

**Exploring the Role of a Mentor in the ASL-English Interpreting Profession: Characteristics
of Experienced Practitioners, Specialized Educators, and Skilled Guides**

By

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“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”

— 2 Corinthians 12:9

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Exploring the Role of a Mentor in the ASL-English Interpreting Profession: Characteristics of Experienced Practitioners, Specialized Educators, and Skilled Guides

Mikaela M. Jordon

Abstract

Mentoring is a vital component of professional development in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field as evidenced by Napier and Pearce (2010), Wessling (2020), Boeh (2016), and Paradise (2013). However, there seems to be no clear standard on how to effectively prepare mentors for the role they have been given. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of what quantitative and qualitative indicators represent an experienced practitioner, the necessary training for mentors, and the essential skills required for effective mentorship. By understanding these three components, mentors will be better equipped to support mentees in their process of self-discovery. The data was collected through the use of a questionnaire and interviews. Anyone who identified as a mentor and an interpreter was eligible for participation in the study. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis to highlight current

perspectives on mentoring in the ASL-English interpreting field. The findings of the study support the TIEM Center's (2022) definition of a mentor that states that mentors are "experienced practitioners who are also specialized educators with the requisite knowledge and skills to guide adult learners in a process of professional self-discovery" (TIEM Center, 2022, p. 2). In this study, I found that mentors believed that an experienced practitioner has a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators with an emphasis on qualitative indicators. A mentor could be considered a specialized educator if they are actively involved in mentor training and a community of practice to share resources and improve their mentoring skills. The mentor training should have roots in adult learning theories such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). These findings have also shown a need for increased collaboration both between the mentee and mentor to determine the skills needed to be an effective mentor.

Keywords: Mentoring, ASL-English interpreting, practitioners, educators, mentoring skills, role

Chapter 1: Introduction

Mentoring has long been touted as paramount to the human experience with its origins dating back to Homer's *Odyssey* (Shea, 2002). In the *Odyssey*, Mentor is the trusted advisor and wise counsel of Telemachus as he journeys to search for his father, Odysseus (Shea, 2002). Since then, mentoring has been viewed as an opportunity for someone with more experience to bestow their knowledge upon someone with less experience. While the approach of mentoring varies by intent of the relationship, the core principle is still the same: mentoring is an opportunity for two people to learn from one another, often with the mentor acting as a guide. A prominent researcher in mentoring, Daloz (2012), further supports how mentors are guides by stating,

[Mentors] lead us along the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before. They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warns us of lurking dangers and point out unexpected delights along the way. (Daloz, 2012, p. 18)

In this study, I will examine the ways in which mentors in the American Sign Language (ASL)-English interpreting profession guide mentees as well as investigate what their role is and how that ultimately influences the success of mentoring relationships.

Background

I am a graduate student at Western Oregon University conducting research on the role of mentors in the ASL-English interpreting field. I have four years of professional experience as an ASL-English interpreter, and I have been a mentor for two years. At the beginning of my career, I had various mentors who supported me to become the interpreter I am today. While I acknowledge their expertise and the support they provided me, which ultimately has contributed to my effectiveness as an interpreter, there were times I felt the support was not individualized to

my needs. I decided to become a mentor, so that I could provide more individualized support to other interpreters. However, as I started to enter mentoring relationships in the role of a mentor, I realized how much I did not know. I lacked the resources and support to be an effective mentor. I thought mentoring served as way for me to share what I learned and pass it along to the next generation of interpreters, but in reality mentoring is much more complex than I initially thought.

When the time came to choose a topic for my thesis, I knew that I wanted to focus on mentoring in the ASL-English interpreting field. I acknowledge that mentoring occurs in many language pairs, but I wanted to focus my research on ASL-English interpreting as that is the language pair that I am most familiar with. My hope with this study is that mentoring in ASL-English interpreting may be applied to interpreters working with other language pairs.

As I began my initial review of the literature, I realized how much I needed to learn about mentoring. I had thought mentoring was a way to pass on shared knowledge, but as I researched, I came to understand that mentoring is multifaceted. I now see it as an opportunity to support another interpreter as they navigate the interpreting profession. While I can share knowledge I may have, ultimately my role as a mentor is to guide the mentee as they discover their professional identity. At first I thought mentoring resources were scarce, but I discovered that they were available once I knew where to search.

This research is for anyone who is a mentor or wants to become a mentor. While mentoring in and of itself is highly individualized, there are resources mentors can use to inform their practices. I wanted to learn from practicing mentors what resources are available and to better understand what my role is as a mentor. My hope is to contribute to improving best practices for mentoring to ultimately improve interpreting practices across the entire field. As the

quality of interpreting improves in the field, access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH) individuals is improved. Mentoring is one small step that has ripple effects.

Statement of the Problem

Various researchers have explored the need for and importance of mentoring within the signed language interpreting field. Napier and Pearce (2010) created a program to address the high attrition rates within the interpreting field in Australia. According to their research, “13% of current practitioners are considering leaving the profession. Lack of workplace support, including mentoring, is mentioned as one of ten reasons for workplace dissatisfaction” (Napier & Pearce, 2010, p. 3). When interpreters receive specific guidance on professional development, they are more likely to feel supported during their careers, which leads to improved interpreter retention (Clutterbuck, 2014; Napier & Pearce, 2010; Wessling, 2020). As indicated by Wessling (2020) the lack of structured mentoring early in an interpreter’s career has led to increased attrition in the interpreting field. With improved interpreter retention, the field can continue to grow and develop in the long term.

Research conducted by Boeh (2016) shows that mentoring is generally seen as a beneficial tool in the interpreting field. Based on the survey results, 96% of participants believed the profession, as a whole, would benefit from the more practitioners engaging in mentoring. Of the interpreters who have utilized mentoring, 80% felt it was beneficial and supported their development. Those who did not have experience with mentoring, 89% believed it would have been beneficial if they had. This study is one example that can be used to understand that mentoring is viewed as a beneficial tool within the profession.

There is an understanding of the value of mentoring in the interpreting field, but there is not a clear path to becoming a mentor as indicated by Wessling (2020),

The absence of a clear path to becoming a mentor, and the inability to easily find a qualified mentor suggests that this is contributing to the gap in readiness for novice interpreters. As such, increasing and improving mentoring options in the profession must be considered as a way to reduce attrition. (p.126)

Additionally, the results of Paradise's (2013) research study showed that students who entered into their practicum or other mentoring relationships lacked clarity on how to navigate the mentoring relationship with some reporting effective mentoring experiences and others reporting ineffective mentoring experiences.

Napier and Pearce (2010), Wessling (2020), and Boeh (2016) recognized that mentoring is beneficial to the development of interpreters and improves the retention rates within the profession. However, as mentioned by Paradise (2013) mentoring relationships are difficult to navigate and thus require additional research to better understand the role that mentors play in the mentoring relationship.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this research study is to investigate the current beliefs about the role of a mentor and to understand why there seems to be a lack of clarity on how to become a mentor. The research will focus on these three questions:

1. What defines an experienced practitioner in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?
2. What resources, training, and support are necessary to be an effective mentor in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field?
3. How is the role of a mentor currently perceived and defined in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?

These questions are based on the definition of a mentor from the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022). This definition states that mentors are “experienced practitioners who are also specialized educators with the requisite knowledge and skills to guide adult learners in a process of professional self-discovery” (TIEM Center, 2022, p. 2).

Theoretical Framework

Learning theories used in mentoring to better understand how adult learners are guided in their process of self-discovery are Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (Baumgartner, 2001; Bouchard, 2019) and Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). Transformative learning is a learning theory that emphasizes how individuals form and reform meaning through reflective practice (Baumgartner, 2001; Bouchard, 2019). This allows the individual to consider how their current perceptions and beliefs are impacted by new knowledge and how all of that ultimately impacts their world view (Bouchard, 2019). The learning occurs within a social context and emphasizes the value of mentor in the process of learning because they act as guides to the learner (Baumgartner, 2001). Transformational learning is crucial to this study because interpreters take in new information that impacts how they view their work, their consumers, their peers, and the world at large. They ultimately must decide how that information will impact their choices as an interpreter. When mentors consider how they approach the role of a mentor, the experiences they have impact their world view which impacts how they mentor. In this study, I hope to understand how transformational learning plays a role in both mentor and mentee development.

In addition, Lev Vygotsky is commonly referenced in the ASL-English interpreting field to discuss how learning occurs (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). Colonomos and Moccia (2013) describe Vygotsky’s learning theory by stating that learning is inherently embedded in a socio-

cultural context where learning occurs through interactions with peers. Learning occurs when, “the learner moves through stages of not knowing how to solve a problem on their own, to interaction with another in a reflective dialogue, and, finally, to independent problem solving” (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013, p. 87). These three stages are referenced as Object Regulation, Other Regulation, and Self-Regulation (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). During Object Regulation, an individual will look to someone with more experience to model the necessary skills that the individual is looking to develop (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013; Flair, 2024). Then during Other Regulation, the individual recognizes there is a gap in their understanding seeks direct support from the model (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). When learners are engaged in interactions and reflective dialogue, they utilize Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD states that “learning occurs through dialogue that serves to scaffold the learner” (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013, p. 87). This framework considers the current skills of the individual and how they can acquire new skills with support from someone else with more experience through the use of scaffolding techniques (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013; Flair, 2024). The goal of ZPD is to ultimately guide the mentee to Self-Regulation where the individual has mastered the skill and can make decisions independently (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013).

ZPD relates to mentoring as a lens through which mentors may prepare mentees to acquire new skills through self-discovery (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). By considering this framework, I hope to discover how mentors are uniquely qualified to guide mentees through the process of self-discovery by being experienced practitioners, specialized educators, and by having specific skills to aide in their mentoring ability.

Organization

In this study, I examine existing literature as it relates to the importance of mentoring in the ASL-English interpreting field. Then I will explore the three facets of the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022) definition of a mentor: who is an experienced practitioner, what training is necessary to be an effective mentor and what skills are necessary to have an effective mentoring relationship. After that, I will describe the methodology I used to investigate current perceptions of mentors in the field, including the data collection methods, the populations included, and the data analysis methods. Then I will discuss the results of the study and their implications for the role of a mentor. Finally, I will summarize the research findings and provide future direction for continued research.

Definition of Terms

Community of Practice – “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Competencies – identified as the physical and psychological factors that impact the development of an interpreter including include both hard skills, such as the actual ability to interpret, and soft skills, such as emotional traits (Shaw, 2018a).

Mentors – In this study, a mentor is defined as coach or sponsor to guide another individual in a collaborative and mutually beneficial way as they develop their skills, learn about professionalism, and make meaningful connections in the field.

Practitioner – an individual who possesses specific skills and knowledge in a particular field and engages in opportunities for continued growth and skill development (Drude et al., 2019; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007).

Practice Profession – a profession that considers not only the technical skills needed to be a practitioner, but also considers the situational and human interactions factors of the work (Dean & Pollard, 2005).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to present the current literature surrounding the role of a mentor in the field of ASL-English interpreting. This research will be grounded in the definition of a mentor from the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022), where mentors are described as interpreters who “are experienced practitioners who are also specialized educators with the requisite knowledge and skills to guide adult learners in a process of professional self-discovery” (TIEM Center, 2022, p. 2). This chapter will be divided into four primary sections. In the first section, mentoring is defined by providing a brief overview of its function and purpose in various practice professions. The subsequent sections are based on the key components of the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022) definition: what an experienced practitioner is, what structures inform mentor training and types of training available for mentors and what skills are required to be a mentor.

Defining Mentoring

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2026), a mentor is “a person who gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person, especially in a professional or academic context.” This concurs with various research studies conducted about mentoring in various fields as shown in, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019), Olaolorunpo (2019), Orland-Barak and Wang (2021), and Paradise (2013). While these definitions provide some context about the work that mentors do, they are limiting because they do not represent the complexity of mentoring or the diverse situations in which it occurs.

According to the International Mentoring Center, “Mentoring is a collaborative, dialogic and reflective learning relationship with mutual learning agreements and shared responsibilities to facilitate the personal and professional development of the individual or teams to create

awareness, increase choices and develop capabilities” (Singh, 2026, para. 1). In this definition, mentoring is represented as a relationship that is mutually beneficial for personal and professional development rather than a simple hierarchy based on experience. In addition, based on this definition, the relationship is rooted in collaboration, discussion, and reflection, in which both parties are expected to have shared responsibilities. This additional layer to the definition of mentoring expands more adequately on the roles and expectations of the individuals involved in a mentoring relationship. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2019) also emphasize the collaborative nature of mentoring while also noting the responsibility of the mentor to provide the mentee with opportunities for developing their professional network.

Drawing on the research presented in this section, a mentor is defined in this study as a coach or sponsor to guide another individual in a collaborative and mutually beneficial way as they develop their skills, learn about professionalism, and make meaningful connections in the field.

Mentoring in Practice Professions

Prior to the professionalization of the ASL-English interpreting profession, it was considered a technical profession whose primary focus was on language skills and the ability to interpret effectively (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2018). Non-linguistic skills were considered secondary and not the focus of professional development. As more research has been conducted, many ASL-English interpreting professionals have embraced being considered a practice profession; its focus is not solely on the development of language and interpreting skills, but also skills related to interpersonal interactions, professional judgment, and management of various situations that may occur (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2018). When considering what this means for the field and professional development, it is crucial to understand that gaining skill and expertise

in the field is not limited to fluency in ASL or the ability to interpret; one must also gain competencies in skills not directly related to language to be considered a well-rounded ASL-English interpreter. These specific competencies will be further explored in the experienced practitioner section.

While the previous section outlines what mentoring is in general, the form and structure of mentoring can vary depending on the field in which it occurs. Fields such as teaching and nursing were chosen as a framework for comparison to the ASL-English interpreting field due to their similarity to interpreting as a practice profession (Daley, 2001; Dean & Pollard, 2005). In subsequent paragraphs, the approaches that underpin the need for mentoring in various fields are explored. This is done to establish the common themes amongst practice professions and their views on mentoring.

In the education field, mentoring is evident during student teaching and teacher development as practitioners use instructional coaches. During student teaching, student teachers are paired with a mentor teacher. The mentor teacher is charged with supporting the student teacher as they apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world situations while also guiding them as they learn to navigate the complex demands of the learning environment, including pedagogical theories and classroom management (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). Similarly, in the ASL-English interpreting field, interpreters who have attended an ITP/IEP typically are involved in some kind of internship where they work with a supervising interpreter to support them as they apply their theoretical knowledge and learn how to respond to the complex demands of different environments and diverse consumers (Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2019).

Additionally, teachers continue to have support beyond their initial education through continued access to instructional coaches. Instructional coaches establish high expectations of learning for the novice teacher while also providing high levels of support to ensure that the goals of the mentoring relationship are met – such as the instructional coach serving as a “thinking partner” for the novice teacher in order to satisfy goals and objectives for student learning (Sweeney, 2023). Similarly, in the ASL-English interpreting field, mentoring provides spaces for interpreters to engage in discussions about their interpreting choices such as supervision sessions or communities of practice (de Wit et al., 2024; Dean & Smith, 2018).

In the medical field, mentoring is seen as “crucial to the survival of all careers...because it provides opportunity to transfer knowledge, skills, traditions and practices of the profession from mentors to mentees” (Osaghae, 2012, p. 7). In the nursing profession specifically, mentoring is seen as a tool to increase the efficiency of nursing practitioners while supporting new nurses as they integrate into the workforce (Olaolorunpo, 2019). Similarly, in the ASL-English interpreting field, there are apprentice programs that serve to provide support to interpreters post-graduation from an interpreter training program (ITP)/interpreter education program (IEP); these programs include mentorship opportunities that support novice interpreters as they transition into the workforce (Community College of Philadelphia, n.d.; Department of Access Services, n.d.; Smith et al., 2013). Understanding what a mentor is in context is an important first step to identifying and establishing the foundation of the vital role that mentors could play within the field of ASL-English interpreting.

Experienced Practitioner: Who is a Mentor?

Based on the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* definition of a mentor, mentors are experienced practitioners (TIEM Center, 2022); however, there is not a definitive standard for

determining who is considered an experienced practitioner. In this section, the field's history of professionalization is explored to better understand what a practitioner in the ASL-English interpreting field is. To promote a definition of experienced practitioner, the factors that have been commonly used to describe experience are explored through the lens of professional practice as it has evolved through the years. To conclude this section, the importance of mentors as experienced practitioners is highlighted.

Historically, the ASL-English interpreting profession began with the friends and family of Deaf individuals or those who had direct interaction with the community; this included teachers of the Deaf and church members, who knew ASL and interpreted out of support for their Deaf peers rather than as professionals (Ball, 2018; Humphrey et al., 2020). Most people who served as interpreters prior to the 1970s often had other jobs and were not paid for their interpreting work (Ball, 2018). In 1964, ASL-English interpreters met at Ball State College to establish the profession (Ball, 2018; Humphrey et al., 2020). During their time at Ball State, the group of interpreters created training materials, ethical standards, and discussed ways to establish the once informal task of interpreting into a profession; they also founded the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) (Ball, 2018). This group set the initial expectations of what it meant to be a practitioner in the ASL-English interpreting field.

Practitioners in the ASL-English interpreting field have continued to develop and refine their practices in response to the needs of the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing communities. As they gained more protection and provision under the law, interpreting practitioners adjusted their approach to the work, from being viewed as caretakers to becoming allies for the Deaf community (Merithew, 1999). As interpreters and Deaf consumers continued to collaborate on best practices for the interpreting field, interpreters were able to better

understand their role within the greater context. Interpreters began considering the choices they made while interpreting as well as the ethical and interpersonal implications of those choices (Merithew, 1999). As Deaf individuals gained more access, the number of Deaf professionals in highly specialized fields significantly increased. This meant that the qualifications of interpreters needed to increase in response to the growing needs of Deaf consumers to ensure their equitable access to employment opportunities and basic human rights, similarly to their peers who do not require an interpreter to navigate their professional and personal life (Merithew, 1999).

If interpreters are expected to be of a certain caliber to be able to align with the needs of the Deaf community, that means that there is a need to establish who is considered an interpreting practitioner. In general, a practitioner is an individual who possesses specific skills and knowledge in a particular field and engages in opportunities for continued growth and skill development (Dean & Pollard, 2013; Drude et al., 2019; Humphrey et al., 2020; Merithew, 1999). In the American Sign Language-English interpreting field, interpreters are expected to have specific skills or competencies, and participate in professional development to further their expertise.

Specific Skills and Knowledge. According to Dean and Pollard (2005; 2018), skills and expertise in the interpreting field is not limited to knowing ASL or being able to interpret; one must also develop competencies in linguistic and non-linguistic skills while considering how linguistic choices are impacted by cross-cultural communication to be considered an effective interpreter. Competencies can be identified as the physical and psychological factors that impact the development of an interpreter (Dean & Pollard, 2005; 2018). These factors include both hard skills, such as the actual ability to interpret, and soft skills, such as emotional traits that impact one's work as an interpreter (Shaw, 2018a). The *Entry to Practice Competencies* (Witter-

Merithew & Johnson, 2005), the *RID Job Task Analysis* (The Caviart Group, LLC, 2016), and the *Essential Functions of a BEI-Certified Interpreter* (Board of Evaluation of Interpreters, 2025) establish general competencies expected of ASL-English interpreters.

In order to outline what is expected of working interpreters, a group of interpreters established an Expert Work Group, spearheaded by Witter-Merithew and Johnson, to clearly define entry-to-practice competencies (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). The competencies fall under five domains: theory and knowledge, human relations, language skills, interpreting skills, and professionalism. The theory and knowledge domain emphasizes the need for an academic foundation and real world knowledge. The human relations domain establishes how interpreters should interact with colleagues and consumers. The language skills domain focuses on interpreters' ASL and English proficiency. The interpreting skills domain explores the competencies necessary to interpret in various settings. The professional competencies domain emphasizes professional standards of practice expected of interpreters. These domains establish guidelines for effective practice as an interpreter.

Additionally, in 2016, The Caviart Group, LLC was hired to conduct a Job Task Analysis for RID as they developed an updated examination process for the National Interpreter Certification (NIC). Data for this survey was collected from 3,186 respondents, including both interpreters and Deaf consumers. Based on the survey results, the desired competencies of ASL-English interpreters were categorized. These categories encompass the major tasks [of the work], knowledge, abilities, skills, physical attributes required, and the attributes desired of a newly certified interpreter (The Caviart Group, LLC, 2016). The section related to major tasks of the work refers to the expectations of what happens before, during and after an interpreting assignment. The knowledge section refers to non-interpreting skills such as best practices and

cultural impact that the interpreter should know how to handle, while the abilities section specifically refers to things they should be able to do. The skills section relates more directly to interpreting skills. The physical attributes required refers to the ability to actually do the work in terms of physical ability. Finally, the attributes desired section focuses on qualities that would be ideal of an interpreter.

The Board of Evaluation of Interpreters requires that a certified, non-intermediary interpreter should possess specific skills in these categories: physical, cognitive, cultural, linguistic, and professional abilities and attributes (Board of Evaluation of Interpreters, 2025). The physical abilities section refers to skills related to facial expressions and manual dexterity. The cognitive abilities section refers to the ability to attend to various demands both visually and auditorily while having strong critical thinking skills. The cultural knowledge and linguistic abilities refer to English and American Sign Language abilities as well as cultural knowledge associated with both languages. The final section focuses on professional abilities and ethical standards.

Based on the presented research, the specific skills and knowledge an interpreter should have can be represented by the competencies necessary to be an interpreter. The competencies that identify a practitioner in the ASL-English interpreter field fall within these domains: linguistic, cultural, knowledge, professionalism, attributes, and interpreting skills (Board of Evaluation of Interpreters, 2025; The Caviart Group, LLC, 2016; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005).

Skill Development. Not only should practitioners in the ASL-English interpreting field maintain certain skills and knowledge to be considered practitioners, but they should also be expected to engage in opportunities for professional development. These expectations are

outlined by the *National Association for the Deaf-Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (NAD-RID) Code of Professional Conduct (CPC)* (2005), the guiding ethical code for ASL-English interpreters. The CPC states that all working interpreters should engage in some form of professional development, where interpreters “are expected to foster and maintain interpreting competence and the stature of the profession through on-going development of knowledge and skills” (NAD-RID, 2005, Section 7).

Although the CPC advises interpreters to actively engage in professional development, only interpreters who are certified are required to engage in continuing education units (CEUs). There are no standardized requirements for non-certified ASL-English interpreters and any requirements assigned to them are either from the agencies they work for or state requirements. RID requires interpreters who have the National Interpreter Certificate (NIC) to engage in 8.0 (80 contact hours) CEU credits over four years to maintain their certification: at least 6.0 (60 contact hours) related to professional studies are required with 1.0 (10 contact hours) related to privilege, power, and oppressions also being required (RID, n.d.). The Board of Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) requirements depend on the state in which the interpreter took the exam as there are only a few states that offer this test and require it. For example, in Texas, interpreters are expected complete 10.0 CEU credits (100 contact hours) every five years whereas, in Illinois, interpreters are expected to have 20 contact hours every year (*Manual for Illinois BEI*, 2022; Texas Health and Human Services, 2025).

Experienced Practitioners in the ASL-English Interpreting Field

While there is not a standardized metric for determining who is considered an experienced practitioner, various criteria have been used to represent someone as an experienced practitioner (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). In this section, the various criteria used are

examined based on the understanding of a practitioner as an interpreter who has a specific set of skills and participates in professional development.

Work Experience. There is limited research in the ASL-English interpreting field that points to what kinds of work experience or certifications make someone an experienced practitioner. One research study conducted by Nicodemus and Emmorey (2015) studied directionality preference between L1 and L2 for interpreters. Nicodemus and Emmorey (2015) divided the interpreters into expert and novice. Determining expert or novice status was based on these criteria: “1) years of professional experience; 2) interpreting credentials; 3) self-ranking of interpreting skills; and 4) types of professional interpreting experience” (Nicodemus & Emmorey, 2015, p. 150)

In the study, they included a table with distinctions for how they determined expert or novice in terms of work experience (Nicodemus & Emmorey, 2015). For years of professional experience, Nicodemus and Emmorey (2015) indicated that a novice was someone with “five years or less of full-time professional interpreting work” while an expert was someone with “ten years or more of full-time professional interpreting work” (p. 151). For experience in interpreting settings, Nicodemus and Emmorey (2015) stated a novice “has interpreted in a limited number of settings” while an expert “has interpreted across a variety of settings” (p. 151). Their study can be used as a framework to determine if similar criteria is used to determine what makes a mentor an experienced practitioner.

Certification. While other practice professions have clear role expectations that separate qualifications based on educational levels, as indicated by Witter-Merrithew and Johnson (2005), the ASL-English interpreting field does not have a clear indicator for qualifications expected of practitioners. While certification exams such as the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) and

the Board of Evaluation for Interpreters (BEI) do outline requirements for examination, certification requirements vary from state to state; some states have rigorous standards for interpreters, whereas other states have no regulations for interpreters (Board of Evaluation of Interpreters, 2025; Center for the Assessment of Sign Language Interpretation, 2020; *State-by-State Regulations*, 2025). Interpreters often work independently without supervision from other colleagues and, depending on their state's requirements, without legal oversight, leading to "a lack of quality control over the accuracy, reliability, and effectiveness of interpreting services" (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005, p. 22). As a result, it is difficult to use certification as an indicator of experience because it is not a standard requirement for all interpreters.

In Nicodemus and Emmorey's (2015) study, they presented a way that certification can be used to determine who is considered an expert interpreter versus a novice interpreter. A novice interpreter was someone who "may hold state certification or none; may be a candidate for Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf certification" while an expert was someone who had "National certification from Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf at one of the following levels: CSC, CI and CT, NIC-Advanced or NIC-Master" (Nicodemus & Emmorey, 2015, p. 151). Nicodemus and Emmorey's (2015) study can be used as a possible framework for differentiating experience levels based on certification.

Specialization. Interpreters who are considered to have a specialty within the ASL-English interpreting field are interpreters who have focused their practice to primarily work within a specific setting or with a specific population (Witter-Merithew, 2010). A specialist is defined as "as a practitioner who through advanced training, acquisition of specialized skills and knowledge, and experience distinguishes her/himself as being uniquely qualified for the specialized work" (Witter-Merithew, 2010, p. 9). Specialization can be considered an indicator of

experience because those who are specialized in a particular type of interpreting have to undergo extensive training to be considered qualified.

For example, the Qualified Mental Health Interpreter (QMHI) certification requires interpreters to complete extensive training in the mental health interpreting field before they can take the assessment to be considered QMHI certified (Alabama Department of Mental Health Office of Deaf Services, 2018). Similarly, interpreters who work with Deafblind consumers, must undergo specialized training to prepare them to not only interpret auditory information, but also interpret visual information (National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers, n.d.). The skills necessary to effectively interpret for Deafblind individuals is beyond those of necessary to be an effective general practitioner (Shaw, 2018b). In addition, interpreters who engage in performance interpreting also engage in a specialization; interpreters must read and understand a script, translate it into American Sign Language and ensure that the intent for the hearing audience is equally experienced by the Deaf audience (Ganz Horowitz, 2014). Doing this requires intentional preparation and consideration of the linguistic and paralinguistic demands of the performance (Ganz Horowitz, 2014). These examples suggest that specialization can be considered a factor of determining whether or not someone is an experienced practitioner.

Mentors as Experienced Practitioners

There is already an understanding of who is considered a practitioner within the field of ASL-English interpreting based on the competencies expected of an ASL-English interpreter (Board of Evaluation of Interpreters, 2025; The Caviart Group, LLC, 2016; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). However, determining who is considered experienced has presented a need for additional research. The criteria presented in this section included work experience, certification,

and specialization as potential indicators of experience. This study will be used to investigate how mentors define who is an experienced practitioner.

Specialized Educator: What Kind of Training is Needed

Based on the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022) mentors should not only be experienced practitioners; they should also be specialized educators. Mentoring is a specialized skill that could require additional training, similar to how interpreters specialize in a specific interpreting skill and need training to acquire it (Sanfilippo, 2025). Mentors have also been compared to teachers because in both roles, the mentor or teacher have to know how to use their knowledge and skills to evaluate the mentee or student, to guide them through the learning process (Sanfilippo, 2025).

In the ASL-English interpreting field, there are preestablished models for additional training. These trainings start by teaching the participant the necessary skills and theories to accomplish their goals. Then, participants are given opportunities to implement their new skills with help from someone who is more experienced than them. This process aligns with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework that considers the current skills of the mentor and how they can acquire new skills with support from someone else with more experience through the use of scaffolding techniques (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013; Flair, 2024). The purpose of this section is to highlight the need for mentor training through the lens of ZPD using training that already occurs in the interpreting field as a model. Then mentor training that is available in the field is outlined to support the need for mentors to be specialized educators.

Current Interpreting Models for Additional Training

There are various frameworks within the ASL-English interpreting field that support the need for additional training within specialized fields. In this section, four training programs are

outlined. These programs are the Qualified Mental Health Interpreter Certification, the Case Conferencing Leader Training, the Center for Atypical Language Interpreting and Graduate Programs. While these programs are not mentoring specific, they model preestablished training within the field and can support the need for mentor training.

Qualified Mental Health Interpreter (QMHI) Certification. Mental health services have not been historically accessible to members of the Deaf community. Not only that but mental health interpreting often requires additional skill due to the complexity of the work. The Alabama Mental Health Interpreter Training (MHIT) Project (Alabama Department of Mental Health, n.d.) asserts that interpreters have a significant impact on the effective outcomes in mental health situations. Thus, the QMHI Certification was created in response to a gap in qualification of mental health interpreters. Interpreters who are involved in this program are expected to participate in a 40 hour MHIT prior to a practicum; the practicum consists of 10-15 observation hours and 25-30 interpreting hours (Alabama Department of Mental Health Office of Deaf Services, 2018). Upon successful completion of the practicum, participants can take the certification exam to officially receive their QMHI certification. Upon receiving their certification, interpreters are expected to participated in annual certification maintenance that includes 40 contact hours by either working in a clinical setting, completing workshop, or a combination of the two (Alabama Department of Mental Health, n.d.).

IIRAS Case Conferencing Leader Training. The Interpreting Institute for Reflection-in-Action and Supervision (IIRAS) was founded on the principle of establishing a collaborative space to improve the use of supervision in practice for interpreters (Dean & Smith, 2018). Supervision is a term used, “in the way psychologists and other mental health professionals use it – describing a supportive, confidential, interactive dialogue between two (or more) professionals

regarding their work with consumers, the goal of which is to enhance professional practice” (Dean & Pollard, 2011, p. 170). IIRAS provides a three phase case conferencing leader training in order to be considered a IIRAS Credentialed Supervision Leader. Phase 1 is the initial training to be a supervision leader and is approximately four months. Participants commit three to five hours per week of training. In Phase 2, participants learn about reflective practice which frames case conferencing as normative type of professional development. This training lasts about one month. Upon completion of this training, participants are involved in monthly “supervision of supervision” sessions. The final phase allows participants to implement everything they have learned and focuses on formative and restorative types of professional development.

Center for Atypical Language Interpreting (CALI). The CALI training program was developed in response to the need for interpreters to be better equipped to interpret for individuals with atypical language needs (Northeastern University, n.d.). The training has four online modules: (1) *An Introduction to Atypical Language*, (2) *Working with Individuals Exhibiting Atypical Language*, (3) *Interpreting Strategies for Individuals with Atypical Language*, and (4) *Decision Points: Working with Consumers Exhibiting Atypical Language*. Upon completion of the initial training, participants work with an experienced supervisor through a three month training. Then participants begin their interactive training to implement everything they have learned up until this point. Then participants work with actively work with consumers who have atypical language needs with the support of the experienced supervisor. The program finishes with a facilitated community of practice where participants and supervisors can learn together and support one another.

Graduate Programs. Graduate programs are an opportunity for practitioners to delve into field-specific topics. For ASL-English interpreters, Gallaudet University, the University of

Northern Florida, Rochester Institute of Technology and Western Oregon University are the primary universities that offer graduate courses. Gallaudet University offers three graduate degrees: Ph.D. in Translation and Interpreting Studies, M.A. in Interpretation: Combined Interpreting Practice and Research, and M.A. in Interpretation: Interpreting Research (Gallaudet University, n.d.). The three programs focus on building skills in research and enhancing interpreting expertise (Gallaudet University, n.d.). The University of Northern Florida offers three master's degrees: General Practitioner, Educational Interpreting, and Interpreting Pedagogy. All three degrees focus on expanding the students' expertise as either a general practitioner, an educational interpreter, or an interpreting teacher (Silverfield College of Education and Human Services, n.d.-b, n.d.-c, n.d.-a). Rochester Institute of Technology offers a master's degree for health care interpreting to support the need for qualified health care interpreters (Rochester Insitute of Technology, n.d.). Western Oregon University offers three tracks for additional study: theory and practice, advanced interpreting, and teaching interpreting (Western Oregon University, n.d.). Theory and practice is geared towards newer interpreters as the hone their practice; advanced and teaching is geared towards working interpreters who want to hone their practice as a researcher and/or teacher (Western Oregon University, n.d.).

Importance of Additional Training. The programs described above were created in response to a need for more qualified leaders in their respective spaces. There was an identifiable gap and someone created a training in response to that gap. Similarly to Vygotsky's learning process and ZPD as outlined by Colonomos and Moccia (2013), practitioners are taught the initial skills and theories needed to be successful in that space (object regulation), then are provided with ample opportunities to hone their practice with the guidance of someone with more experience (other regulation), and then are given opportunities to implement their newly

developed skills in practice (self-regulation). If mentoring is a specialized field, similar to the fields mentioned in this section, then it is evident that mentor training is a response to the need for developing more effective mentoring experiences and, as a result, improving the work of interpreter practitioners. Thus, mentors should be expected to engage in training to develop the necessary skills to be a mentor. Because other models for additional training in the ASL-English interpreting field are structured similarly to the process described in ZPD, mentor training could also include similar components.

Mentor Training

In the ASL-English interpreting field, there are various mentor training programs used in the ASL-English interpreting field. These training programs include state-wide programs, agency-specific programs, and interpreter organizations (Winston & Lee, 2013). Programs such as the *Master Mentor Program* (2005) which focus on training the mentors by giving them the necessary skills to be successful, while programs like CORE (Ramsey Welford & Perchik, 2020) focus on congruently developing both the mentor and mentee. While these two programs have vastly different approaches, they both address the need for more effective mentors. Then after initial training, it is important to consider how that training is maintained; this is explored through the lens of continuing education units as well as communities of practice.

Master Mentor Program. The *Master Mentor Program* was created to address the need for mentor training without expecting its participants to go back to school ultimately making it more accessible to a wider variety of individuals (Winston et al., 2022). This is an 18-week online course focused on four modules: Mentoring through a Systematic Analysis of Power, Privilege, and Oppression; Role-Space and Mentoring; Meaning-Based Assessment; and Peer Mentoring. Participants are provided with learning materials through reading and video lessons.

They also engage in group discussions with the facilitators and peers. Through this process individuals scaffold their learning to become independent practitioners of mentoring. Participants are taught through a “learn-by-doing” approach so that they can experience a similar learning experience to that of their mentees (TIEM Center, 2022). The reasoning behind this as stated by the TIEM Center (2022) is that “By going through the challenge and struggle that produces self-development, participants are also learning how to guide that growth process in others” (p. 2).

CORE. The CORE mentorship program was established with the mission of “interpreters supporting interpreters” (Ramsey Wolford & Perchik, 2020, p. 7). According to Ramsey Wolford and Perchik (2020), the program is based on four principles: colleague advancement, outreach, resources, and ethics. *Colleague Advancement* emphasizes that interpreters are involved in on-going development and should be supported through that development. *Outreach* emphasizes that interpreters share knowledge with each other while being involved with pro bono interpreting assignments. *Resources* emphasize ensuring that interpreters are equipped with the necessary training through CORE workshops. Finally, *Ethics* emphasizes that interpreters work in conjunction with the Deaf community. There are three key roles within CORE’s mentor program: the coach, the mentor, and the mentee; the coach serves to support the mentor, while the mentor serves to support the mentee. Over a six-month period, mentor-mentee pairs meet once a month as well as they are expected to participate in various additional activities to support their learning and development.

Maintaining Training. There are two avenues for maintaining training within the ASL English interpreting field: continuing education units and communities of practice. Based on the initial research reviewed, there is not a standard of practice for maintaining mentor training, thus in this section, methods for maintaining training for interpreting practitioners are highlighted to

draw a comparison to what is possible for maintaining mentor training. In order to maintain their certification, ASL-English interpreters are required to complete continuing education units (*Manual for Illinois BEI*, 2022; RID, n.d.). Typically, CEUs are a requirement of maintaining certification or could be a workplace requirement, but there is no standard that mandates CEUs as a requirement of professional practice. Rather it is an expectation based on the NAD-RID CPC (2005). Because certified interpreters are required to engage in CEU's to maintain certification, mentoring, coaching, and/or supervision skills could be incorporated into the current certification maintenance program to ensure interpreter mentors are actively engaged in current best practices.

Research conducted in the medical field has shown the benefits of CEUs for professional development because it leads to practitioners feeling more supported (Sanfilippo, 2025). In the ASL-English interpreting field, CEUs are a form of professional development that helps to ensure that practitioners are aware of current best practices and improve the quality of their interpretation which ultimately increases consumer trust (Sanfilippo, 2025; The Interpreter's Lab, n.d.). Based on that understanding, continuing education is a way to ensure mentors are abreast of current best practices, they learn tools for improving the quality of their mentoring skills, and it increases trust between the mentee and the mentor.

Communities of practice are another way interpreters can actively engage in professional development. According to Wenger (2000), communities of practice are defined by three factors: (1) the shared understanding of the purpose of the group, (2) the participants engage with one another in a mutually beneficial way based on a set of norms, and (3) there are shared resources amongst the group. In the signed language interpreting field, communities of practice are a way for practitioners to "acquire the relevant competences and expertise" (de Wit et al., 2024, p. 199).

de Wit et al. (2024) mention that some competencies needed to interpret can only be learned through situated practice. Instead of learning occurring independently, it is co-created within the group (de Wit et al., 2024). While the research presented by de Wit et al. (2024) is not specifically related to mentoring, there is overlap in the learning experiences for both mentors and interpreters. Based on this understanding, communities of practice for mentors share the same purpose of improving mentoring practices in a space that is mutually beneficial, with shared resources; the space allows for mentors to participate in situated practice and co-create meaning with their peers.

Mentors as Specialized Educators

Based on the research presented in this section, mentors are specialized educators because mentoring is a specialized skill. Models from mental health interpreting, DeafBlind interpreting and performance interpreting have been used to draw parallels between interpreter training and mentor training. By considering the implications of the Master Mentor Program (TIEM Center, 2022; Winston et al., 2022) and the CORE Mentor Program (Ramsey Wolford & Perchik, 2020), mentor training should include opportunities for practitioners to be taught the initial skills necessary to be successful as a mentor (object regulation) and then they should be given opportunities to implement the skills they have learned through peer mentoring with support from someone more knowledgeable (other regulation). Finally, they should be given opportunities to implement their skills into practice and receive continued support as they hone their practice (self-regulation) which can be done through the use of continued mentor training (Colonomos & Moccia, 2013). This can be achieved through the use of various mentor trainings, continuing education, and communities of practice.

Mentoring Skills: How to Approach the Role

Based on the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022) mentors should not only be experienced practitioners and specialized educators, they also need to have specialized skills to be a mentor that are different from those of an educator. The principles in this section most closely relate to transformational learning because while the Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes how one learns, transformational learning emphasizes why one learns; transformational learning is the process through which new knowledge impacts one's beliefs and perceptions (Bouchard, 2019). As mentor's learn new skills, they must decide how the new knowledge will impact their choices, beliefs, and perspectives as a mentor. In this section, the skills necessary to be an effective mentor are examined through the lens of the Mentor Mindset created by Yeager (2024).

Mentor Mindset

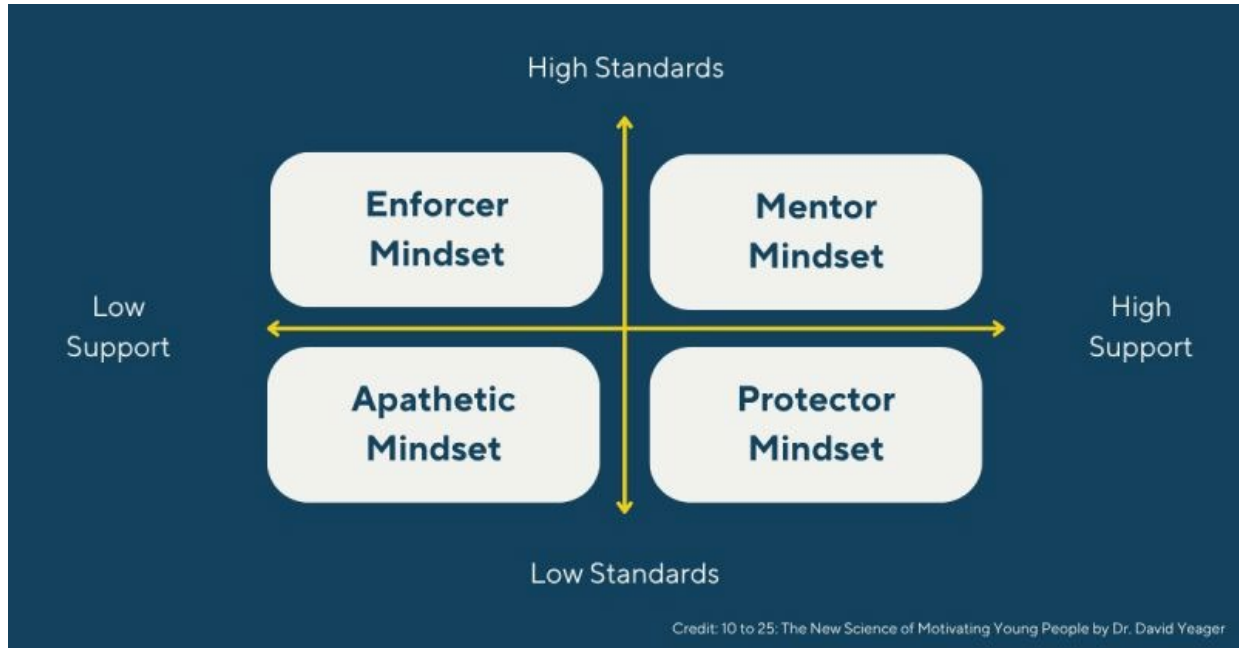
The Mentor Mindset (Yeager, 2024) provides a framework for categorizing various mentoring styles. This framework as shown in Figure 1 represents four types of mindsets: the enforcer mindset, the apathetic mindset, the protector mindset, and the mentor mindset. Each mindset exists on a spectrum from low to high standards and low to high support. The enforcer mindset sets high standards for mentees, but offers little to no support to achieve those standards. Research conducted by Wessling (2020) suggests that a lack of support early on in one's career leads to attrition from the field.

The protector mindset assumes that a mentee cannot attain high standards due to immense pressure, so mentors often lower their expectations to shield mentees from distress. The apathetic mindset offers low support and low standards. Mentors in this category often are

unengaged in the process. These mindsets often limit the potential of the mentee and do not allow them the space to develop and hone their practice.

Figure 1

Mentor Mindset Framework



According to Yeager (2024), the mentor mindset assumes that mentees are more than capable to meet the standards set forth for them if they are given adequate support to do so. This mindset recognizes mentees as already capable to achieve their goal. It also recognizes that the mentoring relationship is an opportunity for two people to work together to meet that goal by supporting one another through a process of self-discovery. It also assumes that the relationship is a collaborative space to find solutions and resources to address needs as they come up.

While this framework is not specific to the ASL-English interpreting field, the principles presented are applicable. The subsequent sections outline how Yeager's (2024) mentor mindset framework could be applied to the ASL-English interpreting field. By using Yeager's (2024)

framework, the skills necessary to be a mentor can be considered based on the purpose they play in the mentoring relationship.

High Expectations. Based on Yeager's (2024) framework, an effective mentor has high expectations of the mentee. However, in order to establish high expectations, there are certain skills that mentors need to have that related to their role and function to bring validity to their choices. In addition, there also needs to be an understanding of the reasoning behind why the expectations are in place.

Adult Learning Theories. Adult learning theories are used by educators to guide their instructional decisions. Similarly mentors need to be specialized educators who recognize the learning theories that inform instructional practices and use that to inform their mentoring choices. Adult learning theories applied to mentoring suggest that adults learn best when they are active participants in their own learning, take ownership of their learning, and have internal motivation to support the pursuit of their goals (Zachary & Fain, 2022). The adult learning theory most commonly used in support of mentoring is constructivism because it is "central to self-directed learning, transformational learning, experiential learning, reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice" (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 51). Constructivism is not a single theory, but rather a collection of theories that states that learning is constructed by the individual and comes from personal experience and also emphasizes that learning occurs in context (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Based on this understanding, mentoring practices should incorporate opportunities for learning to occur in context led by the mentee.

In Zachary and Fain's (2022) *The Mentor's Guide*, they frame elements of the mentoring relationship as it correlates to adult learning theories. By using this framework, there is a shift in the role of a mentee from a passive participant to an active one, the role of a mentor from

authority to facilitator, and the learning focus from mentor-focused to mentee focused (Zachary & Fain, 2022). This adjustment also recognizes the importance of emotional intelligence, self-directed learning, and transformational learning (Zachary & Fain, 2022). Additionally, Yeager (2024) mentions the principle of “authentic questions with uptake” supports the process of transformational learning because it is the process through which a mentor asks genuine questions that they do not know the answer to and are ultimately influenced by the response. By using the aforementioned principles, mentors can make choices in how they guide the mentee to better support them as they experience their journey of self-discovery.

High Support. Based on Yeager’s (2024) framework, in order to be an effective mentor, mentors need to not only have high expectations but also provide the mentee with the necessary support to meet those expectations. This support can come in many forms, but this section focuses primarily on the qualities of an effective mentor, expectation management, and criticism versus feedback.

Qualities of an Effective Mentor. The NCIEC outlines mentor qualifications based on a survey from 2007; these qualifications include certification, availability, ability to provide support, patience and respect, training, experience, specialty skills, and mentoring tools (NCIEC, 2016). In addition, Gordon and Magler (2007) state that an effective mentor is supportive, patient, aware of roles and responsibilities, a clear communicator, an effective guide, committed, empathetic and respectful. Based on this, there is evidence to support that an effective mentor is a combination of technical and non-technical skills, also known as soft skills. Soft skills are “the non-technical skills, abilities, informal knowledge, and behaviors that are needed in addition to hard skills to achieve success in a given career field (Klaus, 2007; Murti, 2014; Tadimetri, 2014)” (Crane, 2022, p. 7).

Expectation Management. Expectations management is defined as “an organization’s ability to manage its own understanding of what is expected of it, especially in terms of different expectation types and their differences in relevance and priority. Thus, expectation management is about strategic monitoring, mapping, and analysis of stakeholder expectations” (Luoma-aho & Olkkonen, 2016, para. 1). Yeager (2024) refers to expectation management as transparency statements; transparency statements are an opportunity for mentors can share their beliefs (message) about the situation and discuss opportunities for growth (opportunities). For mentors, this means they need to strategically map out expectations based on the goals of the relationship. Often this is accomplished through the use of mentor contracts (Gordon & Magler, 2007). While the term contract implies strict adherence to a legal document, in this context, it is used more as a way of documenting roles, responsibilities and expectations (Gordon & Magler, 2007).

The agreement can include a description of the goals and task analysis (Goodman, 2013). The task analysis considers roles and responsibilities of both the mentor and mentee, timeline of reaching the stated goals, a stated review period to discuss the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship, an agreement of how to end the relationship if needed, and communication norms to be used during the interactions (Goodman, 2013). This provides both the mentor and the mentee with an opportunity to be co-collaborators in the success of the mentoring relationship. Each individual should use self-analysis to determine what their needs are and use that as a means to discuss with their counterpart what should be considered for the mentorship agreement (Goodman, 2013). By doing this, there is a clear metric through which the effectiveness and success of the relationship can be measured (Gordon & Magler, 2007).

Criticism versus Feedback. In Yeager’s (2024) book, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, he explores the perceived disconnect between two individuals of

different ages through the wise feedback study. Through multiple studies, he discovered the disconnect lies in that status and respect are the neurobiological needs for young people, but due to their circumstances, those needs are often not met (Yeager, 2024). This ultimately led to undesirable results for both groups (Yeager, 2024). However, when participants were given feedback that recognized their status and gave them respect, they were ultimately much more receptive to it (Yeager, 2024).

There were four criteria used when giving the feedback: “(1) ask, don’t tell, (2) honor their status, don’t invoke yours, (3) validate and explain, don’t diminish, and (4) presume agency (Yeager, 2024, p. 50). While some interpreters do not fall into the 10 to 25 age range, the same principle applies. If Yeager’s (2024) wise feedback principle is applied to interpreters, they want to be treated with status and respect; they want to know that their contributions to the field have value. If mentors can draw on the principles of the wise feedback study, mentors can guide mentees through their process of self-discovery by respecting their professional status and providing feedback in light of their status and respect, which will help the mentee to meet their goals. The importance of feedback is also mirrored in work conducted in the ASL-English interpreting field by Witter-Merithew (2001) and Colonomos (2001).

Specialized Skills for Mentors

Mentors are experienced practitioners who are also specialized educators with a specific skill set as evidenced by the *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* (TIEM Center, 2022). The final part of the definition includes a crucial element of the potential purpose of mentoring; it is a process that leads “adult learners in a process of professional self-discovery” (TIEM Center, 2022, p. 2). This is what could separate mentors from interpreting educators. One way that mentors can guide mentees on the process of self-discovery is through using a framework

presented by Colonomos and Moccia (2013) known as Process Mediation. During Process Mediation, the mentee or the “mediated” has autonomy over the process of the discussion.

Conversely, the mentor or the “mediator” should come without an agenda, listening openly. By doing this, the mediated is provided the space and support to reach their own conclusions as they engage in their own process of self-discovery.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The goal of this study is to understand what it means to be a mentor, based on the experiences of ASL-English interpreters who are currently mentoring. Based on the TIEM Center (2022) *Effective Mentoring Practices Program* definition of a mentor¹, the data was used to explore three aspects of the role of a mentor: what quantitative and qualitative indicators represent an experienced practitioner; what kind of training, if any, do current mentors participate in; and what is the present perspective on the function and role of a mentor as they guide the mentee in a process of self-discovery. The data collection method was designed with three research questions in mind:

1. What defines an experienced practitioner in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?
2. What resources, training, and support is necessary to be an effective mentor in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field?
3. How is the role of a mentor currently perceived and defined in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?

Design

A mixed-methods approach was used in this study incorporating a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. In each subsection, the focus and structure of the data collection protocols are outlined. This includes a brief summary of the questions as well as the format of the question

¹This definition states that mentors are “experienced practitioners who are also specialized educators with the requisite knowledge and skills to guide adult learners in a process of professional self-discovery” (TIEM Center, 2022, p. 2)

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was utilized to gather general perspectives on of the role of a mentor using both qualitative and quantitative questions. It is important to note, some of the quantitative questions included an optional 'other: _____' response that participants used to add additional information which created a mixed-methods question. The questions in the questionnaire focused on four primary categories: demographic information, who is a mentor, what knowledge should they have, and what should they be able to do. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The first section of the questionnaire focused on gathering general demographic information from the participants, including questions related to their personal identity, linguistic background, professional credentials, and experience as a mentor and interpreter. There were fourteen demographic questions; eight were quantitative questions and six were classified as mixed-methods questions. The demographic questions were designed to identify who serves as a mentor and to better understand their professional background.

The next section focused on the quantitative and qualitative indicators that represent an experienced practitioner in the ASL-English interpreting field. Quantitative indicators of experience were considered in terms of the following criteria: after a certain number of years; after working in a variety of settings; after achieving national certification; and after mentoring others. Participants were also asked to consider what qualitative indicators represented an experienced practitioner through an open response format. There were three questions in this section: one was quantitative, one was qualitative, and one was a mixed-method question.

After that, participants were asked what kind of training, if any, do current mentors participate in. The questions were focused on the mentor's confidence in their ability as a mentor,

what kind of training they had received related to mentoring, and if they believed training or continuing education should be required to practice as a mentor. There were eight questions: one question was a Likert scale²; one question was quantitative, with three follow-up qualitative questions that sought to expand on the previous quantitative answer. Participants were asked to answer the follow-up question that matched their response to the original question. The final three questions included a mixed-methods approach.

Finally, participants were asked questions related to their views on the function and role of a mentor. They were also asked to describe the essential qualities of an effective mentor and indicate how they defined success in the mentoring relationship. There were three questions, and all of them were qualitative in nature. The questionnaire concluded with an optional opportunity for further participation in the research by participating in a one-on-one virtual interview.

Interview

The interview questions followed the same overarching themes as the questionnaire but allowed for the participants to add more information. The interviews were used to gain specific insight into perceptions about mentors in the interpreting field. There were 17 primary questions with 15 sub-questions and six follow-up questions to allow for further explanation. All questions were qualitative in nature.

Due to interview participants being recruited from the questionnaire, interviewees and their responses to the questionnaire were not anonymous. There were no questions during the interview related to the quantitative and qualitative indicators of experience, as these questions were answered during the questionnaire. Participants were asked about their beliefs related to mentor training; there were five primary questions with 13 sub questions The participants were

² “The Likert scale is a widely used tool in social science research, designed to gauge people's opinions and attitudes through a structured rating system” (EBSCO, n.d., para. 1).

asked about their beliefs related to the function and role of a mentor; There were 12 primary questions with two sub questions. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection: Dissemination, Population, and Treatment of Data

The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms and was disseminated through the use of various Facebook interpreting groups, the *RID research corner* (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2025), the *Parking Lot Debrief Podcast* (Jordon et al., Rehkopf, 2025) and through word of mouth. Participants were encouraged to share the questionnaire to increase the number of interpreters involved. The questionnaire was available to individuals who were 18 years of age or older, reside in the United States, and identify as both a working interpreter and mentor. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were given the opportunity to continue their involvement in the research by participating in an optional follow-up interview. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes, and it was anonymous unless participants elected to participate in the interview. If participants indicated their willingness to participate, their identities were kept confidential. The participation window was open for at least three weeks. This information can be found in the Questionnaire Consent Form in Appendix C.

Questionnaire responses were saved through Google Forms, then transferred to a password-protected Microsoft Excel file for data analysis. Qualitative responses from the questionnaire were additionally included in a password-protected Microsoft Word file due to the data analysis software that was used. All files were stored on a password-protected hard drive. Only the researcher and the thesis advisor had access to the raw data. After the data was transferred to the Microsoft Excel file, all identifiable information was removed.

The interview followed the same criteria for eligibility as the questionnaire due to participants being recruited from the questionnaire. One additional requirement was included that

indicated the participant must have filled out the questionnaire to participate in the interview. Participants were selected based on how much experience they had as an interpreter and mentor. Those who had the most interpreting and mentoring experience were prioritized for participation. Of those interpreters with the most experience interpreting and mentoring, five were selected for an interview. Interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom and lasted about one hour.

Interview responses were saved through Zoom's audio and visual recording software. A transcript was created using the recordings using a password-protected Microsoft Word document. Because the participants were not anonymous, they were assigned a number to maintain confidentiality. After the data was transferred to the Microsoft Word document, all identifiable information was removed, including names of other people, places, and any information that would identify the participant. All files were stored on a password-protected hard drive. Only the researcher and the thesis advisor had access to the raw data. All recordings, transcripts, and other related files will be deleted within 5 years after the thesis is published. Only the final deidentified version will remain. This information can be found in the Interview Consent Form in Appendix D.

Data Analysis Procedures

All the data collected was analyzed using triangulation and thematic analysis. Triangulation is a data analysis method that uses "multiple theories, data sources, methods, or investigators within the study of a single phenomenon" (Heale & Forbes, 2013, p. 98) which helps to reduce bias in the research and leads to increased confidence in research findings (Heale & Forbes, 2013, 2019). Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using triangulation and thematic analysis, I looked for themes that correlated with the current perspectives on the role of a mentor

in the ASL-English interpreting field, while paying special attention to how the quantitative data supported or refuted the qualitative data and vice versa.

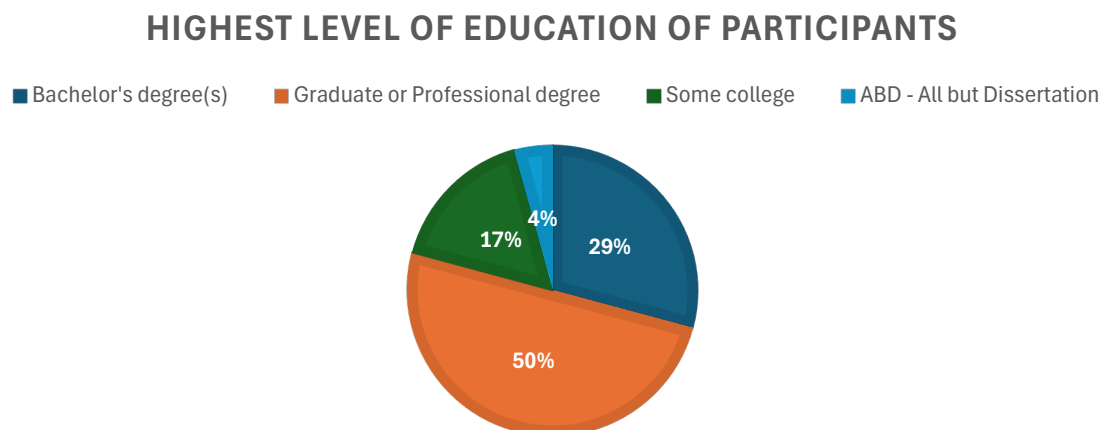
The questionnaire data was transferred to a Microsoft Excel file to be analyzed and coded. Quantitative responses were analyzed using Microsoft Excel formulas. Qualitative and mixed-methods questions were copied to a Microsoft Word document and input into Taguette, a qualitative analysis tool that allows the researcher to highlight and code for themes in the data (Rampin & Rampin, 2021). Data from the interviews was transferred to a Microsoft Word document to be analyzed. All responses were input into Taguette (Rampin & Rampin, 2021). Common themes were highlighted and coded.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. They are presented with the intent of sharing the perspectives of the participants to establish a foundation for further inquiry into this topic rather than suggesting a definitive standard for the field. The questionnaire section begins with describing the demographic information of the participants to gain an understanding of who is serving as a mentor and what kinds of experience they have. Then each of the subsequent sections align with the themes indicated by the three research questions using the categories of experienced practitioner, specialized educator, and mentoring skills. The interview participants' experiences and knowledge of training and resources for mentors, as well as skills necessary for effective mentoring relationships have been highlighted in the interview section.

Questionnaire

Twenty-four participants completed the questionnaire. Of the 24 participants, all identified as female. The participants varied in age ranging from 25-65. Eighty-three percent of participants identified as *White*, 4% identified as *Hispanic/Latino*; *White*, 4% identified as *American Indian or Alaska Native*; *White*, 4% identified as being of *Northern European Decent*, and 4% of the participants chose not to self-identify. As indicated by Figure 2, 50% of participants had a graduate or professional degree, 29% had a bachelor(s) degree, 17% had some college, and 4% had completed all but the dissertation (ABD) for doctoral work.

Figure 2*Demographics – Highest Level of Education of Participants*

Of the 24 participants, 18 had attended an interpreter training program (ITP)/interpreter education program (IEP). Heritage users of ASL comprised 4% of participants while 96% were not heritage users of ASL. Ninety six percent of participants identified as hearing while 4% of participants identified as hard-of-hearing (HOH). The participants had a range of certifications represented in Table 1, with several participants holding multiple certifications.

Table 1*Demographics – Types of Certifications*

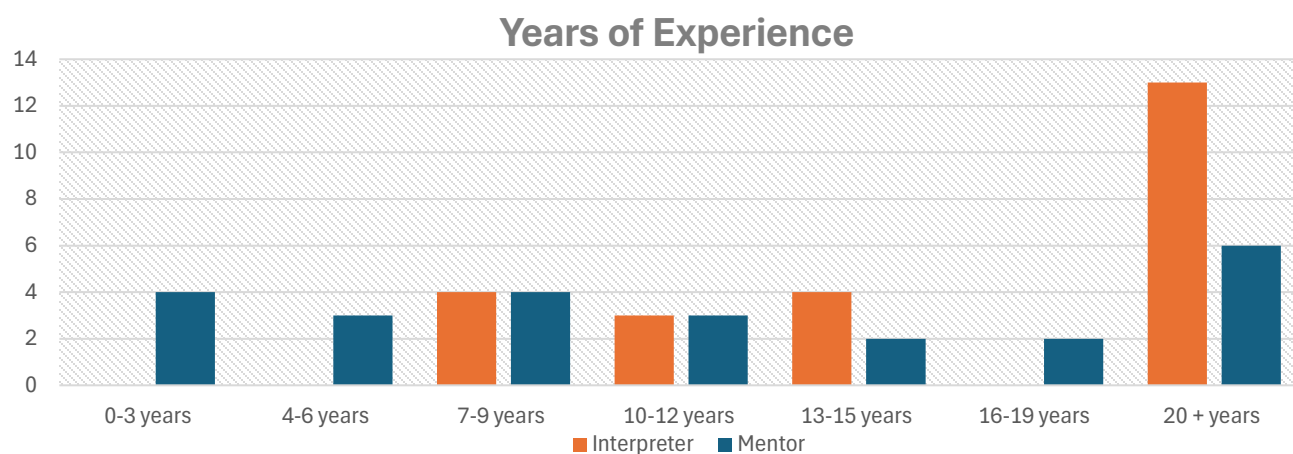
Type of Certifications	Responses
NIC	15
CI/CT	8
EIPA	6
BEI: Basic	2
BEI: Advanced	2
BEI: Master	2
Partial Certification	2
QMHI	2
BEI: Court	1
BEI: Medical	1
CI	1
CCHI CoreCHI	1

CoreCHI-Performance	1
NAD III	1
NIC Master	1
SC:L	1
Oregon Certified Health Care Interpreter	1

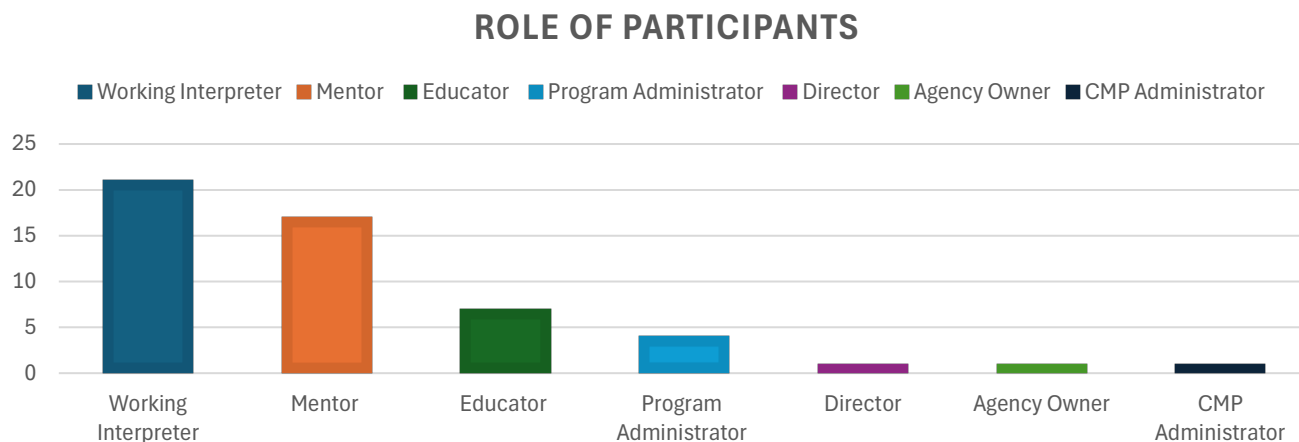
Participants were then asked about their years of experience as both a mentor and interpreter as represented in Figure 3. Fifty-four percent of the participants were practitioners with 20 years or more of experience in the interpreting field with all participants having at least seven years of interpreting experience. The participants had varying amounts of mentoring experience.

Figure 3

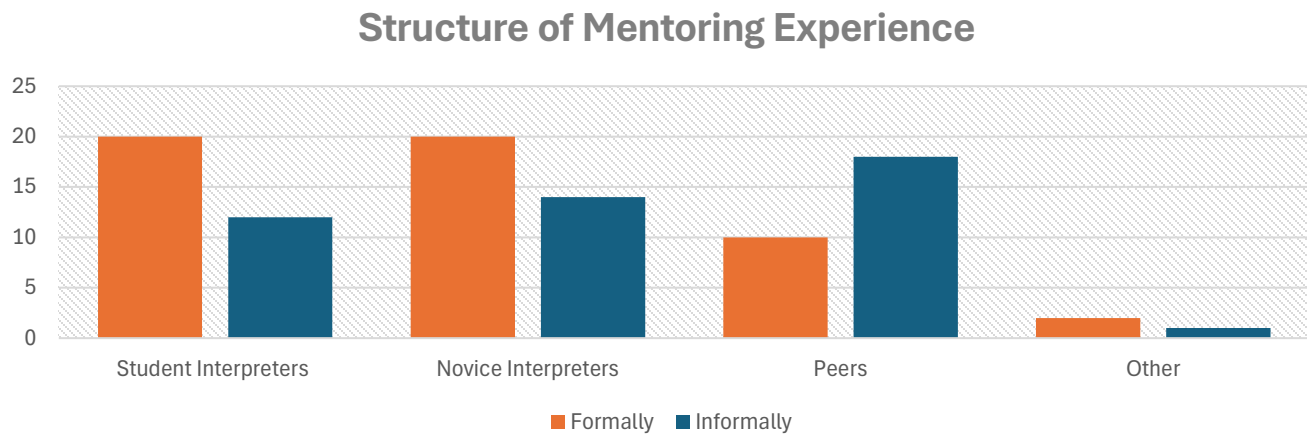
Demographics – Years of Experience



As represented in Figure 4, participants were asked about the current roles they serve in within the interpreting profession. including: working interpreter, mentor, educator, program administrator, and agency owner. Some of the participants added additional roles such as director and Certification Maintenance Program (CMP) Administrator.

Figure 4*Demographics – Roles of Participants*

The participants also represented diverse interpreting experiences including community, postsecondary, medical, video relay service (VRS)/video relay interpreting (VRI), performing arts, education, legal, mental health, platform, designated interpreting, outdoors, government, and business. Participants were also engaged in various forms of mentoring both formally and informally. These experiences included student interpreters, novice interpreters, peers, and others. ‘Others’ was not further explained and left open to the interpretation of the participant. Figure 5 represents the breakdown of the structure of the reported mentoring experiences.

Figure 5

Demographics – Structure of Mentoring Experience

Experienced Practitioner

In this section of the questionnaire, participants were asked three questions regarding what quantitative and qualitative indicators they believe represent an experienced practitioner. In question one, participants were asked to define an “experienced” practitioner by selecting all that applied based on four criteria: after a certain number of years, after working in a variety of settings, after achieving national certification, after mentoring others, and other. In question two, participants were asked to quantify their responses to question one (i.e. [x] number of years, [x] settings, [x] certifications, [x] number of previous mentees). This was a fill-in-the-blank question and participants were given the option to add additional information as needed. Due to this reason, some participants only shared their opinion and others shared specific numbers. Finally, in question three, participants were asked to describe what qualities defined an experienced practitioner.

Quantitative Indicators. Responses from all three questions that explicitly mentioned settings, years of experience, certification or number of mentees were coded as quantitative

indicators as represented in Table 2. Because the three questions overlapped, it is possible that one participant could have mentioned an indicator in multiple responses.

Table 2

Experienced Practitioner – Quantitative Indicators

Quantitative Indicators	Number of Occurrences
<i>Settings (Total)</i>	<i>32</i>
Settings	24
Settings – Specialization	8
<i>Years (Total)</i>	<i>22</i>
Years	13
Years – Full Time	6
Years – Part Time	3
<i>Certification</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Mentees</i>	<i>3</i>

Overall, the number of settings was the most prominent response with 32 occurrences. There were 24 occurrences that mentioned experience with a variety of settings as an indicator. There were eight occurrences that specifically mentioned specialization. Participants indicated that a variety of settings was preferred when labelling someone as an experienced practitioner. Responses ranged from at least two settings to 20 settings. There did not seem to be a consensus on what the exact number of settings best represented an experienced practitioner were. However, it seems to suggest that participants valued the number of settings as an indicator of experience. Some participants did indicate that specialization played an additional role in how they perceived experience.

Years of experience occurred 22 times in participant responses. Six of those responses discussed full-time work, and three of those responses discussed part-time work. Participants identified a range of years from two to seven years of experience as an indicator. Some participants also reported a difference between full-time work and part-time work. For full-time

work, participants mentioned that less time was necessary in gaining experience full-time, as compared to part-time. Settings and years of experience were the two quantitative indicators that were most often paired. One participant indicated, “I think it's if the two go together, years and variety of settings. If they are doing a variety of settings frequently then after even only a year, they would probably have insights that could benefit others.”

Fourteen responses mentioned certification as an indicator of experience. Four of the responses specifically named a certification test (NIC/RID, BEI, EIPA). Eight of the responses mentioned obtaining national certification, but they did not indicate a specific certification. One occurrence mentioned simply taking a performance assessment was sufficient, but did not indicate that passing was a requirement. The final occurrence indicated that certification was not required to label a practitioner as experienced.

In terms of number of mentees, there were only three responses. Two of those responses mentioned having experience with two to five mentees. However, the third response stated, “Mentorship is not a requirement of being an experienced practitioner. Those are separate things.”

Qualitative Responses. Qualitative responses were divided into two categories: professional knowledge and personal attributes, as indicated by Table 3. Professional knowledge was mentioned 48 times, and personal attributes were mentioned 31 times.

Table 3

Experienced Practitioner – Qualitative Indicators

Qualitative Indicators	Number of Occurrences
<i>Professional Knowledge (Total)</i>	<i>48</i>
Teaching Ability	16
Interpreting Experience	13
Linguistic Competence	8
Continuing Education	5
Ethical Decision-Making	4

Cultural Awareness	2
<i>Personal Attributes (Total)</i>	<i>31</i>
Connection to Diverse Deaf identities	10
Soft Skills	10
Connection to the Interpreting Community	8
Life Experience	3

Professional Knowledge. Professional knowledge was primarily focused on continuing education, cultural awareness, ethical decision-making, interpreting experience, linguistic competence, and teaching ability. The participants indicated that the knowledge a practitioner possessed points to their experience. Teaching ability was the most prominent response, followed by linguistic competence, then by interpreting experience. In terms of teaching ability, participants mentioned 16 times that an experienced practitioner should have some kind of knowledge related to teaching. This knowledge included mentoring approaches, skill drills, and various settings. Other responses mentioned passion for teaching, and a willingness to meet the mentee where they are. The participants also mentioned skills such as ability to analyze, ability to provide “contextualized examples,” ability to provide constructive feedback, ability to breakdown the work, and “able to explain concepts in multiple frameworks/differing levels of complexity.” Participants emphasized that the mentor is there to help build the foundation of the mentee’s skills which requires a versatile approach. One participant stated,

“Just because somebody has a lot of experience or has worked in a lot of settings does not mean that they have the ability to effectively teach the next generation of interpreter or help a peer level up. Mentors should be teachers first.”

In terms of linguistic competence, there were eight responses that mentioned language ability. The overarching theme was that an experienced practitioner needs to have a strong language foundation they may draw on to handle various interpreted interactions. Terms such as

*code switching*³ and *linguistic elasticity* were mentioned in regard to being able to match the consumer's language. Code switching was not defined by the participant. However, the participant referenced code switching in terms of being able to match the consumer. The participant who mentioned linguistic elasticity defined it as "the ability to adapt language to match others' needs and preferences."

Thirteen participants mentioned interpreting experience as an indicator of being an experienced practitioner. Breadth of knowledge/understanding/experience in the field was mentioned seven times. Other indicators included adaptability, knowledge of the interpreting process, ability to effectively interpret various situations, and being able to properly prepare for assignments.

There were five responses where participants indicated that some form of continuing education was necessary to be considered an experienced practitioner. Three of those responses indicated that the pursuit of knowledge was important, but did not mention a preference for the way in which that knowledge was gained. Two of the responses indicated specific pathways for continuing education, such as college, workshops, professional training, and/or advanced mentorship. In terms of ethical decision-making, there were four responses regarding the ability to effectively manage situations in an ethical manner with one participant specifically indicating the Code of Professional Conduct (NAD-RID, 2005) as a guide. In terms of cultural awareness, both responses emphasized being cognizant of cultural norms. One occurrence added that it was important to be able to "move seamlessly between [cultures]."

³ According to the Oxford Review, code switching is "the practice of shifting between different languages, dialects, or speech styles depending on the social context, audience, or situation. It often involves adapting one's communication style to fit in with different cultural, professional, or social environments" (Oxford Review, n.d.).

Personal Attributes. Personal attributes primarily focused on a practitioner's connection to diverse Deaf identities, connection to the interpreting community, life experience, and soft skills. These attributes were used by the participants to identify an experienced practitioner. Connection to diverse Deaf identities, connection to the interpreting community, and soft skills were the most prominent responses. In terms of connection to diverse Deaf identities, participants mentioned the importance of having a strong connection to the Deaf community. There was a strong emphasis on working with consumers of diverse demographics, such as, "age, language fluency, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status." In addition, participants mentioned the need for a good reputation in the Deaf community.

In terms of connection to the interpreting community, participants mentioned having a strong professional network, working well within a team of interpreters, and "a knowledge of what the community needs are (that includes both the deaf community and the interpreter community)." Participants also discussed the importance of mentoring others, being uplifting, and wanting the field to grow as indicators of an experienced practitioner.

Additionally, participants also mentioned a variety of skills they thought were necessary to be considered an experienced practitioner, also known as soft skills. These skills included clear communication, self-awareness, professionalism, collaboration, humility, the ability to see various perspectives, and "the ability to 'read the room,' to pick up on and include interpersonal nuances that can enhance interpreted interactions." In terms of life experience, participants mentioned that an experienced practitioner should have a variety of life experiences that allows them to see things from various perspectives.

Additional Findings. In addition to quantitative and qualitative indicators, there were 11 responses which did not fit into the aforementioned categories, but were still important to mention. These findings are represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Experienced Practitioner – Additional Findings

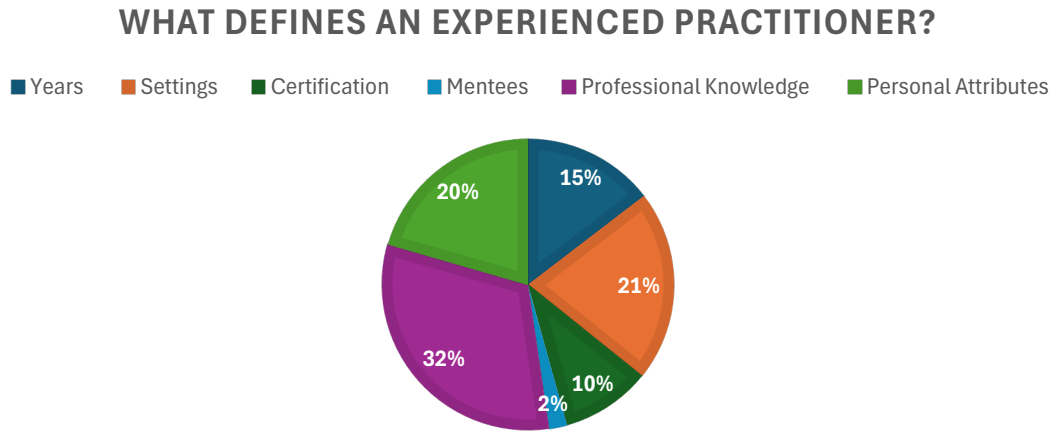
Additional Findings	Number of Occurrences
<i>Total</i>	<i>11</i>
Quantification of Experience	6
Mutual Learning	3
Other Factors of Experience	2

There were six responses related to how to quantify experience; five of those responses indicated that it was difficult to quantify, while one response indicated their view was the bare minimum to be considered an experience practitioner. There were two responses that indicated that experience is not always numerically quantifiable. One response mentioned, “Experienced does not always equal seasoned. Many successful interpreters move through the career without becoming ‘experienced.’” Finally, three responses mentioned mutual learning. Participants indicated that every interpreter brings something to the table, no matter their amount of experience and that everyone can learn from one another.

Overall, based on results from the questionnaire, an experienced practitioner can be described using both quantitative and qualitative indicators as represented in Figure 6. Of all responses in this section, professional knowledge was the most prominent response. Beyond professional knowledge, participants also placed a high importance on number of settings, personal attributes, and years of experience. Certification and number of mentees were the least prominent indicators of experience.

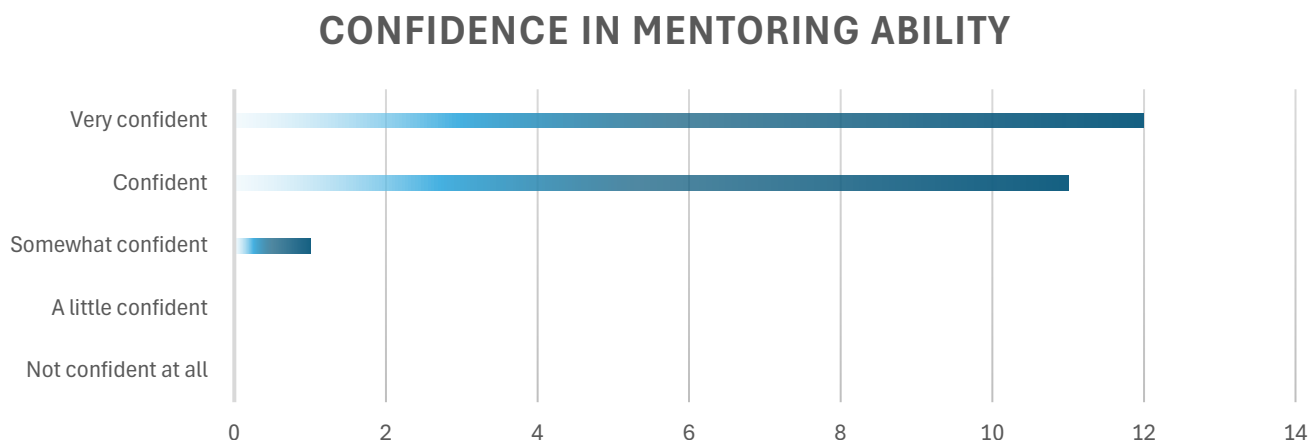
Figure 6

Experienced Practitioner – What Defines an Experienced Practitioner?

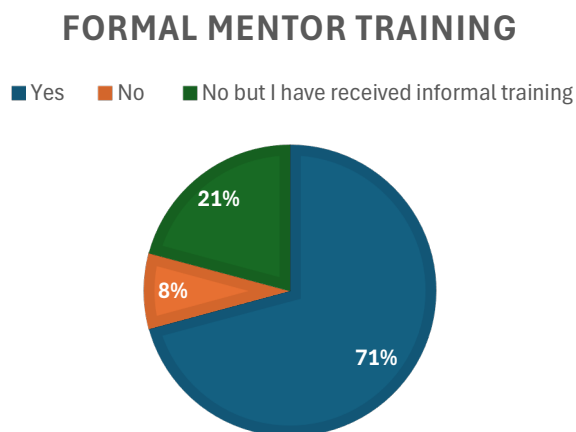


Specialized Educator

In this section, participants were asked eight questions regarding their experience with training as a mentor. Their responses have been outlined in this section. The themes have been grouped based on each question. In the first question, participants were asked about their confidence in their mentoring ability as represented in Figure 7. The goal of this question was to see how the mentor's confidence level related to the amount of training they had or had not received. 12 participants indicated that they felt very confident, 11 participants indicated that they felt confident and 1 participant indicated that they felt somewhat confident.

Figure 7*Specialized Educator – Confidence in Mentoring Ability*

Formal Mentor Training. In question two, participants were asked if they had participated in formal mentor training. The response options included yes, no, and no, but I have received informal training as represented by Figure 8. Most participants indicated that they had received some form of training whether it was formal or informal, with formal training being the most prominent response.

Figure 8*Specialized Educator – Formal Mentor Training*

Questions three through five asked participants to further explain their experience with additional training. Their response from question two determined which question, three through five, they would respond to. Participants who indicated they had received formal training were asked to indicate what kind of training they had received. There were three primary forms of training that the participants had mentioned: academic courses, on-the-job training, or workshops/training programs. Table 5 shows the training that was specifically named by the participants.

Table 5

Specialized Educator – Formal Mentor Training

Formal Mentor Training	
IIRAS Supervision Training	Pedagogy Courses
Project CLIMB	University of Northern Florida
Center for Atypical Language Interpreting (CALI)	Gallaudet University
CORE	Utah State University
EIP-CIP Mentor Training	State RID Chapter Workshops
Pepnet	Toastmasters
Sorenson	

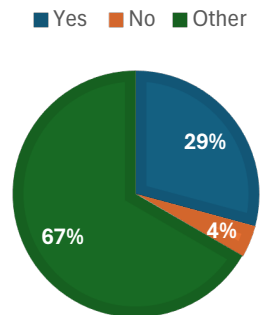
The two participants who indicated that they had not received any training to be a mentor (see Figure 8) indicated this was due to a lack of opportunities and a lack of confidence in the people who are providing the training. Participants who indicate that they had received informal training mentioned that they were involved in various communities of practices and had been mentored by other interpreters and members of the Deaf community.

In question six, participants were asked if they believed training should be required for someone to be a mentor as represented in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Specialized Educator – Should Mentor Training be Required for Someone to be a Mentor?

SHOULD TRAINING BE REQUIRED FOR SOMEONE TO BE A MENTOR?



Participants could answer yes, no, or other. Some participants used the other category to further explain their opinion. There were 13 times when participants indicated that they believed there should be a requirement of training, whether they answered yes or other. Some participants indicated that asking for additional support or training was often utilized to achieve a targeted goal.

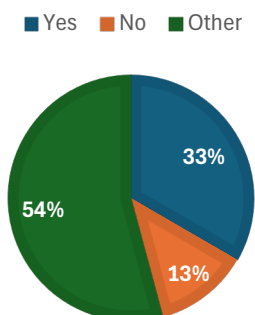
Eight participants indicated the “other” option and did not provide a clear yes or no opinion. Many of the participants who answered other indicated that the requirement of training would depend on the mentee. The responses to the other option include instances where a participant emphasized rather than having a specific training, there should be a “toolbox” of resources for mentors. Additionally, two participants indicated they did not believe that training should be required in part because the field is not there yet.

Professional Development as a Mentor. In question seven, participants were asked if they think continuing education/professional development should be required for mentors as represented in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Specialized Educator – Should Continuing Education/Professional Development be Required for Mentors?

SHOULD CONTINUING EDUCATION/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BE REQUIRED FOR MENTORS?



About half of the participants said they believed training should be required, while one third of the participants selected other and the remaining said no. Those who responded with other, mentioned that the requirement for continuing education/professional development should be dependent on how often they mentor. Some indicated that interpreters are already required to participate in professional development, and it does not need to be specific to mentoring to support their development as a mentor. One participant also indicated that the current structure of continuing education for interpreters “does not allow for this kind of system,” but that establishing communities of practice would function similarly and be beneficial. Payment for mentoring and credentialing standards for mentoring were also mentioned as factors for considering if continuing education/professional development should be required.

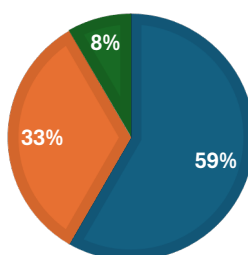
Access to Training, Resources, and Support. In question eight, the participants were asked if they believed they had access to mentor training and support as indicated by Figure 11.

Figure 11

Specialized Educator – Do You Have Access to Training?

DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO TRAINING, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Other



About 60% of participants indicated that they had enough access to training, resources, and support, while one third indicated that they didn't, and the rest answered other. Among the other responses, participants said they had access to training, but not to support and that the needs of the mentee impact their belief about access to training, support and resources.

Mentoring Skills

In this section, there were three questions related to participants' views on the function and role of a mentor, the qualities of an effective mentor, and how they defined success, respectively. Their responses have been outlined in this section. The themes have been grouped by question.

Function and Role of a Mentor. In question one, participants were asked what they believed the function and role of a mentor is. The main role identified was to provide support – participants provided 43 responses as represented in Table 6. Under the providing support theme, four key elements were discussed: skill development, self-discovery, serving as a guide, and collaboration. Skill development emphasized building skills, providing scaffolding for skill development and self-analysis, and developing opportunities for deliberate practice. When

participants mentioned self-discovery, they discussed helping mentees seek their own solutions and understanding how their background, biases, and education impact their work. Serving as a guide was defined as being a role model and providing mentees with advice. Participants defined collaboration as establishing clear communication with mentees, knowing the mentees' needs, and meeting them where they are.

Table 6

Mentoring Skills – Function and Role of a Mentor

Function and Role of a Mentor	Number of Occurrences
<i>Provide Support</i>	<i>43</i>
Skill Development	19
Self-Discovery	9
Serve as a Guide	8
Collaboration	7
<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>30</i>
Emotional Support	10
Be a Sounding Board	9
Provide Feedback	6
Provide Resources	5

The section regarding the responsibilities of a mentor had 30 responses, including providing emotional support, being a sounding board, giving feedback, and helping mentees obtain resources as represented in Table 6. Based on comments from participants, a mentor should be trustworthy, encouraging, provide advice, and be a listening ear. They should also function as a sounding board and offer advice from multiple perspectives. When giving feedback, mentors should prioritize constructive feedback. The types of resources identified as important by participants were resources that could be used as tools for preparing the next generation of interpreters, opportunities for growth, and professional networking.

Qualities of an Effective Mentor. In question two, participants were asked about what qualities they believed described an effective mentor. The qualities could be separated into two

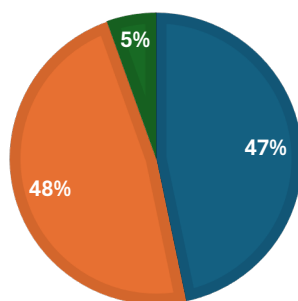
categories: traits and abilities. There were 43 occurrences where the participants mentioned a trait, and 44 occurrences where the participants mentioned something that a mentor should be able to do. There were five occurrences of traits or abilities that could not be grouped into the main themes. The comparison of results is represented visually in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Mentoring Skills – Qualities of an Effective Mentor

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR

■ Traits ■ Abilities ■ Other Findings



There were 43 mentions regarding traits that describe an effective mentor, as represented in Table 5. The most prevalent trait was being personable. Participants indicated that an effective mentor is someone who is kind and approachable, skilled in building rapport and has a strong personal network. There was also an emphasis placed on collaboration with the mentee. The participants noted that the mentors should be open-minded and work as a team with the mentee to establish expectations and structure of the mentoring relationship. Participants also indicated that mentors should be empathetic and patient with their mentees, while also being adaptable, meeting the mentee where they are. There was also mention of maintaining unconditional

positive regard⁴ for the mentee by being non-judgmental and having respect for the person.

Finally, participants indicated that humility by being able to accept your own mistakes and receive feedback on your mentoring skills was another quality of an effective mentor.

Table 7

Mentoring Skills – Traits of an Effective Mentor

Qualities of an Effective Mentor	Number of Occurrences
<i>Traits</i>	<i>43</i>
Personable	10
Collaborative	7
Empathetic	6
Patient	6
Adaptable	5
Unconditional Positive Regard	5
Humility	4

There were 44 mentions of abilities that an effective mentor should have as represented in Table 8. Teaching skills was the most prominent response. Participants indicated that mentors needed to know how to analyze and discuss the mentee’s work, notice patterns in their work, and have the skills to show how to do the work rather than simply telling. Feedback skills, listening skills, and interpreting expertise were equally represented in the participants’ responses. For feedback skills, participants indicated that it was important that feedback be constructive in nature and structured it in such a way that mentees felt heard and supported. They also indicated that feedback should not be a commentary on the person. One participant also mentioned that mentors should be “willing to have difficult conversations (it’s not always pretty).” In terms of listening skills, participants placed an emphasis on mentors needing to have, “good active listening skills.” Participants who mentioned interpreting expertise discussed a need for

⁴ Unconditional positive regard is defined as, “an attitude of caring, acceptance, and prizing that others express toward an individual irrespective of their behavior and without regard to others’ personal standards” (American Psychological Association, 2023, para. 1)

knowledge in the field and access to resources. Finally, participants indicated that it was important that a mentor is mentee-focused by meeting the mentee where they are in terms of strengths and weaknesses, respecting their privacy, and seeing them as an equal.

Table 8

Mentoring Skills - Abilities of an Effective Mentor

Qualities of an Effective Mentor	Number of Occurrences
<i>Abilities</i>	<i>44</i>
Teaching Skills	10
Feedback Skills	9
Listening Skills	9
Interpreting Expertise	9
Mentee-Focused	7

In addition to the two primary categories of traits and abilities that represent an effective mentor, there were five responses that did not fit in the categories, but still should be mentioned as indicated by Table 7. Participants indicated that enthusiasm for the work, integrity, critical thinking skills, and a growth mindset rather than a deficit mindset were important skills to be considered an effective mentor.

Table 9

Mentoring Skills – Additional Findings

Qualities of an Effective Mentor	Number of Occurrences
<i>Additional Findings</i>	<i>5</i>
Enthusiasm for the Work	1
Critical Thinking	1
Growth Mindset	1
Time Management	1
Integrity	1

Success Defined. In question three, participants were asked about how they defined success in the mentoring relationship. Their responses indicated two primary themes: progress toward a desired goal and relational effectiveness, as indicated by Table 5 and Figure 13.

Table 10*Mentoring Skills – Success Defined*

Success Defined	Number of Occurrences
<i>Progress Toward Desired Goals</i>	<i>20</i>
Growth	10
Goal Achievement	4
Based on Mentee's Opinion	4
Mutual Learning	2
<i>Relational Effectiveness</i>	<i>8</i>
Trust	3
Individual Needs Met	3
Mutual Respect	2

Figure 13*Mentoring Skills – Success Defined*

Seventy-one percent of the total responses to question three were centered on progress towards desired goals. There were 20 total responses: 10 were related to growth, four were related to goal achievement, four were related to the mentee's opinion, and two were based on mutual learning. When participants discussed growth, they referred to it as an improvement or a step towards the mentee's goals, but did not indicate that the goal needed to be achieved. The participants focused on progress in the mentee's skills, self-discovery, and an increase in confidence of the mentee.

There was also an emphasis placed on progress, whether or not the mentee saw the progress themselves. Conversely, participants who mentioned goal achievement, referred to a specific goal being met. Some participants also indicated that success was based on whether the mentee felt as though their goals were met and was not up to the mentor. Mutual learning was also mentioned where both the mentor and the mentee learned something from the relationship, even suggesting a lifelong collaboration.

While relational effectiveness was not as prominent as progress toward a desired goal, participants indicated that trust, mutual respect, and meeting the needs of the mentee as paramount to their definition of success. Participants who indicated that trust was a part of their definition also mentioned a bond between the mentor and mentee. There was an emphasis placed on the mentee's needs being met through clear communication, boundary setting, having one's learning style met, and feeling supported. Those who indicated mutual respect referred to it as still willing to work together outside of the mentoring relationship. One participant specifically mentioned that mutual respect "creates a brave space where people can be called out or in to discuss complex issues with neutrality and a willingness to learn and grow."

Interviews

Initially, five participants were selected to participate in the optional follow-up interview. The five were chosen because they had the most experience as a mentor and as an interpreter. Of the five contacted, only three responded. All identified as female, all of them had some form of certification, all of them identified as white, all of them identified as hearing, and 2/3 of the participants had a graduate degree.

Mentor Training

All three participants indicated various training they had received to become a mentor. The training mentioned followed similar themes to the results from the questionnaire. The participants mentioned graduate programs, workshops, training programs, and communities of practice. They were also asked if they used any specific learning theories or approaches to guide their mentoring style. Their responses are outlined below.

Training Available for Mentors. The participants indicated that they believed mentor training was beneficial to their practice. However, there were two distinct beliefs about the availability of training and resources. One participant mentioned that they believed mentor training was important but stated that there were limited resources available. However another participant indicated that the resources are available, but that it is being developed in “silos” leading many people to assume that there are no resources available.

In addition to the mentions of mentor training that the participants knew of, or had been a part of from the questionnaire, the interview participants also mentioned specific training that they were aware of as represented in Table 12.

Table 11

Mentor Training Available

Mentor Training Available	
Master Mentor Program	TIEM Center
Interpreting Pedagogy Programs	Graduate to Certification (GTC) Programs
CATIE Center	CORE
Foundations in Training – IMI	MIP Mentoring

Learning Theories and Approaches. Two of the participants mentioned learning theories or approaches they used to support their mentoring practice. Constructivism was a common theme. One participant explained that it was similar to coordinating learning

experiences where the mentor considers what learning experiences would best support their mentee's development through the lens of zone of proximal development and scaffolding. There were two approaches mentioned where mentoring is viewed as coaching and the concept of "train the trainer." In addition to training programs, one participant also mentioned three books that they used to inform their mentoring approach: *Mentorship in Sign Language Interpreting* (Winston & Lee, 2013), *The Mentor's Companion* (Gordon & Magler, 2007), and *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* (Zachary & Fain, 2022).

Communities of Practice. A major theme in the responses related to mentor training was being involved with communities of practice. Two of the participants emphasized their interactions with their colleagues where they experienced peer mentoring. During these experiences, the mentors were able to collaborate about what they were doing and ask for support or clarification as needed. It allows mentors to learn from each other's successes and failures to overall improve the mentoring experience.

One participant specifically mentioned they preferred to work with other mentors in a community of practice because everyone brought different experiences and backgrounds where they could all learn from one another. This learning focuses primarily on various interpreting models, terminology or concepts that some mentors may or may not be familiar with. The other participant who mentioned communities of practice also emphasized that information should not exist within "silos." The more that mentors spend time in community with one another, the more resources are being shared. They also mentioned how sharing information also supports "curriculum standardization for best practices in mentor training."

Effective Mentoring Relationships

The three interview participants shared various stories from their experience with mentoring. Each participant shared what was effective and ineffective in their mentoring relationships. Based on the responses, ineffective mentoring relationships were those where the mentor had the wrong intentions. In this instance, the participant stated that mentors who are only in it to make themselves shine, ultimately have ineffective mentoring relationships. Another comment emphasized that it is important to be respectful of the mentee because they will likely be a colleague in the future. Mentoring relationships where there was inconsistency in meeting, little structure, no goal, and lack of mentor preparation were also factors in determining if the relationship was ineffective.

However effective mentoring includes guiding the mentee in their process of self-discovery, having an agreed upon structure of the mentoring relationship, setting expectations and collaboration. This will be discussed more below. It is important to note that one participant emphasized there is no not one right way of mentoring but it should contain these components. The specifics of how are ultimately left up to the mentor-mentee pair.

Self-Discovery. Two of the participants emphasized the importance of self-discovery and its impact on self-efficacy. Through the process of mentorship, the participants noted how they work to prioritize the mentee's self-discovery above all else. They mentioned that as mentees start to see the connections between the choices they make in their work and the impact of those choices, the mentees are better able to increase their understanding and awareness of what they are doing and why. One participant mentioned that while there is value in the feedback someone receives on their work, it is more meaningful for the mentee to make those connections on their own. As the participant described it, the mentee can reflect on the choices they make that

potentially led to an undesirable outcome. By reflecting on those choices, the mentee is able to make connections of why that may happen and adjust their approach. While there can be benefit to the feedback provided by the mentor, the participant emphasized when the mentees are given the space to discover their own solutions, they are able to make more meaningful connections that will have a more lasting impact on their work.

The other participant also outlined an experience of the mentee making meaningful connections about their work. In this situation, the mentor asked the mentee to look at a recorded sample of their work. The mentee was asked to review the sample and give themselves feedback. When the mentee and mentor reviewed the sample together, the mentee was able to see correlations between what they thought about their work and what the mentor thought about their work. In this situation, there was often overlap between the mentee's notes and the mentor's notes in terms of what they did well and what they needed to work to improve. The participant emphasized this practice helped to build the self-efficacy of the mentee because "the self-efficacy gives them the motivation, the encouragement, [and] the confidence to continue developing their skills."

There was also a connection between self-discovery and the concept of mentoring as coaching. The participant mentioned that the "traditional mindset" of mentoring focuses on suggesting, while mentoring as coaching focuses on guiding the mentee as they make meaningful connections. The participant mentioned that it was difficult at times to avoid making suggestions and that mentors "need so much support and training in this approach because they keep wanting to slide into being a teacher model."

Structure of Mentoring Relationships. Two participants emphasized that structured mentoring relationships were more effective as compared to those without structure. They

outlined different components of how a mentoring relationship is structured, but did not suggest that one was more important than the other. The time frame of the mentoring relationship could be short term, like during ITP/IEP practicums, or long term, like an ongoing relationship. The participants emphasized the goals of the mentorship determined whether it was short term or long term. It is also important to note that one participant noted a shift in how they structured their mentoring relationships from one that is skill-based to a more holistic similar to how their work as an interpreter has shifted.

Both participants mentioned that while impromptu mentoring sessions can be beneficial, planned mentoring sessions were more effective due to consistency and repetition. The participants stated that effective mentor relationships require intentional planning and have clearly stated goals for the relationship. There was also mention of determining the timeline and plan of how to meet the stated goal, availability of both the mentor and mentee, and outlining of the frequency of mentoring sessions. Both participants also mentioned that they have used “mentor contracts” as a method to outline these expectations.

Expectation Management. All three participants mentioned expectation management in some form or another. One participant noted that sometimes, mentees assume that a mentoring relationship will be skill-based, when in actuality it includes skill building plus decision-making, guiding, and discussion of choices. All three participants mentioned the importance of setting expectations for the relationship as a method to support its effectiveness. Typically, they mentioned expectations are set at the beginning of the relationship. The specific agreed upon terms are up to each mentor-mentee pair. When the expectations were not set, one participant mentioned that it caused a barrier to the effectiveness of the relationship. A few common themes to note are clear boundaries, transparency, and clear role delineation. One participant also

emphasized how mentees are expected to be equal participants within the relationship; they are expected to bring topics of discussion or skills to work on.

Mentoring as a Collaboration. All three participants emphasized that mentoring is a collaboration between the mentor and the mentee; they work together towards the same goal. Two participants mentioned how it is important that both parties take ownership of the effectiveness of the relationship as well as be accountable to one another to meet the stated goals. However, the mentor and mentee have specific roles and responsibilities within the relationship that differ from one another. One participant mentioned that it is the responsibility of the mentee to set the goals of the relationship. Two of the participants mentioned that a mentor is supposed to provide constructive feedback and guidance for the mentee as they accomplish their goal. The mentor may not always have the answers, as one participant mentioned, but it is the mentor's job to continue to work to understand the thoughts and perspectives of their mentee.

Two participants also mentioned that compatibility played a factor in the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. There are times where the mentee and mentor work together well, but there are also times where the two people are not a good fit and that the mentor may not be "the right person" to support that mentee. One factor that influenced compatibility was whether the mentor had the resources the mentee needed.

Additional Findings

While this finding did not fall under the categories of training or effective mentoring practices, one participant emphasized the need for interpreters with diverse backgrounds to be mentors and to be a part of the process of creating mentor training. The participant stated that if someone creating a mentor training is only reaching out to people in their circles with similar backgrounds, then there is a gap in the training for mentors. The example given by the

participant was that if one person who was born and raised in the United States is familiar with navigating the healthcare system in a specific way, their lived experience is going to be vastly different than someone who is an immigrant and must learn to navigate the healthcare system. The participant emphasized that there could be a potential disconnect between those individuals, but that disconnect could be circumvented if mentor training already included various perspectives of people with diverse backgrounds.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the research study as well as their significance in mentoring and what their implications are for mentors. The goal of this analysis is to answer three research questions:

1. What defines an experienced practitioner in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?
2. What resources, training, and support is necessary to be an effective mentor in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field?
3. How is the role of a mentor currently perceived and defined in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?

Defining an Experienced Practitioner

Based on responses from the questionnaire, participants identified quantitative and qualitative indicators that best represented an experienced practitioner as represented in Table 13.

Table 12

Quantitative and Qualitative Indicators of an Experienced Practitioner

Quantitative Indicators	Qualitative Indicators
<i>Settings</i>	<i>Professional Knowledge</i>
Specialization	Teaching Ability
<i>Years</i>	Interpreting Experience
Full Time	Linguistic Competence
Part Time	Continuing Education
<i>Certification</i>	Ethical Decision-Making
<i>Mentees</i>	Cultural Awareness
	<i>Personal Attributes</i>
	Connection to Diverse Deaf identities
	Soft Skills
	Connection to the Interpreting Community
	Life Experience

They also identified a few other factors that did not fit into these categories; those factors included the importance of mutual learning, the difficulty in determining quantitative indicators, and a commentary on how there are multiple ways to consider someone an experienced practitioner.

Based on the findings of the study, the top three indicators of an experienced practitioner were professional knowledge (32%), experience with a variety of settings (21%) and personal attributes (20%). Factors such as years of experience (15%), certification (10%) and experience with other mentees (2%) were mentioned but not as prioritized. With this in mind, it is evident that qualitative indicators are more highly prioritized when determining if someone is an experienced practitioner in the ASL-English interpreting field, specifically when discussing mentoring. This finding was unexpected based on the initial research conducted. As previously mentioned, Nicodemus and Emmorey's (2015) study used quantitative indicators to differentiate a novice interpreter from an expert interpreter. However as represented by the data in this study, mentors consider qualitative indicators as more important factors when determining experience. This finding seems to correlate to the definition of a practitioner that focuses on competencies (see Board of Evaluation of Interpreters, 2025; The Caviart Group, LLC, 2016; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005), but does not identify a threshold to pass in order to transition from practitioner to experienced practitioner.

As previously defined, a practitioner in the ASL-English interpreting field is defined as an individual who possesses specific skills and knowledge in a particular field and engages in opportunities for continued growth and skill development (Drude et al., 2019; Humphrey et al., 2020). However, there was not a clear definition of what an *experienced* practitioner is. These findings would suggest that mentors believe an experienced practitioner in the ASL-English

interpreting field is an individual who has cultivated a comprehensive knowledge base that spans various fields of practice, has extensive professional experience spanning multiple settings, and actively seeks opportunities for professional development.

Mentor Training

The participants in the study generally believe that training for mentors is beneficial, as evidenced by the questionnaire data that shows that 92% of participants had received some form of training whether it was formal (71%) or informal (21%). This theme was also represented in the interview responses. The training typically was received through academic coursework, on-the-job training, workshops, and mentor training programs. It is also interesting to note that 96% of participants indicated that they felt either confident or very confident in their mentoring ability which indicates a correlation between the necessity of training and the confidence in mentoring ability.

In terms of requiring training and continued education units (CEUs) to be a mentor, there was a lot of varying perspectives. Most people generally agreed that training and continuing education was necessary but disagree on whether or not it should be required. It was often reported that requiring training or CEUs to be a mentor depended on each mentor's situation and the needs of the mentee. Based on the results of the study, mentors should receive training to be an effective mentor, but they should partake in training that best aligns with their situation and the needs of their mentee. This finding seems to contradict the models of training presented in the literature review. For interpreters who want to be QMHI certified or become an IIRAS case conferencing leader, they are required to engage in additional training to be receive that certification/title (Alabama Department of Mental Health, n.d.; Dean & Smith, 2018). Further

research would need to be conducted in the ASL-English interpreting field to determine how the requirement of additional training and/or CEUs should be addressed.

Overall, 59% of participants believed they had access to training and support, while 33% believed they did not. Those who indicated other mentioned that they believed that determining if they had enough access to training depended on the needs of the mentee. This disparity in whether or not there was training for mentors mirrors my own perspective when I began this study. However, based on the literature (*Master Mentor Curriculum*, 2005; Ramsey Wolford & Perchik, 2020; TIEM Center, 2022) and participant responses (see Table 5 and Table 12) there is mentor training available. While research has shown that training is available, still a large percentage of mentors feel as though it is not. One interview participant proposed a possible reasoning for this; the interview participant stated that training and support for mentors exists in “silos.” One interesting parallel I noticed was the parallel between 59% of participants believing they had access to training and that 50% of participants had some form of graduate level training. This would seem to suggest that those who feel they had access to additional training had access because they were exposed to it during their graduate work. This could pose a disparity for mentors who do not have the ability to attend graduate school. Future research could investigate how to create equitable access to mentor training resources.

There was also a clear need for communities of practice for mentors as indicated by the interview participants. This is supported by Wenger (2000). These spaces would allow mentors the opportunity to share their experiences as well as resources that they have with their fellow colleagues. Communities of practice allow for mentors to discuss what has been effective and ineffective within their practice. It also could provide space for diverse perspectives to share their experiences, ultimately leading to an increase in effective practices that consider diverse

populations. Research presented by Carpenter (2017) supports this finding because Carpenter's study emphasizes the need for educators and mentors to understand the needs of Black students and to include Black Deaf and Black hearing communities in curriculum development/advances in the field. If mentors seek to include diverse populations in their communities of practice, this could lead to improved experiences for diverse populations of interpreters who experience mentoring (Carpenter, 2017).

Not only that, but the increased use of communities of practice could reduce the impact of the previously mentioned "silos." Based on Wegner's (2000) criteria for a community of practice ⁵, mentors who are engaged in communities of practice should share resources with one another. When additional resources are shared, it could address the disparity in the belief on the availability of mentor training; it would provide opportunities for interpreters to receive additional resources to improve their practice as a mentor, no matter what their access to graduate school is.

During the interviews, participants were able to share additional perspectives on what learning theories supported their mentoring practice. Participants mentioned frameworks that primarily align with constructivism such as zone of proximal development and scaffolding which is supported by Zachary & Fain (2022), Merriam & Bierema (2013), Colonomos and Moccia (2013), Baumgartner (2001), Bouchard (2019), Mezirow (2000) and Daloz (2012). With these frameworks in mind, mentor training should be rooted in constructivist principles focused on Zone of Proximal Development mentors can apply theories used in academic settings to their work ultimately improving the effectiveness of their practices and guide the process of self-discovery for the mentee.

⁵ (1) the shared understanding of the purpose of the group, (2) the participants engage with one another in a mutually beneficial way based on a set of norms, and (3) there are shared resources amongst the group (Wegner, 2000).

Skills Necessary to be a Mentor

Based on the results of this study, the role of a mentor is to provide support to the mentee, while the function of a mentor is to have the skills necessary to support as represented in Figure 14. This mirrors Yeager's (2024) principle of the mentor mindset that states that mentors should have high expectations but also provide support to meet those expectations. As represented by the participant responses, mentors can hold high expectations by being emotional support for the mentees, being a sounding board, and providing feedback and resources; then mentors support the skill development and self-discovery of the mentee while collaborating with them and serving as a guide (see Figure 14).

Table 13

The Function and Role of a Mentor

Function of a Mentor	Role of a Mentor
<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>Provide Support</i>
Emotional Support	Skill Development
Be a Sounding Board	Self-Discovery
Provide Feedback	Serve as a Guide
Provide Resources	Collaboration

It is also interesting to note that when participants were asked about the desired qualities of an effective mentor, the traits mentioned aligned with research done by Gordon and Magler (2007) and the NCIEC (2016). These qualities have been outlined in Figure 15.

Table 14*Qualities of an Effective Mentor*

Qualities of an Effective Mentor	
<i>Abilities</i>	<i>Traits</i>
Teaching Skills	Personable/Humility
Feedback Skills	Collaborative
Listening Skills	Empathetic
Interpreting Expertise	Patient
Mentee-Focused	Adaptable
	Unconditional Positive Regard

Effective mentoring relationships also require that a mentor uses a structured approach. This structure is ultimately left up to the mentor-mentee pair having a plan is an important aspect of effective mentoring. Some participants mentioned using a mentor contract to outline the goals and expectations of the relationship as supported by Gordon and Magler (2007) and Goodman (2013). Moving forward, mentors should continue to apply these practices as it best suits their needs and the needs of the mentee. Future research could investigate what components of the mentor contract are most beneficial.

Based on this study, success in mentoring relationship is defined by two factors, progress towards desired goals and relational effectiveness as represented in Figure 16.

Table 15*Success in Mentoring Relationships*

Success Defined	
<i>Progress Toward Desired Goals</i>	<i>Relational Effectiveness</i>
Growth	Trust
Goal Achievement	Individual Needs Met
Based on Mentee's Opinion	Mutual Respect
Mutual Learning	

This is important for mentoring relationships in the ASL-English interpreting field because it is the lens through which mentoring relationships should be evaluated. In addition, future research related to improving mentor practices, should consider these factors.

The Process of Self-Discovery

One overarching finding from this study was the interconnectedness of the TIEM Center's (2022) definition of a mentor. When participants were asked to define an experienced practitioner, they mentioned teaching ability and mentoring skills as a part of the criteria they included. Similarly when asked about what mentoring skills were necessary, participants responded that the experiences a mentor had and the teaching ability they possessed were factors to consider. Based on this, I would suggest that a mentor must not be just an experienced practitioner or just a specialized educator or just have mentoring skills; they should possess all three traits to guide the mentee on a process of self-discovery. This principle is depicted in Figure 14. If one was to remove a portion of the circle, there would be a gap and it would be more difficult to satisfy the demands of the role of a mentor. Thus, mentors should focus their practice on these three factors as recommended by the TIEM Center (2022) to be considered an effective mentor.

Figure 14

The Interconnected Role of a Mentor



Limitations of the Study

There were two primary limitations to this study: the small sample size and the similar demographics of the participant. There were only 24 participants in the questionnaire and three participants in the interviews. For the questionnaire, of the 24 participants, all identified as female, all of them had some form of certification, 96% identified as hearing, 83% identified as white, and 50% of participants had a graduate degree. For the interview, of the three participants, all identified as female, all of them had some form of certification, all of them identified as white, all of them identified as hearing, and 2/3 of the participants had a graduate degree. Based on the similar demographics of the participants, it is difficult to generalize the findings of the study. In addition, the study may not fully capture crucial perspectives from diverse populations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The goal of this study was to understand what it means to be a mentor, based on the experiences of ASL-English interpreters who are currently mentoring. The data was used to explore three aspects of the role of a mentor based on the *Effective Practices Mentoring Program* (TIEM Center, 2022) definition⁶ of a mentor: what quantitative and qualitative indicators represent an experienced practitioner; what kind of training, if any, current mentors participate in; and what the present perspective is on the function and role of a mentor. The research will focus on these three questions:

1. What defines an experienced practitioner in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?
2. What resources, training, and support is necessary to be an effective mentor in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field?
3. How is the role of a mentor currently perceived and defined in the field of American Sign Language-English interpreting?

Data was collected using a questionnaire and interviews to better understand the current perceptions of the role of a mentor. Participants were asked to state what criteria they used to define an experienced practitioner based on years of experience, number of settings, certification, and number of mentees. To define a specialized educator, participants were asked questions about their beliefs related to mentor training in terms of its benefits, what kinds were available, and whether or not it should be required. For determining the necessary skills to be a mentor,

⁶This definition states that mentors are “experienced practitioners who are also specialized educators with the requisite knowledge and skills to guide adult learners in a process of professional self-discovery” (Winston et al., n.d., p. 2).

participants were asked about the role and function of a mentor and how they defined success in mentoring relationships.

The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms and was disseminated through the use of various Facebook interpreting groups, the *RID research corner* (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2025), the *Parking Lot Debrief Podcast* (Jordon et al., Rehkopf, 2025) and through word of mouth. Participants were encouraged to share the questionnaire to increase the number of interpreters involved. Interview participants were recruited from the questionnaire. Participants were selected based on how much experience they had as an interpreter and mentor. Those who had the most interpreting and mentoring experience were prioritized for participation.

The findings of the study showed that mentors are multifaceted interpreters within the ASL-English interpreting field. They are experienced practitioners, as well as specialized educators, and have a specific set of skills that makes them uniquely qualified to support interpreters in the field. This research has shown that an experienced practitioner is an individual who has cultivated a comprehensive knowledge base that spans various fields of practice, has extensive professional experience spanning multiple settings, and actively seeks opportunities for professional development. A mentor who is a specialized educator is someone who is actively involved in mentor training and a community of practice to improve their mentoring skills. The specific set of skills needed to be a mentor are based on adult learning theories, but are ultimately customizable to the specific mentor-mentee pair. These findings have also shown a need for increased collaboration both between the mentee and mentor, but also amongst mentors especially with diverse backgrounds. Finally, there needs to be a centralized location that houses all of the current resources and any future resources to reduce barriers to accessing mentor

training resources. This would hopefully lead to increased availability of resources for mentors and ultimately more effective mentoring relationships.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. I have read the consent
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. I live in the United States
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Electronic Consent Signature - By selecting YES, you agree to participate in this research and that you are 18 years or older. If you select NO, please close this survey.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Demographic Information

This information is being gathered to better understand the background of mentors in the ASL-English interpreting field.

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Prefer not to say
 - e. Other: _____
2. What is your age?
 - a. 18-24
 - b. 25-31
 - c. 32-38
 - d. 39-44
 - e. 45-51
 - f. 52-58
 - g. 59-65
 - h. 65 and above
 - i. Prefer not to say
3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
 - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Hispanic/Latino
 - e. Mixed/Multi
 - f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - g. White
 - h. Prefer not to say

- i. Other: _____
4. What is your highest level of education?
 - a. High School Diploma/GED
 - b. Some college
 - c. Bachelor's degree
 - d. Graduate or Professional degree
 - e. Prefer not to say
 - f. Other: _____
5. Did you go to an Interpreter Training Program (ITP)/Interpreter Education Program (IEP)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to say
 - d. Other: _____
6. Are you a heritage user of American Sign Language?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to say
7. What is your hearing status?
 - a. Deaf
 - b. Hard of Hearing
 - c. Hearing
 - d. Prefer not to say
 - e. Other: _____
8. What certifications do you hold (related to interpreting)? Please select all that apply. If you hold a certification that is not listed, please add it to the 'other' category.
 - a. Board of Evaluation for Interpreters – Basic (BEI: Basic)
 - b. Board of Evaluation for Interpreters – Advanced (BEI: Advanced)
 - c. Board of Evaluation for Interpreters – Master (BEI: Master)
 - d. National Interpreter Certification (NIC)
 - e. Does not apply to me
 - f. Prefer not to say
 - g. Other: _____
9. What year did you obtain your certifications?
10. How many years of experience do you have in the field of interpreting as an interpreter?
 - a. 0-3 years
 - b. 4-6 years
 - c. 7-9 years
 - d. 10-12 years
 - e. 13-15 years

- f. 16-19 years
 - g. 20+ years
11. How many years of experience do you have in the field of interpreting as a mentor?
- a. 0-3 years
 - b. 4-6 years
 - c. 7-9 years
 - d. 10-12 years
 - e. 13-15 years
 - f. 16-19 years
 - g. 20+ years
12. What is your current role in the interpreting field? (Check all that apply)
- a. Working Interpreter
 - b. Mentor
 - c. Educator
 - d. Program Administrator
 - e. Agency Owner
 - f. Other: _____
13. What interpreting settings do you primarily work in? (Check all that apply)
- a. Community
 - b. Educational (K-12)
 - c. Postsecondary
 - d. Medical
 - e. Legal
 - f. Video Relay Service (VRS)/Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)
 - g. Performing Arts
14. I have mentored the following individuals (Options include *Formally* and *Informally*)
- a. Student interpreters
 - b. Novice interpreters
 - c. Peers

Experienced Practitioner: Who is a Mentor?

1. From your perspective, what defines an “experienced” practitioner? (Check all that apply)
- a. After a certain number of years
 - b. After working in a variety of settings
 - c. After achieving national certification
 - d. After mentoring others
 - e. Other: _____

2. Based on your response above, how would you measure (quantify) how much experience should be had? (i.e. [x] number of years, [x] settings, [x] certifications, [x] number of previous mentees)
3. In your own words, what qualities define an experienced practitioner in the ASL-English Interpreting Field?

Resources, Training, and Support for Mentors: What Training is Needed?

1. How confident do you feel in your ability to be an effective mentor?
 - a. 1 – Not confident
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5 – Confident
2. Have you participated in formal mentor training?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. No, but I have received informal training
3. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, what training have you received to be a mentor?
4. If you answered “no,” why have you not participated in formal training?
5. If you answered “no, but I have received informal training,” what did that training entail?
6. Do you think training should be required for someone to be a mentor?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other: _____
7. Should mentors be required/expected to participate in professional development or continuing education courses in order to be a mentor?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other: _____
8. Do you feel you have enough access to training, resources, and support to be an effective mentor?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other: _____

Role of a Mentor: How to Approach the Role

1. From your perspective, what is the function and role of a mentor?
2. What qualities do you believe are essential for an effective mentor?
3. How do you define success in the mentoring relationship?

Further Participation in the Research

This section refers to your willingness to participate in a one-on-one virtual interview regarding your beliefs and opinions about mentoring.

If you select YES, you will be directed to provide your contact information. The primary researcher will then contact you with the next steps.

If you select NO, you will be directed to the end of the survey and will not be given the option to participate in the interview.

1. Are you willing to participate in a virtual interview?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Interview Participation

(Note: This section will only be available if the participant clicks 'Yes'. If they click 'No', they will be directed to the end of the questionnaire.)

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Number of years of experience as a mentor: _____

Thank you for completing this survey

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Mikaela Jordon (mjordon24@mail.wou.edu) or Dr. Elisa Maroney (maronee@mail.wou.edu)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Introduction Script:

Thank you for taking the time to answer some questions about your experience with mentoring in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field. Today I will be asking questions about your experience as a mentor. Please answer the questions based on your experiences and beliefs. Words like effective and beneficial are meant to be a guide but are ultimately open to your interpretation. Give as much or as little information as you choose, but please remember to maintain confidentiality and respect for peers when applicable. If at any point you wish to stop the interview, we will stop recording and all records of the interview will be deleted. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Questions:

1. From your perspective, have your experiences as a mentor been effective? Why or why not?
2. What made you feel prepared to take on a mentee?
3. What makes an effective mentoring relationship?
4. What makes an ineffective mentoring relationship?
5. What did you like about the experience?
- a. What examples can you give?
6. What did you not like about the experience?
- a. What examples can you give?
7. What does success (e.g. certification, getting a job) look like to you in the mentoring relationship?
8. When you first entered into a mentoring relationship, what were your expectations?
- a. Did the mentoring relationship meet your expectations? Why or why not?
- b. What strategies have you employed to guide the mentoring session?
- c. How do you establish expectations of the mentoring relationship with your mentee?
9. What is your attitude towards mentoring? How has your attitude changed from before you were a mentor to now?
10. What is your motivation for entering into a mentoring relationship?
11. How do you feel that expectations are upheld during the mentoring relationship?
12. Have you received any kind of training for being a mentor?
- a. If yes, what kind of training was it? [tell me about it/tell me why you decided to pursue training]
- b. If no, why not?
- i. Do you know where to find mentor training?
- ii. If it were free would you do it - get into the time and the cost
 1. How much are you willing to pay for training?
 2. How much are you willing to commit to mentor training?
 3. How much time have you committed to mentor training?
 4. How can training circumvent barriers to in-person engagement-online, self-paced?
13. What, if anything, are you doing currently to improve your practice as a mentor?
14. Do you think mentors should be expected/required to engage in professional development specifically related to mentoring? Why or why not?

- a. How do you think mentees would appreciate/benefit from mentors who must participate in mentor professional development?
- b. Do you believe mentors should be compensated for mentoring?
 - 15. Should there be more structure or more requirements related to being a mentor?
 - 16. What are the current approaches/philosophies of mentoring or educational theories that you utilize with your mentee?
 - 17. How do you set expectations in the mentoring relationship?

Follow-Up Questions:

- 1. Please expand on that.
- 2. What, if anything, else would you like to share that you have not yet had an opportunity to share?
- 3. Tell me more about your response to _____ (e.g., #1).
- 4. Please give me an example of your response to _____ (e.g., #1. d.).
- 5. What other information would you like to add?
- 6. Tell me more about your answer.

Appendix C: Consent Forms for Questionnaire

Research Study Title: *Defining the Role of a Mentor: Laying the Groundwork for Effective Mentoring*

You are invited to take part in an online questionnaire about your experience as a mentor in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field. This study is being done by Mikaela Jordon, a graduate student at Western Oregon University, with support from Dr. Elisa Maroney.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

You can be in this Questionnaire if:

- You are 18 years of age or older
- You live in the United States
- You work or have worked as both an interpreter and mentor.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Taking part in this research is your choice. You can stop or leave at any time without any penalty. The questionnaire will take about **20 minutes**. Even if you start the questionnaire, you can stop at any time and your answers will be removed from the study. The results of this study will be published as a Master's Thesis, may be used to develop training and training materials, and/or released in other publications.

PURPOSE

The goal of this study is to understand what it means to be a mentor, based on the experiences of people who are currently mentoring. The researcher will use the data from this study to explore how experienced professionals describe what a mentor is, what kind of training is needed, and what skills are important for mentoring.

TIMELINE

The questionnaire will be open for at least three weeks.

BENEFITS

You will not be paid and will not get any personal benefit from being in the study. However, your answers may help improve the way mentoring works in the future.

RISKS

Some people might feel a little stressed while sharing about their experiences. If you do feel stressed, you are encouraged to reach out to counseling services. You can stop being part of the study at any time. If you choose to stop, all your answers will be deleted.

CONFIDENTIALITY (PRIVACY)

Your answers to this questionnaire will be anonymous unless you choose to do the *optional* interview. The questionnaire will be done through a Google Form, and your answers will be stored in a secure, password-protected file. We will not collect your name, email, or IP address, so no one will know who you are or how you answered. If you choose to do the follow-up interview, your personal information will be kept private. Only the researcher (Mikaela Jordon) and her advisor (Dr. Elisa Maroney) will be able to see your answers.

CONTACT

If you have any questions about the questionnaire or study, please contact:

Mikaela Jordon at mjordon24@mail.wou.edu

Dr. Elisa Maroney at maronee@mail.wou.edu or call 503-838-8735.

This study was approved by the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any concerns or feel you were treated unfairly, you can contact the IRB at irb@mail.wou.edu or call 503-838-9200.

Appendix D: Consent Form for Interviews

Research Study Title: *Defining the Role of a Mentor: Laying the Groundwork for Effective Mentoring*

You are invited to take part in a virtual interview about your experience as a mentor in the American Sign Language-English interpreting field. This study is being done by Mikaela Jordon, a graduate student at Western Oregon University, with support from Dr. Elisa Maroney.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

You can be in this Interview if:

- You are 18 years of age or older
- You live in the United States
- You work or have worked as both an interpreter and mentor.
- You have already filled out the Questionnaire

The three to five participants with the most experience as a mentor will be selected as interview participants.

If there are several mentors with the same number of years of experience, each potential participant will be assigned a number. A random number generator ([Random.org](https://www.random.org)) will be used to select interview participants.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Taking part in this research is your choice. You can stop or leave at any time without any penalty. The interview will take about **one hour**.

By signing this form, you agree to be in the interview, and you give permission to be audio and video recorded. The results of this study will be published as a Master's Thesis, may be used to develop training and training materials, and/or released in other publications. You can ask for a copy of this form.

Even if you start the interview, you can stop at any time. If you do stop, you will be asked if you want your questionnaire answers removed as well. If you say *yes*, all information related to you will be deleted. If you say *no*, your questionnaire answers will still be used, but anything that identifies you will be removed.

PURPOSE

The goal of this study is to understand what it means to be a mentor, based on the experiences of people who are currently mentoring. Using this interview, the researcher will explore how experienced professionals describe what a mentor is, what kind of training is needed, and what skills are important for mentoring.

BENEFITS

You will not be paid and will not get any personal benefit from being in the study. However, your answers may help improve the way mentoring works in the future.

RISKS

Some people might feel a little stressed while talking about their experiences. If you do feel stressed, you are encouraged to reach out to counseling services. You can stop being part of the study at any time. If you choose to stop, all your answers and information will be deleted.

CONFIDENTIALITY (PRIVACY)

Your information will be kept private. Your name will **not** be used. Only the researcher (Mikaela Jordon) and her advisor (Dr. Elisa Maroney) will have access to your name or personal information. The interview recordings and typed notes (transcripts) will be stored on a secure password-protected hard drive. All personal information will be removed from the transcripts and a code will be used to keep your identity private.

All recordings, transcripts, and other related files will be deleted **within 5 years** after the thesis is published. Only the final version (with no names) will remain.

CONTACT

If you have any questions about the interview or study, please contact:

Mikaela Jordon at mjordon24@mail.wou.edu

Dr. Elisa Maroney at maronee@mail.wou.edu or call 503-838-8735.

This study was approved by the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you have any concerns or feel you were treated unfairly, you can contact the IRB at irb@mail.wou.edu or call 503-838-9200.

CONSENT

I agree to take part in this study. I understand that the interview will be audio and video recorded and that my identity will remain confidential. By signing or typing my name below and returning this consent form to the researcher, I am providing signed consent to participate in the interview.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name