



“Respect for Colleagues - Members have a professional obligation to assist and encourage new interpreting practitioners in the profession.”

AVLIC’s Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct (section 4.3.2)

Over the last 20 years of my interpreting career, I have worked sporadically with interpreting students on practicum, either out in the community for an occasional assignment or in a few scattered college classes.

In early 2010, I blanched when I heard I’d be spending every day, all day, with a student as they shadowed and teamed with me for their full six-week placement...twice! I stumbled around trying to figure out what to do, how to do it, what they needed and how I could meet those needs. I sought to understand my role and responsibilities. I felt pressure to perform as a supervisor. I felt the stress of having eyes on me constantly, analyzing every move I made and questioning everything I did.

After a couple of weeks with the first student, I soon discovered a passion for regularly sharing my interpreting expertise. I also experienced the interpreting profession through their excited, nervous, analytical and inexperienced eyes. They learned from me and I learned from them. I felt I had a wealth of practical knowledge but was rather outdated when it came to current interpreting conventions and terminology. I was grateful for the opportunity to witness someone’s growth in the interpreting profession.

Given my seasoned status, I tend to interpret intuitively and automatically most of the time - dare I say complacently - flagging areas of improvement through a teamer’s feedback and as situations arose. Having a student with me widened my gaze to encompass new vistas. I was forced to slow down, dissect my interpreting and processing to see what I was doing and why I was doing it on a minute-by-minute basis. Then I started to learn how to talk about my decisions using current interpreting lingo and concepts.

Thank you to the two students who delved into that adventure with me. It was a very rocky start but a strong finish. They taught me an incredible amount of information about my field, my interpreting, my beliefs and my values.

When I recently came across a book that focuses on mentoring interpreters, I thought “Darn it, I wish I read this earlier!”

The Mentor’s Companion by Patty Gordon and Mari Magler is based on a mentoring plan developed by one Minnesota school district. In 1994, state legislation was passed requiring all interpreters in the K to 12 setting to meet standard certification levels. Many interpreters had been working independently for years with no interpreting supervision or evaluation. In opposition, districts were worried they could not keep who they had or attract qualified new interpreters to keep up with the demand due to the new qualifications law.

In 2000, the law was amended to include a two-year period for interpreter graduates to meet the criteria through weekly mentoring with certified interpreters. In 1994, there were only six qualified interpreters out of an estimated 400, so demands were high for mentoring services.

Gordon and Mari wrote the initial mentoring plan for that one district. Over the years, they developed and supplemented the system with more hands-on training and resources with the goal that the entire state could access the material. The Mentor’s Companion is an amalgamation of that work, re-published in 2007.

“Developing the mindset of a life-long learner, particularly one that is self-directed, is a benefit to the individual and to the profession.” Gordon and Mari

Recently, I decided to look for my own mentor. I found a highly professional, qualified interpreter with diagnostic experience, who I respect and trust, to guide me in advancing my interpreting skills. I also became a MAVLI mentor with AEIP students to offer ongoing guidance to people just starting their interpreting adventure. The opportunity to learn and to teach allows me to enhance my skills.

The Mentoring Companion added some specific direction to my own inexperienced process of mentoring and of being mentored. For example, the book explains that a mentor envelops many roles - a teacher, a guide, a counselor, a role model and a cheerleader. A mentor also needs to know his or her own personality type and communication style in order to effectively work with someone else in a learning environment.

According to the book, an effective mentor is as follows:

- Supportive - encourages the mentee to accept challenges, offers ideas, adapts to unexpected mentee needs
- Patient - devotes time to the relationship, allows the mentee to progress at their own pace
- Aware of roles and responsibilities - adjusts their role to meet needs, maintains professional and personal boundaries

- A clear communicator - active listener, open and direct, manages conflict
- An effective guide - guides versus teaches, provides alternatives, offers materials and resources
- Committed - demonstrates excellence in their own work, attends PD, completes tasks on time
- Empathetic - allows mentee to safely express emotions
- Respectful - keeps information confidential, is aware of cultural norms, needs and beliefs, accepts other opinions and ways of doing things

An effective mentee is as follows:

- Eager to learn - demonstrates the desire to learn, independently looks for information, seeks additional PD
- Team-orientated - cooperates and communicates with the mentor, participates in discussion and design of the mentorship, expresses their needs
- Patient - keeps realistic timelines and adjusts expectations
- Willing to take risks - takes on new challenges, lets go of old beliefs and ways of doing things
- A person with a positive attitude - trusts in the process
- Aware of what they want from the relationship - identifies expectations, open to the mentors perspective
- Committed - does the work, follows through on plans and activities

The Mentoring Companion offers the reader a mentorship process - from hiring a mentor (agreements and contracts) to creating goals (step by step strategies and education plan) to the ongoing observation and final evaluation processes (sample diagnostic rubrics and reports).

There are even 40 pages filled with twenty-five specific activities divided into three sections: interpreting process, language competency and personal growth. Each activity is broken down into the goal, the materials and equipment needed, followed by a step-by-step procedure.

The wealth of general mentorship guidance offered in this book coupled with the specific examples from the interpreting profession continues to assist me in my dual role as a mentor and a mentee.

By Kristi Dorian



Mentorship

When I graduated from the AEIP in Nova Scotia in 1997, I was blessed with the opportunity to be a part of a mentorship program. It was called Interpreters United (IU); two interpreters and a few Deaf leaders started this mentorship program. It was an opportunity to support recent graduates as they headed out into the field. It ended up evolving into a mentorship program with about 15 interpreters who had a wide range of skill and years experience. It was an opportunity for interpreters to consciously make professional development plans, get guidance on their work, receive feedback on how to improve, and work with interpreters and Deaf community members who were helping them achieve their goals and provide a better service.

This mentorship program gave me the support and guidance I needed as a recent graduate. I was given assignments that were manageable and some that were more challenging with supports in place to allow for guidance and growth.

To date, Winnipeg doesn't have a formal mentorship program for graduates but I think we are trying to support our colleagues and support ourselves as we grow and develop in this challenging field. I believe we must all "drive our bus" and strive to get better but we need to work with others to do so.

Simply interpreting more doesn't equate to being a better interpreter. When we are working we are not necessarily getting better, we still need to learn and grow when we are not actively interpreting. There are things we can do to improve our interpreting skills such as forming study groups, working with interpreters and practicing giving and receiving feedback, finding common errors and anomalies in our work, practicing with language models, working in more teamed environments, observing interpreters and talking about the work.

Personally, I have been interpreting for 14 years and there are places where I would love some mentorship because I do not have the schema or skill set to be able to provide a successful interpretation. Working together is how we get better - it takes effort but it's worth it!

Someday I hope we have a formalized mentorship program but until then let's work together and grow together!!

By Mandy MacDonald