

November 2011

Striving for an "A" Grade: A Case Study of Performance Management of Interpreters

Karen Bontempo
Macquarie University, Australia

Bethel Hutchinson
Shenton College Deaf Education Centre, Australia

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



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

Recommended Citation

Bontempo, Karen and Hutchinson, Bethel (2011) "Striving for an "A" Grade: A Case Study of Performance Management of Interpreters," *International Journal of Interpreter Education*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 6. Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ijie/vol3/iss1/6>

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.

Striving for an “A” Grade: A Case Study of Performance Management of Interpreters

Karen Bontempo¹

*Shenton College Deaf Education Centre
and Macquarie University, Australia*

Bethel Hutchinson

Shenton College Deaf Education Centre, Australia

Abstract

Research regarding the efficacy of an interpreted education for deaf students has suggested that the practice is fraught with challenges. This could be because interpreters provide merely the illusion of access in a mainstream setting (Winston, 2004), or it may be because many education systems are simply not interpreter ready (Patrie & Taylor, 2008), among other factors. A primary concern is often the proficiency and skill level of interpreters working in education settings. In this article, the authors report on a best-practices process of diagnostic skills analysis, performance management, and a tailored series of ongoing training opportunities undertaken by a cohort of interpreters based at a secondary school for deaf students in Western Australia. The project that is described, and the performance evaluation principles and training practices adopted, may be easily embraced by other organizations employing interpreters; managers and mentors of interpreters; as well as by individual interpreters themselves.

Keywords: interpreters; education; ongoing training; best practices; diagnostic skills analysis; performance management; professional development

¹ Correspondence to: bontempo@iinet.net.au

Striving for an “A” Grade: A Case Study of Performance Management of Interpreters

1. Introduction

The broader context of skill development and training for interpreters reaches far beyond the scope of entry-level education programs for work in the profession. Ongoing training for interpreters is critical to (a) mitigate the skills gap that exists for many practitioners upon graduation from programs and (b) prevent the fossilization of skills in more experienced practitioners (Bontempo & Napier, 2007). An onus on interpreters to access ongoing training throughout the duration of their career is a stipulated tenet of many ethical codes of conduct and guidelines adopted by interpreter associations and is a condition of maintaining interpreter certification and licensure in several countries around the world. Providing suitable professional development opportunities to practitioners to help them meet these requirements may be the remit of interpreter associations, educational institutions, or the employers of interpreters. In terms of employers, some may be more industrious than others in creating training programs and skill development plans that are based on individually identified skills gaps and a performance management process catering to the needs of interpreters in the workplace. Regardless of employer capacity to do this in an adequate fashion, it remains incumbent on individual interpreters to maintain or advance skills and to participate in ongoing skills assessment, self-evaluation and reflection, and professional learning activities. This appears to be more straightforward for interpreters to comply with when they work for larger employers, some of which provide this type of ongoing performance management and training support to meet the needs of individuals. In the case of signed language educational interpreters in particular, however, this seems to be a rare practice. In this article, we report on one exception to the rule—a best-practices project of diagnostic skills analysis, performance management, and tailored ongoing training opportunities initiated by an employer of Auslan²/English interpreters at a public secondary school in Western Australia. The case study presented here took place within an educational context. However, we believe that the principles and process of performance management that we share here can be applied to interpreters employed by any organization.

2. Background and rationale

Shenton College Deaf Education Centre (SCDEC) is a Western Australian (WA) public school that caters to deaf or hard-of-hearing high school students, typically aged 12–17 years. SCDEC is fully funded by the state government’s Department of Education and has a reputation as a “Centre of Excellence.” The school is situated within one of the top public high schools in the state, Shenton College, with the larger school population totaling more than 1,200 students. The 25 deaf and hard-of-hearing students enrolled at SCDEC are supported by a mix of

² *Auslan* refers to Australian Sign Language.

Bontempo and Hutchinson

full-time and part-time staff, including eight teaching staff and 20 nonteaching staff (e.g., interpreters, note-takers, onsite captioners, and administration staff).

The Department of Education in WA requires that each school link its school plan to the Department's overall aim. The stated aim of the Department is for all students to reach their learning and skills potential and to contribute to society. To enable the Department's aim and the school plan to be implemented, teachers and nonteaching staff are required to participate in professional learning activities that are linked to the school plan. To identify the specific skills gaps and to determine what type of professional learning is required for each staff member to assist them in achieving the school plan, each staff member undergoes a mandatory performance management process, overseen by the school principal. Given the Department's focus on the education of children, the professional learning that is made available at school level across WA is largely geared toward the critical skill development and maintenance needs of teaching staff rather than the training needs of nonteaching staff.

This means that interpreters working in schools are typically unable to access "ready-made" professional learning on site in their workplace, suited specifically to their professional development needs as interpreting practitioners. In recognition of this, in recent years the WA Institute of Deaf Education (WAIDE), a statewide Department of Education service for deaf and hard of hearing students, has provided increasing formal support to individual interpreters working in mainstream school settings throughout WA. Such support in schools from this centralized service has been warmly welcomed by interpreters, particularly those working on a solitary basis in a school, isolated from other interpreting colleagues. Interpreters are employed at the local level by individual schools, not by WAIDE though, so providing the range and extent of desirable support and professional learning opportunities to these interpreters across many schools throughout the state can be challenging. SCDEC however has a significant number of interpreters on staff, indeed considerably more than any other school in WA, forming a critical mass in one school. It was therefore important for SCDEC to provide an effective performance management process on site for this substantial group of employees with specialised skills and professional learning requirements. Despite appreciating this need, there was no internal knowledge source or expertise based within SCDEC to accurately evaluate the performance of the interpreters on staff, identify gaps in skill, and develop professional learning tailored to the needs of the interpreters. Consequently, to ensure that the interpreters were properly supported to play their part in the implementation of the SCDEC school plan, in 2008 the principal of SCDEC, Bethel Hutchinson, sought out the professional expertise of an independent external consultant. Karen Bontempo was the consultant appointed to conduct individual diagnostic skills analyses of the interpreting team and to develop a professional learning program suited to the needs of the individual interpreters on staff at SCDEC.

Educational interpreters in WA are employed under the job title of "Education Assistant—Auslan" by the Department. Although regarded differently from the typical "Education Assistant" assigned to students with learning difficulties or disabilities, proper recognition of the complexity of educational interpreters' specialized work—and their employment status—is still not as it should be. This is particularly apparent outside WA in other parts of Australia. For example, it is not compulsory for interpreters to hold qualifications in interpreting in order to work in a school; therefore, many interpreters in primary and secondary schools in Australia have less than adequate Auslan proficiency for the task required of them and hold no interpreter certification. For a number of reasons outside the scope of this article, there is a much more effective system and structure in place for educational interpreters in WA than for those in other states of Australia (Bontempo & Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Potter & Leigh, 2002), with Potter (2010) noting that nearly 50% of educational interpreters in WA have completed an interpreter education program and/or hold interpreter certification at the paraprofessional level (entry-level interpreting certification in Australia, awarded by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters [NAATI]).

At SCDEC, a pleasing anomaly exists, with 90% of the interpreting team holding interpreter accreditation and the remaining interpreting staff enrolled in an interpreter education program at the time of the project. This places SCDEC in a unique position in WA, let alone in Australia. The process of interpreter evaluation and performance management initiated at SCDEC was, therefore, underpinned from the start by an encouraging organizational culture for interpreters.

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

A formal diagnostic skills analysis of this number of interpreters in a school environment had never taken place before in Australia. Formal school-based interpreter-specific performance evaluation opportunities appear to be more widely available in the United States (e.g., the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment [EIPA] process) and have been applied to community interpreters in WA at the initiative of the WA Deaf Society (Bontempo, Goswell, Leneham, & Tsapazi, 2007), but an undertaking of this nature and scale in an educational environment in Australia was a first to our knowledge. Given the link between interpreter competence and outcomes for deaf students (Schick, Williams, & Bolster, 1999; Winston, 2004), it was anticipated that taking a proactive, performance-oriented approach toward developing interpreter skills on the job should have positive effects in the classroom for deaf children and their peers as well as healthy outcomes for practitioners, administrators, teachers, and parents.

3. Structure and process

Once the consultant was appointed, it was vital that we obtain “buy-in” from the interpreters on staff so they would appreciate that the process posed no threat—only the potential for gains. The school principal sent a notice to interpreters in advance of the onsite visit by the consultant to clarify the structure and process of the performance management project. Assurances were made regarding the parameters of the project: The process was simply a way of trying to grow the skills of individual interpreters. As part of this program, the interpreters would engage in a one-on-one diagnostic skills evaluation, analysis and discussion process; then, they would participate in a tailored program of learning events over a period of time. Interpreters were advised that employment contracts were not at risk as a result of the process and that this was intended to be a supportive performance improvement exercise. Interpreters were given the consultants’ contact details and were provided with the performance evaluation rubric in advance. Participants were also advised that they were welcome to contribute to the rubric if they felt that any aspects were missing or if they felt that any section was inappropriate to include.

Participants completed a competency self-evaluation form 2 weeks in advance of the consultant’s onsite visit. The purpose of this form was to assist interpreters in focusing on the range of competencies central to their role and to encourage self-analysis of their skills in advance of the monitoring period—a helpful exercise in terms of reflective practice. The form also directed the consultants’ attention toward aspects of performance that the individual interpreter identified as a concern. Such identification included the appreciation that areas of priority may be debated—for example, the area that an individual may identify as a weakness may not be the most critical concern in regard to their performance; similarly, some interpreters may be unconsciously competent and, therefore, unable to see where they are doing particularly well.

The preliminary paperwork also served as a reality check whereby the consultant could compare self-evaluation of competency and reported skills gaps with actual performance as measured by the consultant on site by showing the interpreter any variance between the forms. The self-evaluation forms were returned to individuals at debriefing sessions.

The consultant visited the school on stipulated days/times of the week over a 2-week period in the middle of the school year in order to observe and evaluate the work performance of individual interpreters in classrooms—that is, observing them interpreting in their everyday work setting. Each interpreter was observed for one class period (lasting up to 60 minutes, depending on whether the interpreter was working in the senior school or the middle school), and the session was filmed. The evaluation did not focus on the first 10 minutes of performance during the observation period, to allow the interpreter time to warm up and to allow time for any initial performance anxiety to subside. The consultant completed detailed notes and comments for each individual on a specially designed rubric during the observation period (see Appendix). The rubric provided the categories for the diagnostic skills analysis and was informed by the findings of Bontempo and Napier (2007), which highlighted a common range of skills gaps in interpreters. Observational data based on performance was collected in written form, but in addition, footage of each individual was captured to (a) provide evidence for personal evaluation and debriefing later and (b) provide clear examples of work performance when reviewed in conjunction with the

Bontempo and Hutchinson

rubric. The diagnostic skills analysis gave an indication of current levels of occupational performance and identified specific skills areas upon which the interpreter could improve. Strategies and resources for self-development were outlined to individual interpreters in a debriefing session held post observation.

The initial process in 2008 included 16 educational interpreters at SCDEC. The favorable feedback received by the principal, and the positive outcomes arising from the process in 2008, led to further external review of the educational interpreters during the following year. In 2009, nine interpreters participated in the performance management process. The format was altered based on the 2008 experience. The 2009 project included the following two additions: (a) interpreters were not able to choose the class in which they were observed (in 2008 they were given a choice) and (b) filmed “modeling” took place during a number of subjects (including Year 8 science, Year 11 English, Year 10 home economics, a Year 11 Deaf Center support class, and a senior school assembly), whereby the consultant worked as the interpreter, thus allowing the regular interpreter of that class to observe the consultant and then discuss the interpreted session afterwards with the consultant. This modeling took place after the initial observation and debriefing session with the individual interpreters concerned. Modeling offered the opportunity for interpreters to witness how specific linguistic features and effective coping strategies could be integrated into interpretations in the classroom, rather than an exclusively theoretical discussion with the interpreter about options they could implement in the future.

Annual meetings were held with SCDEC teachers in 2008 and 2009 to apprise them of the performance management process. The purpose of these meetings was to gain their support and to increase teachers’ awareness of the interpreters’ work.

4. Data collection and analysis

As noted, interpreters were directly observed and evaluated by the consultant from “within the space” in order to capture performance in their authentic work environment. As the consultant was not an employee of SCDEC at that time, this was particularly useful in allowing the consultant to understand the bigger picture regarding operations at the school level, to appreciate classroom dynamics, and to get a better sense of the deaf students with whom the interpreters were working. Relevant permissions were obtained to film the interpreters in classrooms, and discussions were held with mainstream teachers in advance to explain the purpose of the filming.

The DVD footage of each interpreter’s work was collected and kept by the principal of SCDEC as part of performance management records compliance, with copies made for the individual interpreter. It was noted to the principal that all data collected and feedback documented for the interpreters needed be treated with some caution in regard to the following considerations:

- The performance measures were taken in a certain place, on a certain date, and at a certain time. They were, therefore, frozen-in-time “snapshots” of performance and could not be regarded as comprehensive indicators of performance across other contexts, or with a different audience or altered subject matter.
- Due to the aforementioned reason, it was also impossible to compare the performance of one interpreter with that of another interpreter. Unless two interpreters were undertaking the task of interpreting the same event (which was the case with only two interpreters out of all the interpreted events observed over the 2 years—and, even then, they interpreted different parts of an interpreted event, not the same parts, so again, it was difficult to “compare”), it should be understood that job events cannot be fairly compared with one another because of the wide variety from classroom to classroom: different students, different subject matter, different day, different time, different teacher, different classroom environment, different background knowledge, and so forth.
- It was noted that not all the interpreters were able to work in their preferred classroom environment for the observation experience, particularly in 2009. To be observed and evaluated in a less comforting environment may have had a negative impact on interpreter performance. Conversely, though, it was noted that practitioners who performed at only a “just adequate” level of performance in a nominated class of their preference should be monitored to ensure that they are not placed in classes, or with children, that are beyond their skill levels.

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

- Typically, and due to the context, the consultant was largely able to view only monologic instructional discourse interpreted from English into Auslan. The performance evaluation records and feedback to interpreters was, therefore, primarily reflective of skill and competence in one language direction only.

Data collection was hampered, to an extent, by classroom context, content, and teacher delivery style. Some classes contained more teacher-centered instructional discourse than others, whereas other classes were more interactive, particularly if the lesson was more practical in nature or if a discussion-based activity was taking place. Some classes contained few opportunities for data collection due to the independent-study nature of that particular lesson. In the latter instances, if the interpreter was barely working at all, the observation session was rescheduled.

Debriefing was scheduled for immediately after the interpreted class to facilitate the most effective recollection of decision-making processes; this allowed interpreters to reflect on these processes and discuss them while also analyzing their interpretations, with the consultant's guidance. Overall strengths and weaknesses were identified individually in the one-on-one debriefing sessions with interpreters; recommendations for improvement were made, and suggestions for change were offered to each interpreter. These sessions were typically 1 hour long. The footage could be viewed during the session, and the completed performance evaluation rubric was made available to each interpreter. The interpreters' self-evaluation of their skills (submitted to the consultant 2 weeks prior) was also brought up and discussed in the debriefing session in order to address any areas of concern flagged by interpreters themselves and, where applicable, to apply these concerns to the recently observed interpreted class.

During the debriefing sessions in 2008 and 2009, interpreters were asked several specific questions by the consultant before walking through the details recorded on the rubric and analyzing the footage with the interpreter. These preliminary questions included some or all of the following: How do you feel? What were you happy with? What do you feel worked? What could you do differently next time, and why? Do you think the teachers' aims for the lesson were conveyed effectively via your interpretation? Did your interpretation allow the student to participate in the lesson? The question presented at the end of the debriefing session was: How do you feel about the evaluation process you have just been through? The consultant found the interpreters to be very forthright in their responses and generally conscious of areas of both competence and incompetence in their performance.

5. Training opportunities and professional development action plans

We designed and delivered professional learning sessions arising from the outcomes of the self-evaluations, the observations of the consultant, and the resulting discussions in the debriefing sessions. Training days targeted at the needs of the educational interpreters were scheduled for the student-free days available at the start of each quarterly term in the school year. The professional learning days incorporated issues regarding performance that were observed as being global in nature—that is, skills deficits or concerns noted in most of the interpreters, or activities that could enhance the skills development of all participants. These global issues are described in more detail in the next section.

During the professional learning sessions, where possible and appropriate, select footage of individual interpreters demonstrating good practices was screened to the group (with the permission of the interpreter). In addition, sample footage of some of the modeled interpreting in classrooms by the consultant was viewed; we showed this footage to exemplify features and practices that could be adopted by other interpreters or to illustrate specific concepts under discussion in the professional learning session.

In addition, the participants wrote their own professional development plans during the first professional learning day and revisited these plans at later sessions. When writing the plans, participants bore in mind the overall goals of SCDEC and targets for the Department of Education and were informed by (a) the self-competence evaluation conducted by the interpreter prior to the performance evaluation; (b) the observation experience, footage, and completed rubric written by the consultant; and (c) the debriefing discussion that took place post observation. Goals for each individual were developed and documented. Each interpreter submitted this

Bontempo and Hutchinson

individual plan to the principal in 2008, and goals were evaluated, revised, and reported on in 2009 after the second iteration of the performance management process, with new plans written for either skills maintenance or further development in 2010.

We encouraged interpreters to focus on their specific goals when asking for future feedback on their work from mentors (either formal or informal) and from team interpreters as well as from other peers and consumers, where applicable. The opportunity for interpreters to self-determine their own professional development plan as part of the performance management process was critical. They identified their own particular goals that they felt were achievable and then developed strategies and a time frame for attending to these goals. We encouraged interpreters to seek out mentors (from within the SCDEC interpreting team, the Deaf community, or the wider interpreting community) as part of their ongoing skills development. In addition, we strongly recommended that they take up membership of the local interpreting association, the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA), attend Deaf community events, and participate in external training and professional development opportunities for signed and/or spoken language interpreters in the local area.

6. Performance and progress

Overall, based on the data collected during the stipulated periods, interpreters employed at SCDEC generally met or exceeded performance expectations in the observed sessions. It was evident that a handful of interpreters on staff had more experience and skills to draw on than did some other interpreters on staff, and these interpreters typically delivered stronger performances during the evaluation period. The few interpreters on staff who did not yet hold NAATI accreditation—as well as those who could be described as “novice” practitioners holding recently awarded NAATI accreditation—demonstrated more significant skills gaps, as might be expected, and as supported by research in the field (Bontempo & Napier, 2007, 2009).

6.1. Skills gaps

The following skills gaps were observed at times in the various interpretations:

- Lack of discourse markers.
- Issues with discourse cohesion.
- Insufficient use of depicting signs, constructed dialogue, and constructed action.
- Confusion of space/placement properties.
- Illocutionary force not always conveyed.
- Prosodic features of Auslan not fully utilized—loss of speaker style and affect.
- Inappropriate positioning of interpreter in the classroom.
- Incidental communication in the environment not transmitted.
- Translation style leaning toward a dominant literal style with too much intrusion of English source text features when classroom context really lent itself to a more dynamic, or free, translation style.
- Superficial processing of information—operating at sentential level rather than discourse level.
- Difficulties, at times, in meeting the linguistic needs of students with minimal language.

Many of the aforementioned topics formed the basis of a series of training days conducted with interpreters and were the focus of professional development goals for individuals. Improvements were seen over time regarding some of these issues, with fewer of these skills gaps appearing in the later performance evaluations. Interpreters who delivered better interpretations and had more sophisticated coping strategies tended to be NAATI-accredited interpreters with several years of experience. A number of these interpreters, although not all

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

of them, had not only educational interpreting experience but also community interpreting experience or had extensive experience interpreting for native signers—which, they noted during debriefing sessions, had scaffolded their skill sets for work with a range of deaf children in education settings.

6.2. *Positive aspects*

Positive aspects of interpreter performance and manner that were noteworthy and that appeared global in nature included the following:

- Perceptive insight into skills gaps—self-evaluations were honest and largely accurate when compared to the observed data.
- Practitioners were extremely flexible and accommodating to requests and changes.
- Appropriate demeanor and interaction in the classroom and with stakeholders was observed.
- Interpreters generally represented the jargon associated with the subject area well.
- Strong evidence of preparation and background knowledge.
- Good boundary management.

Generally, the participants demonstrated a willingness to be challenged, and the vast majority of practitioners really embraced the opportunity to be evaluated and to receive feedback on their performance. Even those who were uncertain at the start appeared positive at the end of the project and saw tangible benefits in the process.

6.3. *Concerns identified by interpreters*

Many of the interpreters raised and shared the following concerns in relation to their work:

- Time constraints—it is difficult to “unpack” concepts in the limited time available in mainstream classes due to the pace and density of most lessons.
- Mainstream teachers often lack awareness of the needs of deaf students. This was felt to be an issue particularly in relation to compromised language proficiency and fund-of-knowledge deficits faced by some of the SCDEC students.
- The role of the interpreter is not well understood by staff and students. In addition, interpreters felt that there was little understanding and recognition among the teaching staff regarding the complexity of the interpreters’ work.
- At the time of performance evaluations in 2008 and 2009, with the exception of a part-time Auslan teacher, SCDEC had no other deaf staff members on site to support students and interpreters. This resulted in a project recommendation to appoint full-time deaf staff members to valued roles in the classroom. A full-time deaf mentor was appointed in 2010, and she quickly proved to be a significant asset to SCDEC. In addition, the part-time Auslan teacher’s hours were increased, and his role changed so that he became a more integral part of the teaching team.
- Many of the deaf students lack confidence in asserting their needs (to teachers and to interpreters).
- Little training is available for interpreters in regard to (a) interpreting for students who have dysfluent language and (b) the linguistic development (both typical and atypical) of deaf children.
- Interpreters felt that they were not working in an “interpreter-ready” system (Patrie & Taylor, 2008). They all reported that certain common issues have a significant impact on their work—issues regarding role, employment status, pay, teacher–interpreter relationships, school community awareness, and student’s “linguistic readiness” to work with interpreters were all raised.
- There was perceived encouragement of “learned helplessness” among deaf students, and perceived low teacher expectations of deaf students, both of which frustrated the interpreters.
- Sometimes, there was visual confusion in the classroom, with teachers learning Auslan occasionally trying to sign at the same time as the interpreter. Interpreters appreciated that this was balanced with the need for teachers to interact directly and to establish relationships with deaf students; however, they did

Bontempo and Hutchinson

feel that this created some tension for them in terms of doing their work effectively when attempts to sign persisted during lessons, particularly if the signs used were incorrect.

6.4. Progress

The original performance management innovations occurred in 2008 and 2009. In 2010, the consultant started teaching at SCDEC and was no longer able to conduct the performance evaluations of interpreting staff as an independent external party. Therefore, with the intention of interpreters taking increased ownership over their professional growth and development, SCDEC purchased four flip cameras and mini-tripods to enable the interpreters to film themselves and then reflect on their own work. We anticipated that the interpreters would have the skills and knowledge to be able to do this in a meaningful fashion themselves in 2010, having been through a guided process previously. In addition to the previous learning experiences with the consultant, interpreters were sponsored to participate in an external professional development session in 2010 with Jemina Napier, a highly esteemed Australian educator, researcher, and interpreting practitioner. The workshop focus was on reflective evaluation and analysis of one's own interpreting work. Interpreters filmed samples of their work during 2010. Time was set aside during the timetable and on professional learning days where the interpreters paired up with one another, reflected on their performance, and critiqued their skills within the successful evaluation framework established in 2008 and 2009.

Feedback from the interpreters on the learning gained using the flip cameras in 2010 was extremely positive. Indications of how beneficial the self-evaluation approach was in 2010 prompted the decision to continue with self-reflective practice in 2011, with some further adaptations to enhance the approach. In 2011, each interpreter gathered at least two samples of interpretations from each term. These samples were from two different classes; however, in each term, the same two classes (same teacher, same group of students, etc.) were filmed to obtain a longitudinal sample of work over the year. Interpreters analyzed his or her own performance and nominated a colleague to conduct a critical peer review of the footage. At the end of each term, time was given for the interpreters to view the footage and analyze the work samples. The expectation is that by the end of 2011, the samples will show evidence of interpreter improvement in areas of concern identified in the first sample. An assumption is that samples can be more fairly compared, considering that controls are in place for class environment, teacher, and student over the year. Time was also allocated in 2011 for deaf mentors on staff to review performance footage and to provide feedback to the interpreters for skill enhancement purposes.

In January 2011, interpreters attended the "Supporting Deaf People Online Conference", a virtual conference with themes specific to Deaf education and educational interpreting. SCDEC sponsored their attendance and encouraged staff to access a broad range of other external professional learning experiences in 2011. In March 2011, Marty Taylor, of Canada, an interpreter educator and scholar of international repute with a particular interest and publication record in the field of educational interpreting, was brought into the school by the principal of SCDEC to conduct training with the interpreters.

In regard to 2012 and beyond, some thought has been given to a hybrid internal/external evaluation, including increasing the role of the deaf mentors in formally supporting interpreter skill advancement. Further thoughts include the possibility of allowing for a wider feedback loop and receiving input from teachers and students as well as from a peer or an external consultant in the evaluation process. It is intuitive that an enhanced understanding of language acquisition, teaching and learning principles, adolescent development, and the linguistics of both Auslan and English could assist interpreters in their work with deaf students. Professional learning addressing some of these issues is planned for SCDEC interpreters in 2012. The agenda, as we move forward, also includes implementing a more formalized mentoring program and increasing opportunities for team interpreting. In addition, we intend to safely extend the skills of interpreters by encouraging them to work outside their comfort zone, providing support and training as needed. Finally, the intention in 2012 is to tackle some of the broader issues identified by interpreters in an effort to make the school system more 'interpreter-ready'.

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

7. Recommendations, resources, and project evaluation

Detailed consultant reports provided to the principal in 2008 and 2009 noted overall levels of performance and included evaluations of interpreted events for each interpreter as well as recommendations for future development of interpreters' skills. The following list details some of the general recommendations in the reports:

- Allow onsite access to DVDs, books, journal articles, reference lists, and so forth, to encourage professional learning during down time in the timetable or when students are absent.
- Increase SCDEC and interpreter networks within the Deaf community.
- Employ more deaf staff in key roles.
- Interpreters to seek out mentors (formal or informal, internal or external).
- Interpreters to network with interpreting peers external to SCDEC.
- Attend suitable external workshops and training, not just the internal professional learning provided by SCDEC.
- Read current literature regarding educational interpreting.
- Complete an interpreter education program (where applicable).
- Become a member of ASLIA.
- Participate in ongoing self-evaluation and monitoring by peers.
- Prepare/liaise more directly with teachers.

Interpreters were provided with extensive resources as an outcome of the consultant's report. SCDEC took the following actions in response to the recommendations listed in this report:

- Compiled a comprehensive list of skill advancement suggestions and activities to work through.
- Provided interpreters with a detailed list of relevant reference material and reading suggestions (developed by Jemina Napier and Karen Bontempo for ASLIA).
- Purchased a range of DVD practice material, textbooks and journals.
- Arranged copies of journal articles, book chapters, and websites to review during down time or to read during class times in which students were mainly doing independent study or taking an examination.
- Created an "interpreters resource room." Interpreters were given a dedicated separate learning space including bookshelves, computers, TV/DVD equipment, chairs, desks, etc. This was designated a place to prepare, reflect, review, and discuss work with colleagues. This was in addition to the existing interpreters' office located in the adjoining room, which is a more social, open space where timetables are kept and team meetings are held.

Measures that we used to evaluate the success of the project indicated extremely positive results; these measures included the following:

- Individual face-to-face feedback on the process.
- Evaluation forms for all professional learning sessions.
- Copies of the professional learning plans developed (and respective timelines and goals met).
- Principal and administrator evaluation of efficacy of the consultant's work.
- An evaluation form on which interpreters could rate and provide feedback on the overall performance management process; the consultant's conduct and interactions with interpreters.

From 2010 forward, there was a great deal more ownership over the performance management process by the interpreters, as they were increasingly empowered to be reflective and reflexive practitioners. Opportunities to give feedback in various ways to management were created through the project. Interpreters were able to clearly stipulate their training needs as practitioners and also to identify what proved helpful and effective for them in the performance management process. In these ways, SCDEC is working toward best practices in the performance management of interpreters.

8. Conclusion

To enable effective learning in a student, one looks for best practices surrounding the teaching and learning experience. In this instance, part of that equation is ensuring that (a) the interpreter's work meets an appropriate standard and (b) that the value of this work is properly recognized and reinforced within the organizational system. Although the case study presented herein describes the efforts of one school in trying to address issues of performance quality and ongoing training of a cohort of interpreters, the latter notion of working within a system that properly acknowledges and supports the complex work of interpreters is a much bigger issue—and the larger system is much more difficult to revolutionize from the ground up.

To assist in the understanding and recognition of interpreters and to aid in creating an “interpreter-ready” environment, there needs to be a more effective job description and employment category that is specific to educational interpreters in Australia. There also needs to be salary differentiation, recognizing the qualifications and experience of those in the role. This, in turn, would offer incentives for educational interpreters to complete interpreter education programs, participate in ongoing professional learning and training, gain accreditation, and stay working in schools as interpreters, highly valued for the multifaceted, challenging work that they do. Patrie and Taylor's readiness of the wider school community is flagged by Patrie and Taylor (2008) as a key factor in creating an interpreter-ready environment. Not only must administrators, parents, teachers, and interpreters understand one another's roles, but the students—deaf and hearing—must also understand the interpreter's role and how to work with the interpreter for the best outcome. These interpreter-readiness issues are part of the bigger picture and remain as areas needing improvement at SCDEC, within the larger school community, and within the broader education system in Australia.

Ultimately, staff are the most valuable resource of an organization. Every employee affects productivity in the workplace and has an impact on the organizational culture. SCDEC management values interpreting staff and want to help continually improve interpreters' skills, believing that improved performance by practitioners should support better outcomes for deaf students. This performance management project sent a clear message to staff that SCDEC considers interpreters worth the investment, and SCDEC recognizes that it is indeed fortunate to employ so many interpreters with appropriate credentials and good interpreting skills.

However, SCDEC still has much to learn and improve upon in regard to various aspects of an interpreter-mediated education experience for deaf students. Given the work described in this article, it seems that SCDEC might score a “B” grade for effort and results in regard to developing a meaningful performance management process and in offering skill advancement opportunities to educational interpreters. However, until the bigger and broader issue of creating an interpreter-ready system in education settings can truly be addressed and rectified, SCDEC will need to keep striving toward achieving that elusive “A” grade.

9. Acknowledgments

We acknowledge SCDEC interpreters for their receptiveness to the performance management process, in its various iterations, from 2008 to the present. The interpreters have been fully engaged and keen to understand their performance better—in terms of skill gaps that may exist and the ways in which they work effectively. Without the support of the interpreters—and their willingness to invest in the process—this project would not have been so successful. The flexibility of Shenton College staff is noted with sincere thanks, and we particularly appreciate the teachers and students who accommodated our presence in classrooms during observations. Finally, we are very grateful to the entire SCDEC team for their support regarding the project and this article.

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

10. References

- Bontempo, K., Goswell, D., Leneham, M., & Tsapazi, R. (2007, September). *Diagnostic skills analysis: Intensive interpreter PD*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the ASLIA National Interpreter Trainers' Workshop, Sydney, Australia.
- Bontempo, K., & Levitzke-Gray, P. (2009). Interpreting Down Under: Signed language interpreter education and training in Australia. In J. Napier (Ed.), *International perspectives on signed language interpreter education* (pp. 149–170). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Bontempo, K., & Napier, J. (2007). Mind the gap! A skills analysis of sign language interpreters. *The Sign Language Translator and Interpreter, 1*, 275–299.
- Bontempo, K., & Napier, J. (2009). Getting it right from the start: Program admission testing of signed language interpreters. In C. Angelelli & H. E. Jacobson (Eds.), *Testing and assessment in translation and interpreting* (pp. 247–295). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Patrie, C., & Taylor, M. (2008). *Outcomes for graduates of baccalaureate interpreter preparation programs specializing in interpreting in K–12th grade settings*. Retrieved from <https://ritdml.rit.edu/bitstream/handle/1850/5383/CPatrieProject01-2008.pdf?sequence=7>
- Potter, L. (2010, July). *Managing educational interpreters: New roles for teachers of the deaf in 21st century inclusive education*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf, Vancouver, Canada.
- Potter, L., & Leigh, K. (2002) An investigation into issues surrounding the efficacy and use of educational interpreters for deaf students in the mainstream setting. *Australian Journal of Education of the Deaf, 8*, 47–60.
- Schick, B., Williams, K., & Bolster, L. (1999). Skill levels of educational interpreters in public schools. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, 4*, 144–155.
- Winston, E. A. (Ed.). (2004). *Educational interpreting: How it can succeed*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Appendix: Educational Interpreter Performance Evaluation Rubric

Interpreter's Name: _____ Date: _____ Class setting/context: _____

Elements to Consider	Comments
1. Interpreting Aspect	
1.1 Equivalence of message (appropriate for context? Contains textual integrity and fidelity? Info exchange is successful, overall?)	
1.2 Avoids distracting mannerisms that impact on performance (whispering, vocalizations, upper body shifts, inappropriate eye gaze, etc.)	
1.3 Uses appropriate time lag to allow concepts to be conveyed accurately	
1.4 Miscues (omissions, additions, substitutions, intrusions, anomalies)—any strategic?	
TRANSMISSION ACCURACY: 1 2 3 4 5 5 = <i>VERY ACCURATE</i>	
2. Language Aspect	

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

2.1 Comprehends source message (English vocabulary, denotative/connotative meaning, Auslan signs/fingerspelling/numbers)	
2.2 Paralinguistic elements (facial expression, pace, size of signing space, mouth movements, etc.; English prosody/inflection)	
2.3 Articulation (clear production of signs, fingerspelling, numbers, etc., in Auslan. Clear production in English at correct volume.)	
2.4 Uses correct grammar and structure in target message (complete thoughts in English and Auslan; use of space, classifiers, tenses, indexing, etc., in Auslan)	
2.5 Fluency (“smoothness,” control and flow of language; comprehensibility/ease of viewing or listening to target text—care taken not to overly smooth out rough source text)	
2.6 Vocabulary and register (using correct signs, right style of language, appropriate vocabulary, idioms, strategies for unknown/key vocab., etc.)	
OVERALL LANGUAGE SKILLS: 1 2 3 4 5	5 = EXCELLENT
3. Interaction/Role Aspects	

Bontempo and Hutchinson

3.1 Roles specific to education (classroom context adjustments; checking student comprehension; purpose and intent of lesson made clear?)	
3.2 Managing overlap, turn-taking (and indicates speakers), questions, interruptions, clarifications, and introductions	
3.3 Handling ethical dilemmas and demonstrating ethical behavior (e.g., apparent preparation for lesson took place)	
3.4 Social/cultural/professional sensitivity (use of appropriate strategies to gain attention; facilitation of social interactions with peers; interpreter interaction with student/s and teacher/s)	
MANAGING INTERACTION/ROLE: 1 2 3 4 5	
5 = EXCELLENT	
4. Professional Conduct	
4.1 Environmental management (to extent possible), appropriate positioning, accessibility of class/content in general	

A case study in performance management of educational interpreters

4.2 Appearance/presentation, demeanor, punctuality, posture, etc.	
4.3 Response to errors/overall confidence	
4.4 General attitude, conduct, and body language	
OVERALL PROFESSIONALISM: 1 2 3 4 5	
5 = EXCELLENT	
5. General Comments	