winston is the Director of the National Interpreter Education Center at Northeastern University, and coordinates the activities of the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers. She is actively involved in the design, development and implementation of the Masters in Interpreter Pedagogy program there. She holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Georgetown University, an MA in Linguistics from Gallaudet University, and an M.Ed. in Technology and Learning from Western Governors University. Dr. Winston serves as the leader of the NCIEC Mentoring Project Team, which is responsible for designing and implementing the efforts reported here.

Acknowledgements

The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) is supporting this national effort to identify, evaluate, and implement effective practices in mentoring. It is only through the

Effective Practices in Mentoring: NCIEC Report

efforts of all the NCIEC members, and especially the members of the Mentoring Project Team that this work has progressed. Special thanks to Pauline Annarino, Diana Doucette, Paula Gajewski-Mickelson, and Beverly Hollrah for making this team work so well!

References

RID Standard Practice Paper: Mentoring. 1996. Retrieved July 28, 2006 from <http://www.rid.org/113.pdf>