

11-2010

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Recommended Citation

Fitzmaurice, Stephen, "Teaching Goals of Interpreter Educators" (2010). *Publications*. 3.
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Teaching Goals of Interpreter Educators

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Abstract

Angelo & Cross (1993) found substantial differences in the teaching goals of faculty from different disciplines, yet they found no differences for educators based on their employment status or the type of institution in which they worked. The current quantitative study compared the teaching goals of interpreter educators with those of educators from other disciplines. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 52 goal statements from Angelo & Cross' Teaching Goal Inventory (TGI) in terms of what they aim to have students accomplish in their courses. The data suggest that interpreter education constitutes a separate discipline from the nine disciplines identified by Angelo & Cross. Interpreter educators place far more emphasis on the development of higher order thinking skills than do educators from most other disciplines. There appear to be no differences in the teaching goals of interpreter educators employed in a full-time or adjunct capacity, nor for interpreter educators employed at two-year and four-year institutions. In sum, there is consensus among interpreter educators that conveying higher order thinking skills is the most important teaching goal.

Keywords: interpreter educators; teaching goals; TGI; higher order thinking

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1. Introduction

United States federal legislation regarding access to communication for deaf individuals created a demand for American Sign Language (ASL)–English interpreters in the early 1970s (Ball, 2007; Cokely, 2005; Frishberg, 1990; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001; Monikowski & Peterson, 2005; Monikowski & Winston, 2003; Pöchlacker, 2004; Winston, 2005; Winston & Schick, 2000). Demand, however, quickly exceeded the available supply of early “interpreters.” Consequently, ASL–English interpreter programs were instituted in the early 1970s with direct, continuing federal assistance to six institutions of higher education across the country (Frishberg, 1990; Winston, 2005; Witter-Merithew, 1980). This, in turn, created a need to locate interpreter educators for these programs.

The educators in most American interpreter programs were predominantly “highly skilled interpreters respected in their communities for their interpreting abilities...[who] often do not have any formal training as interpreters or as interpreter educators” (Winston & Schick, 2000, p. 117). Winston and Schick indicate that adjunct faculty did not differ from full-time interpreter educators in terms of education or experience. What is noteworthy about this group of interpreter educators is the lack of foundation in teaching or education. Winston (2005) wrote:

The great majority of faculty were, and continue to be, hired as part-time adjuncts because they are competent practitioners of interpreting. Their expertise as educators and as interpreting educators was not an essential qualification for hiring Only the relatively few full-time faculty were required to demonstrate any expertise as educators. Most have learned to teach through experience, taking courses occasionally. Many earned degrees beyond high school and college, but few entered teaching as a profession to be mastered. (p. 209)

The US-based National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC, 2008) indicates that 32 interpreter programs opened between 1969 and 1979, and 39 more between 1980 and 1989 (p. 6). Winston (2005) estimates there are approximately 150 interpreter programs across the United States with one or two full-time educators in each program and some programs with as many as eight adjunct educators. The reliance on competent practitioners does not appear to have changed in the last 40 years.

The lack of a formal educational background might very well have created an interesting diversity in the teaching philosophies of these practitioners who have shifted roles to become interpreter educators. However, this does not appear to be the case. Winston (2005) investigated the teaching of ASL–English interpreting, focusing on the knowledge, attitudes, and philosophy of interpreter educators. Interpreter educators reported, in general, that “developing the higher order thinking and analysis skills that interpreters need to be competent practitioners” (p. 219) is vital. What is not clear from this report is whether interpreter educators see higher order thinking skills as a teaching goal.

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1.1. Teaching goals

Over the last decade, higher education has shifted from pedagogical approaches based on *teaching* to approaches focused on *student learning*. Incorporated within this change is the demand that educators assess student learning and critically reflect on their teaching—the nucleus of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

A key component to the assessment of learning is establishing goals that educators can use to gauge the effectiveness of teaching through the demonstrated learning of students. McKeachie and Svinicki (2006) wrote:

The first step in preparing . . . a course is working out course objectives [goals], because the choice of textbook, the selection of the type and order of assignments, the choice of teaching techniques, and all the decisions involved in course planning should derive from your objectives [goals]. (p. 10)

Other researchers stress that learning activities, course plans, program curricula, and assessment at all levels should follow from the established goals (Schwarz, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Angelo and Cross (1993) highlight that the establishment of teaching goals is fundamental:

Goals are ends we work toward, destinations we set out for, results we strive to achieve. But goals are far more than terminal points. They are also reference points that we use to measure our progress and to determine whether we are headed in the right direction. Without clear goals, we cannot readily assess the effectiveness of our efforts or realize when we are off course, how far off we are, and how to get back on the right track. (p. 13)

1.2. Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI)

The exploration of an educator's goals is the crux of the Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI) developed by Angelo and Cross (1993). They administered the TGI to a large sample of full- and part-time faculty at two- and four-year institutions of higher learning. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 52 goal statements in terms of aims for students' accomplishment in their courses. In their study, Angelo and Cross categorized the 52 TGI goal statements into six goal clusters (1993, p. 16–18):

1. Higher order thinking skills
2. Basic academic success skills
3. Discipline-specific knowledge and skills
4. Liberal arts and academic values
5. Work and career preparation
6. Personal development

Angelo and Cross (1993) further analyzed differences in teaching goals across academic disciplines and across demographic variables of the educators themselves. They found substantial differences in the teaching goals of faculty from different disciplines. For example, humanities professors ranked (a) thinking for oneself, (b) valuing the subject, and (c) openness to new ideas as being most important; whereas medical faculty ranked (a) the ability to apply principles, (b) making wise decisions, and (c) being responsible for oneself as being most important. Teaching goals were not related to gender, experience, institutional setting or employment status.

The demographics of Angelo and Cross' sample is substantially different from the population demographics of interpreter educator faculty members. The NCIEC reports that 62% of signed language interpreter educators in the US are considered part-time (p. 13) and that 78% of signed language interpreter education programs are housed at technical, vocational, or community colleges that award a two-year

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associate's degree (p. 5). Given this skew within the interpreter educator population and the substantial differences with Angelo and Cross' sample, an investigation of the different teaching goals for part-time/full-time interpreter educators working at different types of educational institutions is warranted.

In brief, the current research inquiry aims to assess the teaching goals of interpreter educators by:

1. Comparing the teaching goals of interpreter educators with educators in other disciplines
2. Determining if there is any consensus among interpreter educators employed at two-year and four-year institutions
3. Determining if there is any consensus among interpreter educators employed full-time or part-time

2. Method

Participants were recruited via an e-mail invitation sent from the NCIEC to the electronic mailing list of the membership of the US-based (predominantly) signed language interpreter educator organization, the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT). If CIT members responded to the initial invitation, the NCIEC then e-mailed participants a second time, providing a link to an electronic survey. The larger three-part survey was designed to compile a national needs assessment on interpreter program faculty members and took approximately 45 minutes to complete. The questions pertaining to the current study were contained in the first section of the survey. Participants were asked to complete demographic questions and the Teaching Goals Inventory (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

Specifically, each participant was asked to select one course that they teach and answer 52 questions about their teaching goals for the course. For each goal statement, participants were asked to rate its importance using the following five-point scale:

1. *Not applicable*—a goal you never try to achieve
2. *Unimportant*—a goal you rarely try to achieve
3. *Important*—a goal you sometimes try to achieve
4. *Very important*—a goal you often try to achieve
5. *Essential*—a goal you always/nearly always try to achieve

Quantitative data were collected through Zoomerang, an online survey tool. The link to the survey was active for 68 days.

3. Findings

In all, 44 individuals responded to the survey. Six respondents did not complete all sections of the survey and were excluded from further analysis. The age range of respondents is summarized in Figure 1. Figure 2 illustrates the number of years of teaching experience reported by our sample. Sixty-two percent of the sample were employed as full-time faculty, whereas 35% were considered part-time or adjunct faculty. Four-year institutions represented 66% of respondents; 34% of respondents worked at two-year institutions.

3.1. Teaching goals of interpreter educators vs. other disciplines

Table 1 contains the top three teaching goals by discipline, as reported by Angelo and Cross (1993, p. 368). Added to this table are the current data from interpreter educators. Interpreter educators have no goals in common with the disciplines of science and medicine and two goals in common with English and mathematics. Only one goal is shared by interpreter educators and faculty in the remaining five disciplines (i.e., arts, humanities, basic skills, social sciences, and business).

The similarity to the field of mathematics is perhaps not appropriate and may be explained by different interpretations of the phrase "problem solving." It is likely that mathematics educators use the phrase

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“problem solving” (84%) to mean the solving of mathematical problems, in particular, solving equations and/or finding appropriate mathematical models which approximate reality, etc. Interpreter educators, however, may perceive problem solving (71%) as pertaining to solving problems of an environmental, situational, or communicative nature.

Suggesting that the goals of the interpreter educators are well matched to those of the English faculty is also problematic. English faculty most highly value writing skills (84%), whereas interpreter faculty most highly value problem solving (71%). Although English and interpreter educators hold languages at their core, the fundamental difference of faculty teaching goals limits the similarities of interpreter educators and English educators.

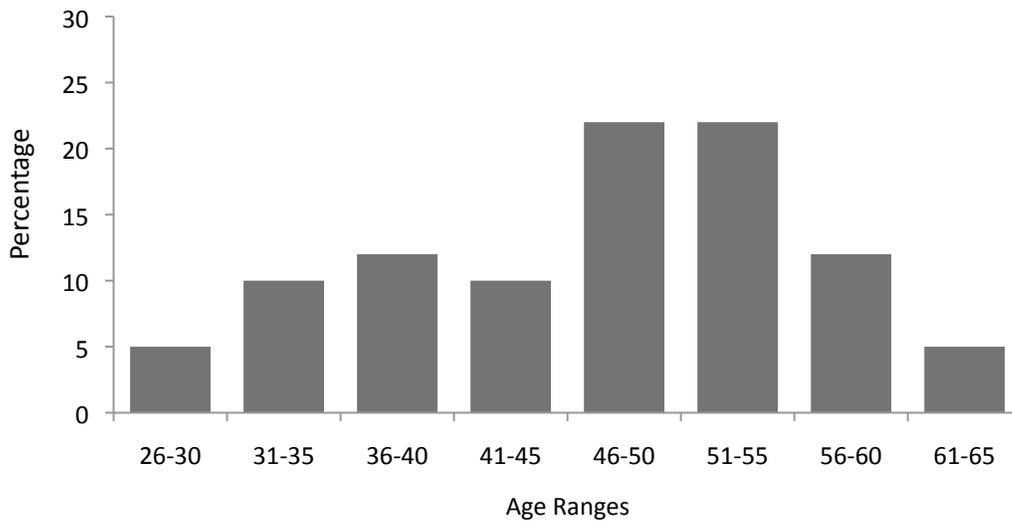


Figure 1: Respondent age ranges

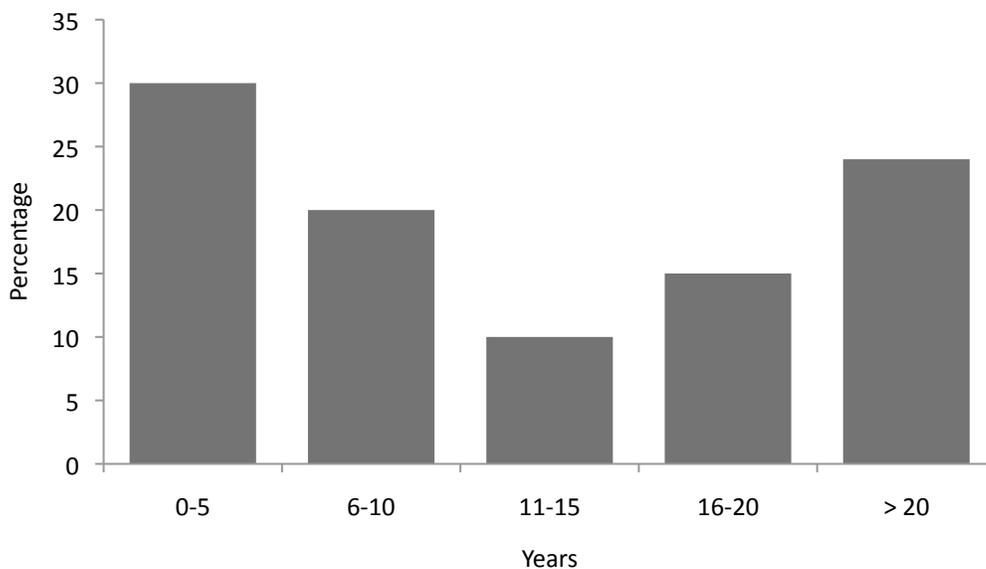


Figure 2: Years teaching in field