Teaching Goals of Interpreter Educators

Stephen Fitzmaurice
Clemson University, sfitzma@clemson.edu

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Steve Fitzmaurice[1]

Clemson University

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] *Correspondence to:* *sfitzma@clemson.edu*

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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; Pöchhacker, 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 pracitioners" (p. 219) is vital. What is not clear from this report is whether interpreter educators see higher order thinking skills as a teaching goal.

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

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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 effectivness 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 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

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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 "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 intepreter 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 smiliarities of interpreter educators and English educators.
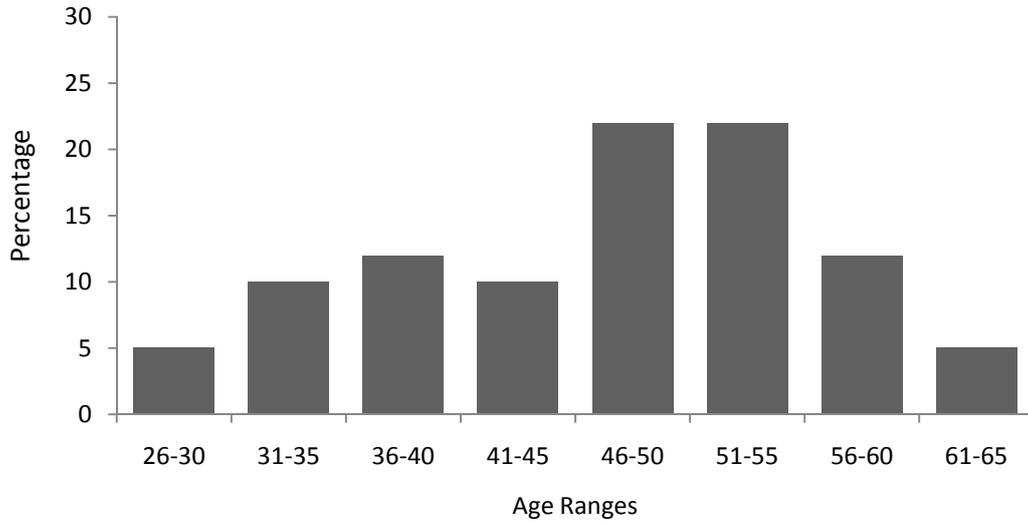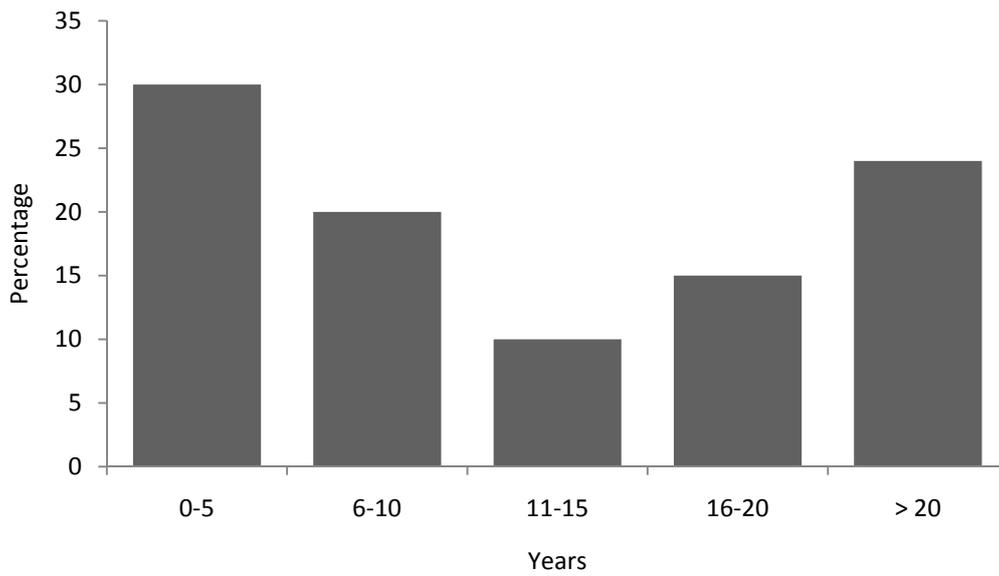
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Figure 1: Respondent age ranges

Figure 2: Years teaching in field

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Table 1. Three Top-priority Teaching Goals by Discipline (Including Interpreter Educators)

Goal #	Teaching Goal	Percent rating goal as being essential									
		Int. ed.	Arts	Hum.	Eng.	Basic skills	Soc. sci.	Bus.	Med.	Sci.	Math
3	Problem solving	71						57			84
51	Think for self	68	66	59	75	65	50				
2	Analytic skills	67			66						73
1	Apply principles					59	57	69	73	61	
17	Math skills										84
18	Terms and facts							61		60	
52	Wise decisions								70		
45	Self-esteem					63					
44	Responsible for self								68		
21	Value of subject			56			52				
19	Concepts and theories									71	
7	Creativity		69								
15	Writing skills				84						
31	Aesthetic appreciation		78								
27	Openness to ideas			56							

Note: Data from columns 4-12 are from Angelo & Cross' Table 10.2 (1993, p. 368).

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3.2.   Teaching goals of full-time vs. adjunct faculty

A comparison of full-time and adjunct interpreter educators indicates similar responses in terms of teaching goal clusters (Table 2). The most notable finding is that higher order thinking skills are very important to both groups. Overall, the two groups seem to agree on what clusters are important in their teaching. The only deviation from this similarity is that adjunct interpreter educators' responses indicated that the personal development cluster was more important than did the responses of full-time interpreter educators. A chi-square analysis indicates, however, that these subtle variations are not statistically significant. In short, there are no significant differences between the teaching goal clusters of interpreter educators working in a full-time or adjunct capacity.

Table 2. Percentage of Faculty Rating Each Teaching Goal Cluster as Being Essential

Teaching goal cluster	Full-time faculty	Adjunct faculty
Higher order thinking	48	55
Basic skills	26	19
Discipline specific knowledge	31	34
Liberal arts	27	25
Work and career preparation	34	33
Personal development	35	49

In order to examine differences within each discrete goal statement, each goal cluster was expanded to reveal the top three specific teaching goal statements for both full-time and part-time interpreter educators. Although the the discrete ratings for teaching goal statements within each cluster do differ slightly (Table 3), a chi-square analysis found no statistical differences. In general, the employment status of interpreter educators also does not significantly alter specific teaching goals.

Table 3. Mean Rated of Top Three Priority Teaching Goals by Employment Status

Goal cluster	Goal #	Goal description	Employment status	
			Full-time faculty	Adjunct faculty
Higher order thinking skills	1	Apply principles	4.43	
	2	Analytic skills	4.50	
	3	Problem-solving		4.59
	6	Think holistically		4.82
Discipline specific knowledge	19	Concepts & theories	4.43	
Personal development	51	Think for self		4.85

3.3.   Teaching goals of two-year vs. four-year educators

Inspection of Table 4 suggests no differences in the teaching goal clusters of interpreter educators at two-year and four-year colleges. Chi-square analyses confirms these findings. Clearly, developing higher order thinking skills is an essential teaching goal for educators in both two-year and four-year interpreter programs. Both groups rated higher order thinking skills over other goal clusters.

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Table 4.   Percentage of Faculty Rating Each Teaching Goal Cluster as Being Essential

Teaching goal cluster	Four-year colleges	Two-year colleges
Higher order thinking	54	47
Basic skills	20	26
Discipline specific knowledge	35	29
Liberal arts	25	27
Work and career prep	34	33
Personal development	37	43

In order to examine differences within each discrete goal statement, each goal cluster was expanded to reveal the top three specific teaching goal statements for interpreter educators in two-year and four-year programs. Although the development of higher order thinking skills is a top teaching goal for interpreter educators at both two-year and four-year institutions, the discrete ratings for teaching goal statements within each cluster do differ slightly. Table 5 reports these findings.

Table 5. Mean Rated Top Three Priority Teaching Goals by Institution Type

			Institution type	
Goal cluster	Goal #	Goal description	Two-year colleges	Four-year colleges
Higher order thinking skills	1	Apply principles	4.47	
	2	Analytic skills	4.42	4.59
	3	Problem-solving	4.56	
	5	Synthesize info		4.45
	6	Think holistically	4.42	
Personal development	51	Think for self		4.48

In order of frequency, interpreter educators at two-year programs aim to develop (a) problem solving skills, (b) the ability to apply principles, (c) analytic skills, and (d) the ability to think holistically. All of these goals fall within the higher order thinking goal cluster. However, this is not true for educators at four-year colleges. Their top three teaching goal statements rated as being most essential fell within two goal clusters: higher order thinking and personal development.

In other words, these data suggest interpreter educators at two-year colleges aim to focus on developing higher order thinking skills exclusively, yet interpreter educators at four-year colleges aim to divide their teaching goals between higher order thinking skills and personal development. However, chi-square analyses indicate that these subtle differences are not statistically significant.

4.   Limitations

It is worth noting that these findings might be limited by the demographics of our sample. The NCIEC (2008) estimates that there are 367 full-time interpreter education faculty and 554 adjunct ASL and interpreter educator faculty in the United States. These numbers suggest a full-time to adjunct educator ratio of 1:2. The full-time to adjunct educator response ratio for the current study was 2:1. The NCIEC also reports 71 two-year interpreter programs and 20 four-year interpreter programs, a ratio of 4:1. The

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ratio of the number of two-year faculty to four-year faculty in our sample was 1:2. Thus, we must be cautious in our conclusions, given the differences in these demographic variables between our sample and the interpreting educator population.

Furthermore, the educational background of our respondents is unknown. Although employment in an academic institution typically requires a minimum academic qualification, the areas and duration of study of each respondent is unreported. It may be the case that important differences in teaching goals could be traced to educational backgrounds.

5. Discussion

The reported data concerning the teaching goals of signed language interpreter educators in the US indicates that interpreter education is not similar to any of the nine disciplines identified by Angelo and Cross (1993). The teaching goals judged most important by interpreter educators were (a) problem solving, (b) thinking for self, and (c) analytic skills. This set of teaching goals has some degree of commonality with English, but the teaching goals for English do not include problem solving, which is the most important goal for interpreter educators. It seems most appropriate, in terms of the teaching goals within the field, to consider interpreter education as a distinct entity from the other disciplines studied by Angelo and Cross.

Cross (2005) reports that across all disciplines, 28 percent of teachers consider higher order thinking skills as being essential. The contrast with interpreter educators is substantial—50% of the faculty in our sample rated higher order thinking skills as being essential. Our data support the conclusion that interpreter education constitutes a distinct, independent academic discipline, even though it has yet to formulate a strong footing (Baker-Shenk, 1990; Pöchhacker, 2004).

Our analyses failed to find any differences in the teaching goals of full-time and adjunct faculty, and in faculty at four-year institutions and two-year institutions. These data are in line with studies reported by Angelo and Cross (1993) and Schwarz (1996), who note no differences in the teaching goals of these populations. In other words, there is a strong similarity in teaching goals among interpreter educators at two-year and four-year institutions and educators employed in a full-time or adjunct capacity. We do note however, that the demographics of our sample are quite different from the population of interpreter educators reported by the NCEIC (2008).

The goal cluster that was judged to be most important by all of the interpreter educators in our sample was higher order thinking. There was an overwhelming consensus of the importance of this cluster. These findings echo those of Winston (2005), who found that interpreter educators "valued activities that lead students toward constructing their own knowledge through critical thinking, decision making, and self-assessment" (p. 220). These three specific attributes or skills all fall within the larger context of higher order thinking skills.

The initial impetus for the creation of the TGI was to provide data to educators regarding their teaching goals in an effort to design meaningful assessments of learning (Angelo & Cross, 1993). The next steps for interpreter education then would be to:

Examine the design and effectiveness of higher order thinking assessment instruments currently employed by interpreter educators

Employ qualitative data collection methods to develop a broader understanding of how higher order thinking skills are fostered among various interpreter programs and student populations

Examine how interpreter educators operationalize higher order thinking teaching goals into learning activities and outcomes

Facilitate the creation of common exit standards and, perhaps, more effectively connect interpreter programs to national certification exams criterion

Winston (2005) wrote:

> What needs to be made explicit is the understanding that critical thinking, decision making, and self-assessment underlie competency in all areas of competent interpreting. Content, specific texts, and settings are the areas where these abilities need to be applied. Educators

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need to understand how to develop these skills and processes in interpreting students. (p. 229)

Of Angelo and Cross' (1993) six teaching goal clusters, higher order thinking might very well be the most difficult cluster to assess. The next steps might indicate that, whereas interpreter educators consider higher order thinking skills to be essential, there is little done in the classroom with regards to the instruction or the assessment of these skills. Ludwig (2000) reports "often, faculty hold higher-order thinking as a goal, but it is not clear that their instructional practice goes as far as it might to help students develop their higher-order thinking" (Information Technology section, p. A44).

6. Conclusion

In terms of the teaching goals of respondents, these data suggest that signed language interpreter education distinguishes itself from the nine other disciplines identified by Angelo and Cross (1993). 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, despite interpreter educators being "the products of a unique history" (Ball, 2007, p. 1) and unusual early beginnings, and although the vast majority of interpreter educators may be skilled practitioners and not trained educators (Winston, 2005; Monikowski & Winston, 2003; Winston & Schick, 2000), interpreter educators demonstrate a strong consensus regarding the importance of higher order thinking skills as the prominent teaching goal. These findings can only be applied in relation to the signed language interpreter educator population of the United States. Therefore it would be interesting to administer the same survey to signed and spoken language interpreter educators internationally to determine whether there is consensus across the interpreter education field in more general terms.

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