

The pedagogical value of interpreting practice groups

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Interpreting students are often told that, after completing university training, their skills will inevitably deteriorate unless they keep practising. Indeed, to achieve a truly expert level of performance and assure quality, which is a key success factor in a competitive world, self-directed practice and peer feedback are paramount.

An interpreting practice group is a blended learning tool aimed at honing both simultaneous and consecutive techniques through group practice and mutual feedback. Its aim is to make use of open-access and peer resources to counter the decline in technical skills that can occur post-graduation, while also reinforcing professionally useful soft skills such as confidence and peer interaction.

Interpreting practice groups consist of regular training sessions where members have the opportunity to practise both interpreting techniques, give each other feedback and deliver speeches in their mother tongue. It relies on the commitment and active participation of the interpreters who play a key role by shaping each session to meet their needs: e.g. working on a specific topic or interpreting mode, practising retour. Moreover, preparing and delivering speeches improves interpreters' self-confidence and hones other communication skills that represent an added value especially for those working as freelancers.

Frequent interpreting practice allows members to strengthen their language combination and/or add a new language, and provides measurable progress in their skills base which generates a strong sense of contentment and motivation.

In order to reproduce a real-life setting, groups frequently use various open-access resources such as speech repositories, online videos and speeches prepared by senior interpreters who are often invited as guest speakers. The training sessions are recorded in order to support the interpreting community by sharing interactive materials. The interpreting practice group based in Brussels, IBPG, has developed a website, a YouTube profile with over 40,000 views, and a Facebook page to share useful information relevant to the interpreting profession.

Last but not least, group practice is an excellent forum for social interaction: while the learning curve is still steep, mutual support and the sharing of best practises can help novice interpreters overcome challenges ranging from interpreting performance to booth etiquette and professional standards. Furthermore, informal moments foster the building of trust and confidence - necessary for the smooth running of the group - as well as promoting collegiality among colleagues.