Autopoiesis: Scaffolding the Reflective Practitioner Toward Employability

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Abstract

Sign language interpreters confront a diversity of complex situations in their everyday work. To be able to consider and appropriately respond to such situations, interpreters need robust cognitive reflective frameworks to support them. Since 1993, the University of Wolverhampton's BA (honors) Interpreting British Sign Language/English course has delivered undergraduate training to aspiring sign language interpreters. The end product has been high levels of "appropriate" graduate employability success, in part due to the strong correlation between what employers regard as essential and desirable in an employee, and the attributes demonstrated by the reflective practitioners created by the program. In this article, the author looks at a range of perspectives in relation to reflective learning, discusses its application in interpreter training, and argues that reflection is one of the essential skills required for effective practice. In order to achieve this skill, however, interpreter educators must establish robust scaffolding frameworks during training. The author provides examples of methods used to build these cognitive frameworks during placement learning modules. It is in part the building of interpreting students' cognitive reflective framework during training that will provide them with the necessary key tools for professional practice and lifelong learning.

Key Words: scaffolding, reflective learning, reflective practice, work placement, employability, supervision, interpreter training, modelling, social directed learning, individual directed learning, lifelong learning, sign language interpreting

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1.   Introduction

In the early 1970s, Varela, Maturana, and Uribe (1974) coined the term *autopoiesis* to describe a system that is able to autoproduce, derived from the Greek word *poiesis,* meaning "production." Although the term was initially applied to the academic discipline of biology, to describe organisms that are able to maintain themselves by reproducing what they need from within their own entity, I saw parallels to the interpreter training process. In this article, I explore how interpreter trainers could obtain the same autopoeitic results from interpreter trainees, by focusing on the understanding and development of reflective practice. I demonstrate that the undertaking of reflective practice, during training and placement learning, is paramount in establishing reflection as a key part of an interpreter's skill set that enhances employability. The creation of a reflective professional who is able, through a structured scaffolded training approach, to adapt to, cope with, and learn from new situations will be in a position to support his or her own future growth and become an autopoeitic interpreting practitioner.

1.1. Developing Employability

Yorke stated that employers are mainly interested in the answer to the following question: "What can the emerging students actually do?" (1999, p. 17). This is highlighted by the Higher Education Academy's student employability profiles created by employers, who cite six main employability criteria that "can transform organisations and add value early in their careers" (HEA, 2006, p. 140): cognitive skills/brainpower, generic competencies/personal capabilities, technical ability, business and/or organization awareness, and practical elements such as vocational courses. From the descriptions and explanations of these six employability criteria, one can draw at least 15 employability skills that could be seen as containing reflective components (Bown & Dekesel, 2009, 2010, 2011): the ability to participate in and review quality control processes; to reflect and review one's own practice; to critically evaluate professional practice outcomes; to understand basic financial and commercial principles; to appreciate organizational cultures; to demonstrate learning through work experience; to adapt to new technologies; to be aware of emotional intelligence and performance; to express a desire to learn for oneself; to take into account interpersonal sensitivity; to communicate and persuade; to work with others in a team; to assess risk and draw conclusions; to work with information and handle a mass of diverse data; and to identify, analyze, and solve problems. Although employers were not specifically thinking of interpreters when commenting on what makes a graduate employable, the above list of skills could apply to the interpreting profession. The interpreting graduate "product" who enters the marketplace should therefore, be able to demonstrate a range of skills and attributes that ensures that not only does the interpreter meet the national occupational and registration standards, but also is "desirable" to the community, with the potential of being "immediately employable" Fanthome (2004, p. 5). Although employers would ideally prioritize the contracting of

reflective practitioners (Bown & Dekesel, 2010; Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac & Lawton, 2012), the reality is that in geographical regions, where there is still a shortage of interpreters, this may not be feasible.

During the holistic development of a student interpreter, seven main stakeholder groups come to bear, each with particular expectations. The first group is the deaf or minority-language community, who will be seeking a multiskilled individual with an attitude and ethos appropriate to the settings and interlocutors they will engage with. The second group is the hearing or majority-language communities, whose needs tend to differ from the first group. The third group is the employers; whether the graduate becomes an employee or self-employed, both domains require effective demonstration of specific skills for remuneration. The fourth group is the individuals or team who teach the "trainee," whose influence will encompass not only all stakeholders' views and professional standards, but also the trainers' personal philosophies and approaches to training. The fifth group is the students themselves, whose primary goal will be to graduate with the right qualification for professional accreditation so as to secure successful employment. The sixth group is the professional organizations of interpreters (e.g., the Association of Sign Language Interpreters [ASLI] and the Visual Language Professionals [VLP]), who help shape the future of the profession. The final and seventh group is the relevant professional registration bodies (e.g., the National Registers for Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People [NRCPD]), who regulate the profession and safeguard, in particular, the first and second groups of stakeholders.

A range of authors list the skill sets required of a professional interpreter (for an overview, see Bontempo & Napier, 2007). Among the many capabilities an interpreter needs in order to function effectively and carry out duties and responsibilities is reflective thinking. Harvey (2003, p. 3) considers this a key capability of employability: "The emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner."

2.   The Case for Reflection

Reflective thinking is already considered a key component of interpreter training; "the literature clearly supports the idea that [a] competent professional . . . should engage in . . . critically reflective practice" (Williams, 2001, p. 33). Reflective learning is seen as an "important educational tool" (Taylor, 2003, p. 244) that has been "internationally accepted" (Collin & Karsenti, 2011, p. 570) and is therefore widely used in higher education training (Kahn, 2006; Kahn et al. 2008). However, Kreber (2004) and Moon (2000), argue that reflective learning is often "poorly conceptualized," which is supported by Fendler (2003, p. 20), who describes it as a cocktail of "mixed messages and confusing agendas," and, as such, its definition, method of development, and assessment can be matters for debate.

Although many explanations of reflective thinking offer descriptions Dewey (1933) gives a trustworthy and succinct definition. He argues that it is "a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty in which thinking originates," which should result in "an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (p. 12). This is a particular challenge for beginners who, without a specific inquiry framework and skilful professional guidance, will have difficulty rising above the perplexity that Dewey identifies.

In 2006, Peter Kahn conducted an extensive review of reflective learning across 69 training programs in a variety of disciplines and summed up reflection as "the extended consideration of problematic aspects of knowledge or practice . . . used to help an individual understand their professional practice or to gain insights into their progress against a set of personal goals" (p. 1). Owen, & Stupans (2009, p. 272) find reflection to be "a cognitive process for organizing ideas and building theory from observations and experiences," and Thorpe (2000, p. 80) refers to it as a means of "achieving transformative learning," which is echoed in Kahn et al.'s (2008) review of course designers, who found it to be formative and supportive in "self improvement and adaptation of practice" (p. 168).

Schön (1987), in raising the question of why professionals should undertake reflective thinking, maintains that an essential component of professional practice is one's capability to decisively reflect when faced with new,

intricate, and diverse situations. This carries across training in a range of people-centered disciplines such as social work, education, and health, whose practitioners see reflective practice as a central component of their profession, alongside domain specific and technical skills (Crowe & O'Malley, 2006; Findlay, Dempsey & Warren-Forward, 2010; Hamilton & Druva, 2010; Jones, 1995; Kahn, et. al. 2008; Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2004; Lam, Wong & Leung, 2007; Loughran, 1996; Ruch, 2002, 2005, 2007; Tornøe, 2007; Valli, 1992). Instructors trying to determine if a particular skill should be included in training may be guided by this essential pedagogic principle: Is the skill a tool for critical thought in the linking of theory to practice (Bergson & Sperlinger, 2003; Kahn et al., 2008; Lam, Wong, & Leung, 2007; Owen & Stupans, 2009; Taylor, 2003; Thorpe, 2000)? Instructors can also look to the generally accepted view that students need to focus on "'problems of the type met in professional life'" (Ramsden, 2000, p. 81), as part of a "problem-based curriculum" (Newble & Clark, 1986, p. 268), which in turn helps them to review the consequences of their decisions (Mumford, 1987) and relate "fresh material to prior knowledge" (Burke, Jones, & Doherty, 2005, p. 133).

Additional principles for embarking on reflective thinking are autopoietic in nature, in that they aim to foster "self-improvement and adaptation of practice" (Taylor, 2003; Kahn et al., 2008). This leads to an expansion of one's repertoire (Johns, 2000) and enhances the overall quality of an interpreter's practice (McKee, 2008). This improvement in practice is in part made possible by a focus on the justification of actions, which aids the retrospective and predictive activity in which a practitioner will be involved (Jasper, 2003). Reflection allows for thinking time to understand decisions in practice (Thompson & Thompson 2008) and by the key activity of monitoring one's own learning (Hamilton & Druva, 2010; Thorpe, 2000), helps to establish "the accountability of professional practice" (Fook, 1999, p. 207). Not only does this professional accountability create a professional identity, but one can argue that the continuous verification of our own actions against those of other practitioners also establishes a "'self-identity'" (Lam et al. 2007). Eraut and Lam highlight a range of other reasons why we should embark on reflective learning and thinking: Reflective thinking improves and prevents complacency (Eraut 1996); it harvests the impact of feedback on self-awareness (Eraut, 1996; Lam et al., 2007); and it improves awareness of the impact our actions have on other people (Lam et al. 2007). This latter reason of why we should embark upon reflective thinking within interpreter training is a key component of being a reflective practitioner, namely, the ability to be sensitive and responsive to clients' needs (Taylor, 2003; Redmond, 2006). Although we can debate whether the listed benefits are direct results of reflective thinking or by-products, involvement in reflective thinking creates a responsible awareness of "safety in practice" within one's capabilities and limitations (Jasper 2003). This "safety to practice" benchmark principle is relevant to all stakeholder groups identified above.

Schön's (1983, 1987, 1995) work is a good starting point for examining the component parts of reflective activity. Schön identifies three types of reflection, which are distinguished by the points in time in which they can occur: *knowing-in-action,* in which professional practice demonstrates underlying knowledge—"the knowing is in the action" (Schön, 1987, p. 25); *reflection in action,* in which our ability to reflect can "reshape what we are doing while we are doing it" (Schön 1987, p. 26); and *reflection on action,* in which one uses knowledge-in-action to reflect upon past events. Cowan (1998) adds a fourth type of reflection, *reflection for action,*—which could also be called—*reflection pre-action* (Bown & Dekesel, 2011), in which one uses reflection to predict the outcomes of potential actions and select the most suitable option given the setting and participants.

It could be argued that most individuals will implicitly demonstrate a natural level of reflective ability; however, the extent to which this is sufficient for professional practice can be questioned. In order to reflect effectively, which Kolb (1984) identifies as a key learning process, learners or practitioners will have to go through a staged or phased process that encompasses reflection (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Brookfield, 1987; Dewey, 1910, 1933; Lam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1990, 1998; Schön, 1987, 1995; Vachon & LeBlanc, 2011). The aim is to turn initial doubt or uncertainty, via self-knowledge and understanding, to a state of self-actualization, in which practitioners are able to "improve [their] own performance without being reliant on guidance from others" Fanthome (2004, p. 5). Eraut (1996, p. 124) argues that the learner will therefore eventually move away from rules and guidelines, in order to develop an "intuitive grasp of situations based on deep tacit understanding," on the way toward achieving the educational advantage that Petty (1998) labels as "autonomous thought."

3. Scaffolding the Learner

The reality within vocational training is that theory alone does not develop a rounded practitioner. Interpreter trainees must understand that interpreting practitioners do not solely adhere to rule-based theoretical models; instead, they use "complex situational understanding" (Cope et al., 2000), which Berliner defines as the ability to "discern in complex environments what is important to attend to" (1988, p. 12). This understanding relies heavily on on-the-job experiences and is honed over time by the discovery that there is no single neat answer to the problems encountered in practice; practitioners develop arsenals of workable strategies to guide them. Trainees can benefit enormously from the experience of such a seasoned practitioner, a guide to take them on as an apprentice, facilitate their journey from theory to practice, and continually progress them beyond their present capabilities (Cope et al. 2000; Owen & Stupans, 2009; Verenikina, 2008;). This and other types of guides provide scaffolding for the learner. *Scaffolding* during the formative period helps to create the internal coping structures for managing stress within practice, guides the thinking process, allows for the selection of suitable responses, informs appropriate decisions, and contributes to the safe management of career longevity.

Cope et al. (2000) discusses the "cognitive apprenticeship" concept developed by Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1988), which describes the ideal relationship between the practitioner and trainee and highlights the central strategies that practitioner supervisors should employ in the guiding process. These include modelling, coaching, scaffolding, fading, articulation, reflection, and exploration. The practitioners should therefore be able to provide an in situ demonstration of their interpretation to the learner and give constructive feedback as to his/her attempts, accompanied by varying levels of support, in order to permit the learner to become independent.

Cope et al. argue that "it is these types of activity to which mentors might aspire when they are supervising and instructing students on placements" (2000, p.851). He sums up the key characteristic of scaffolding, namely, that practitioners should provide learners

> with sufficient support to allow them to achieve more than they would be able to without help. As the competence of the learner increases, the support is withdrawn in such a way as to pass responsibility over to the learner. In this way, learners are able to move toward independent competence in areas where they initially needed help. (Cope et al., 2000, p. 854)

Reflection is one of the key components of scaffolding. Practitioners should create situations that allow learners opportunities to verbalize or write down their "reflective" thoughts, in which they compare their performance to that of other professionals, are able to consider alternatives, and justify their actions alongside considering the consequences of them. However, when reflective activity is to be demonstrated via written free-form journaling, the results can lead to streams of consciousness, without any real depth or shape to the review of the experiences, hence the process of reflection requires direction (Duffy, 2009; Kahn, 2006). Such direction can be provided by frameworks or templates, also known as exemplars, to guide reflective thinking and form one type of scaffold within the stages of reflection. These exemplars must, however, allow for flexibility of growth and take into account individual differences within the developmental process. Ultimately, where a tutored or directed reflective process exists to review professional practice, it provides the learner with a tool in the journey toward reflexive thought, "the mind's conversation with itself" (Thorpe, 2000, p. 81). This dialogue, which is an essential part of learning and development (Walker, Crawford, & Parker, 2008), has the potential to "create an ongoing cycle of learning, critical thinking, and self-assessment that continues throughout their careers" Winston (2005, p. 231). This in turn provides a framework for reviewing safety in practice, continuing professional development, and lifelong learning.

4. Reflection as Scaffold Within the Interpreter Training Program

Reflective learning requires time to develop. Trainers must be aware of the learners' abilities at each level within a training program (Hamilton, & Druva, 2010) and their demographics (e.g., age, life experiences,

financial/personal circumstances, technology drivers), which impact upon their approaches to learning and their perceptions about the world around them. Reflective activities must be designed to support bridging the gap between field practice and simulated, in-class practice, and they must mirror the nature and complexity of the workplace (Cope, Cuthbertson, & Stoddart, 2000; Kahn et al., 2008). The teaching team's ongoing review of the method of implementation of the reflective learning strategy (Thorpe, 2000) ensures a collective understanding of the developments required for interpreter trainees to reach each attainment benchmark, and guarantees that appropriate innovations and adaptations are interwoven within the overall framework.

Reflective learning requires reflective dialogue. This dialogue takes place in class via peer and tutor feedback, remotely through online forums, and face to face via guided sessions with lecturers. It forms an essential part of the social nature of learning within vocational training, in which practitioners transfer their skills to the learners, and therefore adheres to Vygotsky's (1978) concept that learning occurs within a social context. Scaffolding is key to supporting the learner's progress (Cope et al., 2000; Kahn 2006, 2008; Owen & Stupans, 2009; Thorpe, 2000; Verenikina, 2008), and this is a vital component of the reflective dialogue process within interpreter training.

For nearly two decades I have been actively involved in the enhancement of employability of sign language interpreters, through the roles of a manager of interpreting agencies, a trainer of interpreters, an employer, and, since 1999, course leader of the British Sign Language/English interpreting undergraduate degree program (3- and 4-year courses) at the University of Wolverhampton. One of my responsibilities as course leader was the pedagogic design, establishment, and management of a work placement for third-year students. This placement provides an additional opportunity to close the gap between theoretical constructs and professional practice, and it is the culmination of a scaffolded journey towards becoming a reflective professional practitioner. Two placement modules were developed via a structured organic process. They were born out of field experience and systematically reviewed, revised, and adapted over the years. A central ethos in this process was the role of "reflection in practice." This was supported by ongoing research into the views of employers and students taking part in placement learning (Bown, 2007; Bown & Dekesel, 2009, 2010, 2011; Bown & Williams, 2007) and consequently highlighted one of the many transferrable features of the interpreting work placement model. The model itself has recently been identified as a case study for good practice in the final report on public service interpreter training by the Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (Graham, 2012).

At the University of Wolverhampton, students engage in specifically designed scaffolded reflective activities both within the classroom setting and in the blended learning context. Each contains diverse developmental pedagogic methods, with varying levels of control, leading toward independence and a skill framework for working life. The activities undertaken aim to cultivate growth in each of the four areas of reflection as identified by Schön and Cowan, namely, knowing in action (e.g., live interpreting, role plays, and academization of diary entries), reflection in action (e.g., think-aloud protocols and freeze-frames), reflection on action (e.g., online forum discussions and assessment matrices), and reflection for action (e.g., situational analysis, preparation, and skills gap analysis). At the beginning of the work placement, reflection is individually directed and takes the form of journaling; as the program continues and students receive work placement experience, reflection becomes social, with the journal as catalyst for dialogue.

4.1. Individual-Directed Reflection: Journaling

Scaffolding the learner is applied during each year of formative training, but it becomes particularly essential during the transition from lecture-based delivery to the work placement experience, which provides key opportunities for moving directed reflection toward effective self-reflection and provides the framework for growth into future reflexivity. Prior to embarking on the work placement experience, students are already familiar with interpreting justifications post-assignment and think-aloud-protocols during an assignment, and they will also have utilized "freeze-frame" options while undertaking an interpreting performance. The latter is similar to calling for a time-out in various sports, where the student can discuss possible strategies with tutors and peers before continuing with their interpreting assignment. The student's work placement attendance is scaffolded by a guided reflective thinking and writing tool, which is the prompt for the individualized documentation of the reflective process. This is to be completed by the learner after each observed/undertaken assignment, discussed with the site

supervisor, and then submitted to the university-based tutor for comments and feedback to be addressed at one-on-one sessions at the university. This approach is supported by Bergson & Sperlinger (2003), who looked at a range of interpreter training courses and commented that interpreters often do not possess the necessary "framework" in order to reflect. Owen and Stupans (2009, p. 275) also argue that "Deeper levels of reflection which are a highly valued part of the learning process require significant scaffolding [and ought to encompass] regular feedback by lecturers, student groups examining various types of critiqued reflective writing, and students using self-evaluations tools against explicit criteria."

The individual-directed reflection phase is scaffolded by the "student diary template." The template provides both structure and flexibility (Owen & Stupans, 2009), helping students avoid what Hamilton and Druva (2010) term the "unmarked minefield" of reflection via journaling—such as rambling descriptive narratives—and allows students "to take responsibility for monitoring and making judgement about aspects of their own learning" (Tornøe, 2007, p. 102). The template, along with each student's supervisor and tutor, together guide students toward higher quality reflection. In addition, we insist that in their reflective diary entries, interpreter trainees compare and contrast current scholarship and the views of interpreter practitioners with their own experiences and show breadth of reasoning and discussion. This not only creates a bridge between theory and practice but also provides authority and validity to support students' decisions. Findlay, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2010, provide a sound review of the literature documenting the benefits of this type of journaling.

The journal created via the student diary template affords students the opportunity for documented reflection within a spatial dimension, that is, they can look backward and forward across their own development and check how they have expanded their repertoire of understanding and applying the strategies that help them resolve issues and dilemmas experienced along the way. Usher, Francis, Owens, and Tollefson (1999, p. 10) argue that by "challenging assumptions and biases [students will evidence that] their thinking has altered."

4.2. Socially Directed Reflection: Work Placement

Many of the work placement sites at which our trainees gain experience (including interpreter agencies/organizations and educational establishments) have been involved with our degree program and its work placement since 1995. This has brought about considerable joint knowledge in administering our work placement model of learning. Feedback from site supervisors regarding their involvement with training the next generation of interpreters indicates that "it keeps our practice up to date" and "a trainee's questioning of our practice via the diary template makes us current, and challenges our own thinking about our practice."

The work placement coordinator, in liaison with university based tutors and work placement supervisors, manages the allocation process of trainees to each work placement site, taking into account a range of supportive factors such as a trainee's capabilities, their preferences for geographic location (placements can be allocated across the U.K.), future job aspirations, life experiences and previous/current work experiences. For example, they may already be working or volunteering with an organization, that if placed there for the work placement experience, could create a conflict of interest and thus an alternative would need to be found. Other features considered are mobility and financial resources available for travel to sites. The above points when weighed together with the coordinator's knowledge of the site, supervisors and personnel, allow a balanced and informed judgment to be made, and thus provide optimum "scaffolding" to match site setting to a trainee's developmental needs from the start. This also takes into account that although the end goal is to create independent practitioners, trainees may reach the different stages of reflection at varying progression speeds and thus an individualized approach to support their experiential growth is required.

Students must meet four learning outcomes from the work placement experience:
a. Implement effective methods of procedure in interpreting, using effective coping strategies for the domain and utilizing appropriate preparation requirements.
b. Be able to understand and produce cohesive concepts while demonstrating diversity in both first and second language that skilfully reflects and conveys the source/target message.
c. Function professionally and ethically within the working constraints relating to different settings and participants.

d. Utilizing reflective practice, conduct written and spoken diagnostic analyses of an interpreter's performance identifying the impact and outcome upon domain participants, possible alternative strategies, and the continuing professional development needs of interpreting practitioners (self and others).

The latter outcome is documented via a weekly diary of events. We require that the diary entries reflect a diverse range of "observed" and "worked" interpreting assignments and include succinct descriptions of each event (situation/participants), the preparation undertaken, the issues that arose (including environmental pressures), and linguistic, cultural, professional, and interpersonal/dynamic observations. The writing must include a discussion of possible solutions to dilemmas and encompass a self-diagnostic analysis detailing areas of competence and areas that need further development (skill gap analysis). Students must demonstrate flexible and sensitive thinking as they perform a thorough reflection on the effects and influences of the interpreter's "self" within the setting. They should also engage in reflection post-assignment and indicate how improvements could have been made.

4.3. From Social Discourse to Social Dialogue

This written reflection permits both the work placement site supervisor and the university-based tutor to guide students with a structural framework for discussion and analysis of their experience. This supports Vygotsky's (1978) principle that learning needs to take place within a social context. Along the course of the program, the socially directed reflection moves from a *social discourse phase*, in which the supervisor and tutor still teach and explain in an authoritative manner (mainly because the learner has not fully constructed an individual framework for reflection and still depends on other practitioners), toward a *social dialogue phase*, in which the learner becomes more independent and the supervisor and tutor can stand back, providing only brief prompts, and the discussion is now that between the tutor and a developing equal. As trainees approach practitioner status, they become adept at engaging in this social dialogue internally, achieving reflexivity in their thinking, that is, they are able to think about their own actions, thoughts, responses, and consequences, without intervention by others. Thorpe (2000, p. 82) defines this reflexiveness as "the mind's conversation with itself."

During the placement, in addition to the regular sessions with the on-site supervisor (who is ultimately responsible for the support, guidance, dialogue and practical skill development of the trainee on site), the trainee has mandatory sessions with university-based tutors (see rotational schedule below). Prior to these sessions, each trainee is required to submit an electronic copy of their placement diary update. The tutor will then provide written feedback to the trainee and during the sessions discuss the trainee's progress and experience to date, while drawing out key points for the social-directed reflection. It is further supported by a summarized written record of the discussion and a personal development plan which the tutor and student agree to and sign off. This permits the trainee to review points of their own reflection for further development and ensures they are on a progressive track in relation to their evidence submission for their final portfolio. The trainees can and do also show their diary entries to their site supervisors where they feel appropriate. While site supervisor qualifications and experience will vary dependent upon the domain, for example, educational settings, freelance interpreter, or interpreting agency, many are actual alumni of the degree program.

The structures of supportive roles thus put in place afford a continuous cycle of scaffolding to be created (from supervisor to tutor and back to supervisor), and although we could debate the actual nomenclature of each role, that is, *university-based tutor* and *on-site supervisor,* in reality they are a hybrid along a continuum of mentor, coach, and lecturer. They are responsible for promoting, encouraging, and guiding trainees, and ultimately ensuring that trainees meet the assessment outcomes and the professional/vocational standards. Their pivotal engagement in the scaffolding process and achieving an individual trainee's reflexiveness is "one of asking skilful and challenging questions to promote deeper learning" (Owen & Stupans, 2009, p.274).

4.4. Assessing Reflection

In most interpreter training programs, ours included, the reflective journal is not only part of the scaffolded personal development of the trainee but also part of the method by which the outcomes of a work placement are assessed. Thus, supervisors are often both guide and assessor. McMullen (2006, p. 333) argues that "any assessment reduces the honesty and learning value of reflective writing and of the portfolio." It can also be the case that a trainee will feel compelled to write with a particular audience in mind (Perkins, 1996), for example, a supervisor or assessor. In designing and implementing any assessment regime for interpreter trainees, it is important to consider, how they as learners will engage with the process (Bown, 2003). Biggs (1999, p. 141) highlights the possible issue of the learner's "economy," about which he says, "What and how students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed." This also correlates to Ramsden's view that as far as students are concerned "assessment always defines the actual curriculum" (2000, p. 187). So, how then can one ensure the reflective writing is productive and satisfies the assessed outcomes of a course, while not narrowing the trainee's learning experience? The first solution we found was to distinguish between university-based tutors, some of whom will eventually grade students' diary entries, and the on-site work placement supervisors, who do not grade a trainee's performance. This allows for an open, unconstrained relationship at the assessment level at least, as the on-site supervisor has the freedom to be a guide only. Interpreters in training are aware from the outset that the supervisors will not mark their work in any way, although the student may still consider them as potential future employers, which can unduly influence the relationship. Site supervisors complete an ungraded employer's report upon conclusion of the placement that addresses the trainee's overall professional attitude, the successfulness of their interpretations, their implementation of feedback, the progress made during the placement period, preparation for assignments, co-working abilities, awareness of skill limitations, evidence of continuing reflective practice, consideration of the impact on clients of a trainee's conduct, and their flexibility in method of interpretation and role moderation decisions.

In our aim to ensure that students' journal entries are truly reflective and not written solely with assessment in mind, we decided not to have all the diary entries that are created by an interpreter in training submitted for assessment. Instead, trainees select five diary entries of those within their portfolio to submit for assessment purposes. They are advised to select entries that illustrate and reflect diversity in their learning experiences. This second solution to a large extent reduced the pressure of assessment within reflective writing, and it keeps intact the integrity of reflective writing as a learning tool. The third solution was to provide the trainee with a rotational appointment schedule of university-based tutors (practitioners, some of whom have developed their relationship with the trainee for several years). This may at first seem quite a challenge for the trainee, who will have to deal with a range of practitioners' views, when at times they will just want to be presented with one solution and a fixed way of "doing things." Even though all practitioners are working within nationally defined occupational standards, the trainee may perceive their varying perspectives as conflicting opinions. However, the trainees do in fact need this approach, as Tornøe points out in her study on the use of log-based supervision in clinical settings:

> Changing supervisors enhanced their learning process. By observing that different nurses did things differently, they learned that "several roads may lead to Rome." Even though this was confusing in the beginning, most students reported that this was a valuable learning experience. Dealing with several supervisors challenged their critical thinking skills, and forced them to reflect on how they wished to develop their own nursing practice. (2007, p. 99).

The above solutions mirror the approaches to reflective learning within the BA (honors) Interpreting: (British Sign Language/English) program and are based on the premise that throughout the duration of the program, in order for beneficial growth to occur within reflective learning activities, not all reflection should be assessed; the use of reflection as an assessment tool should be gradually increased; multiple practitioner guides must scaffold a trainee's reflective engagement; nongraded reflection should be continually utilized (results are used for formative feedback); and not all practitioner guides should grade a given trainee.

5.   Conclusion

Much has been written about the skills required to become a sign language interpreter, and, in recent years, the sign language interpreting field has started to review whether training courses are fully preparing students for all aspects of professional practice. Concerns have been raised, not only as to the applied skills of the physical aspects of interpreting, but also as to the development of the cognitive frameworks for managing, reflecting upon, and responding appropriately to the myriad of situations and dilemmas practitioners may find themselves in.

From the initial stages and within the past few decades of formalized interpreter training, one of the key responsibilities interpreter trainers have had to adopt, it could be argued, is that of stakeholders within a gate-keeping process controlling entry to the profession for those wishing to work with deaf and hearing communities as interpreters. Since its inception in 1993, the BA (honors) Interpreting British Sign Language/English specialist degree program at the University of Wolverhampton has developed a variety of tangible methods to allow student interpreters to establish and grow the necessary cognitive framework for their personal and professional needs. A key tool is the scaffolded reflective diary template, which leads students from directed individual reflection, via directed social reflection, toward reflexivity. This and other structures, introduced from commencement of the course, become essential within the advanced reflective skills development required for placement practice in the final year. They embed approaches, thinking, and reflective practice that will serve as a robust foundation for future growth, continuing professional development, lifelong learning and safety of practice.

York's (1999) initial question, however, "What can the emerging students actually do?" asked on behalf of employers and clients, even in the light of national professional standards and accreditation safeguards, does require a response. Training programs that encompass scaffolded reflective learning inform employers that the graduate end product is in fact not the end product, but is autopoietic in nature. The graduate interpreters have the potential for further growth within the organizations and communities in which they will work. They can accommodate long-term sustainability and support adaptation to future situations and participants. The scaffolding that practitioners have been exposed to throughout their training, has created the framework for this self-development. In the process, the reflective learner has become a reflective practitioner, who holds the necessary toolkit for further study and a successful professional life.

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