

2021

Book Review: The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education: Pursuing Evidence-based Practice

Francesca Maria Frittella
francesca.frittella@gmail.co

Follow this and additional works at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ijie>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Sign Languages Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Frittella, Francesca Maria (2021) "Book Review: The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education: Pursuing Evidence-based Practice," *International Journal of Interpreter Education*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ijie/vol12/iss1/8>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Interpreter Education by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

Book Review: The Next Generation of Research in Interpreter Education: Pursuing Evidence-based Practice

Francesca Maria Frittella¹

Roy, C. B., and Winston, E. A. (Ed.). (2018). *The next generation of research in interpreter education: Pursuing evidence-based practice*. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press. (153 pages).

Cynthia Roy and Elizabeth Winston have brought together in this volume the work of five scholars who are fundamental contributors to research-driven signed language interpreter education in the United States and Canada. The aim of the book is foreshadowed in its programmatic title: to support the ongoing shift in interpreter education from a teaching model based on perpetuated habits and myths to a systematic methodology with sound theoretical underpinning. In other words, the objective is to gradually replace teaching based on *common practices* with research-validated *best* or *effective practices*. This aim is the thread that binds together the individual contributions to this volume. Each study critically analyses one established assumption or an emerging trend in signed language interpreter education, places it within a theoretical framework, and investigates empirically its impact on the interpreting classroom. The common aim of the studies reflects a fundamental shift in the field's philosophical assumptions about teaching and learning with profound methodological implications. The participants in the educational encounter are no longer discarded as marginal or irrelevant to the learning outcome; their subjectivity is no longer regarded as an unwanted influence contaminating the study's outcomes. On the contrary, the students, their feelings, their satisfaction with the learning experience, the adequacy and depth of their reflection and metacognitive processes are regarded as fundamental forces determining the outcome of teaching. Student-dependent variables are, therefore, no longer excluded from the research question but become its very object. It could be said that the shift to "student-centered teaching" is starting to be accompanied by a shift to "student-centered research."

In Chapter 1, "Applying Adult Learning Theory to ASL-English Interpretation Role-Play Activities," authors Paul Harrelson, Annie Marks, and Chan Yi Hin report their exploration of role play in the classroom: a method

¹ Correspondence to: francesca.frittella@gmail.com

Book review: The next generation

commonly employed to prepare signed language interpreting students for real-life practice. In their inquiry, they challenge the widely-held assumption that the more authentic the classroom activities, the greater their effectiveness. To investigate this assumption, the authors present a review of situated learning theory, social learning theory, and experiential learning. Based on such a framework, the authors argue that systematic teacher's interventions are required to guarantee the effectiveness of role-play activities. The authors suggest manipulating the setup of the activities by gradually decreasing the level of teacher control along what they call the "authenticity spectrum of interpreting programme elements." Further research is needed to accomplish the ambitious aim of the authors to systematize the fundamental components of role-play activities. However, the authors' approach seems to be highly productive and may serve as a starting point for future studies. Their authenticity spectrum and catalogue of teaching techniques within this continuum may represent a scaffolding framework for the design of role-play activities. This could serve as a design model for courses with clear learning objectives and a progression corresponding to the learning needs of the students, which could guide trainers' decisions around which elements to include in the classroom, how and why.

Chapter 2, "Exploring Deaf Interpreter Education: Narratives from Practitioners and Students," presents Jeremy Rogers' qualitative study identifying patterns in curricula, instructional approach, and formative experiences in Deaf interpreter education with the aim of distinguishing effective instructional approaches. The study analysed a small corpus of semi-structured interviews with nine participants (six working Deaf interpreters and three Deaf interpreting students), who were interviewed about their perspectives on existing preparation practices. The interview transcriptions were analysed using an open-coding method to identify recurring themes. The results suggest that the institutions where the participants completed their training may be ill-equipped to admit deaf students. While the small participant population may render these results ungeneralizable, the feeling of frustration reported by the participants in being disadvantaged during their training compared to hearing students should at least serve as a loud alarm bell to institutions. It would be unacceptable if the foundational ethical principles of the profession and its very purpose—that of creating a more inclusive society with equal opportunities for all—were neglected in the very places that have been established to safeguard, nurture and spread these principles. The methodology adopted by the author seems effective to address this topic. It would be desirable to offer data and a visual representation of the total occurrence of each theme in the interview responses.

Chapter 3, "Anxiety and Self-Efficacy in Novice Interpreters: Examining the Impact of SMART Goal Setting and Mastery Rehearsal Scriptwriting," by Kimberly S. Bates, offers a comprehensive review of the issue of stress in the interpreting classroom. The author examined the beneficial impact that a combination of SMART goal setting and mastery rehearsal scriptwriting may have on novice signed language interpreters' levels of self-efficacy and anxiety. Three participants completed the study and only one received mentorship. The author collected in-depth qualitative data on participants' self-efficacy and anxiety level at baseline, midpoint and end of the study using methods such as inventories, questionnaires, a reflective journal and interviews. The in-depth analysis of each individual case is a distinguishing element of this contribution that may serve as inspiration for future studies.

Chapter 4, "Practitioners' Perspectives on Mentoring," by Kimberly A. Boeh, shares a study on mentoring. The study involved a survey of 443 interpreters and four students. The context is the perceived lack of workplace support mentioned as a reason for work dissatisfaction among signed language interpreters, combined with the feeling of novice interpreters that they are insufficiently prepared to enter the field. Mentorship, involving the direct transmission of practical knowledge by an expert to a novice entering a community of practice, is regarded as a crucial means to support students in the transition from training to real-life practice and reduce their vulnerability when facing problems for which they are not prepared. The study reveals that there is very little consensus in the field concerning mentorship models, including whether the mentors should receive remuneration and who should bear the cost for such a programme. The author proposes a possible model involving agencies partnering a veteran interpreter with an entry-level interpreter and paying each of them for their work. While the feasibility of this solution remains to be assessed, it seems important to discuss further possible solutions to give novice interpreters access to mentoring whilst guaranteeing compensation to mentors. A further issue that should be investigated is the quality of mentoring and whether and how mentors should be selected and trained.

Finally, in Chapter 5, "Teaching to Self-Assess: Developing Critical Thinking Skills for Student Interpreters," Stephen Fitzmaurice presents a method for developing students' self-assessment skills. Self-assessment skills are crucial, in that they correlate with work performance, self-regulation and life-long learning skills. For the past two years, the author has been assessing his students not on their interpretation product but on the quality of their self-

Book review: The next generation

assessment. Not only may this method encourage students to self-regulate and take charge of their learning process, it may also contribute to reducing classroom anxiety, by transforming the role of the trainer from assessor to facilitator of students' effective engagement.

On the whole, this book provides a valuable contribution toward furthering research-based signed language interpreter education in America and beyond. As a conference interpreter trainer, a practitioner and a researcher in interpreting pedagogy and course design, I found that the book also offers valuable insights for the research and practice of spoken language interpreting: an area in which we are still far from completing the shift to systematic, research-based teaching.

The studies in this book may provide a double contribution to interpreter education research. The first may lie in their effort to expand the theoretical framework for course design. The second contribution may lie in their methodology. The interpreting education research panorama has been largely dominated by the quantitative research paradigm. Researchers in the field of education have come to realize the inadequacy of this methodology in the investigation of pedagogical phenomena in all their complexity, the identification of crucial patterns and the explanation of the intricate interplay of factors that influence the learning outcome. This realization stimulated the recent increase in mixed-method and qualitative studies. Works like the ones presented in this volume provide practical examples of how to apply abstract principles to answer our research questions and may serve as a precedent for future studies.

Regarding the limitations of the work, more concerted efforts are required to develop a research-validated, comprehensive instructional design framework for interpreter education. A comprehensive theoretical framework on this topic in our field is still missing. Further research is needed to identify new effective practices, systematize the array of available teaching interventions and define precisely the conditions under which these may be effective. Nevertheless, our efforts should be directed to developing a methodology for qualitative interpreting pedagogy research. In this new stage, issues of rigour and legitimacy seem to challenge the field, as we are learning to apply new criteria to judge the quality of research work where the traditional parameters of quantitative research are not applicable. It should be an aim of the field to develop blueprints for study design, analysis and evaluation of qualitative data.

Finally, the very approach to teaching promoted by the editors and authors in this volume may, in itself, be regarded as a contribution of this book, perhaps the one with furthest-reaching implications for interpreter education practice. The examples of action research presented in this book, embedded in the real-life context of teaching and learning, turn the interpreting classroom into a laboratory. They consider the students, their engagement patterns and response to the activities as the primary source of data to test the effectiveness of teaching methods. This way, they urge educators not to take teaching-learning mechanisms for granted, not to leave the result of the teacher-learner interaction to chance. They remind us that each class session is meant to be a meaningful encounter and that it is our responsibility to create adequate conditions for the goals of such interaction to be met.

As a reviewer, I particularly appreciated this approach and believe that all educators could be inspired by this book to adopt a researcher perspective regarding their teaching. Other than comprehensive theoretical frameworks, rigorous study designs and validated course design and teaching methods, this approach seems indispensable to achieve sustained improvement in interpreter education. If we regarded each of our classes as a small-scale experiment and aimed to discover a piece of truth or answer a small research question every time we teach, would not this be a guarantee of life-long improvement? I believe that cultivating this mindset is the key to empowering the next generation of educators to practice innovation rather than merely replicating the unquestioned practices of the previous generation.