

'Working closer together'

– an interview with Danielle D'Hayer

'Movers and Shakers' is a series of interviews with the interpreting profession's leading lights.

Danielle D'Hayer is an Associate Professor in Interpreting Studies at London Metropolitan University (Londonmet). She is the course leader for the MA Interpreting, the MA Public Service Interpreting (Health and Legal) and the MA Conference Interpreting. With more than 20 years' teaching experience, she has designed and developed training programmes specifically for interpreters and those teaching interpreting at the College of North West London and London Metropolitan University.

What made you choose to teach interpreting?

Teaching is a passion and a main ingredient in my life. I did my first teacher training in secondary education in the 1980s in the UK before going on to teach languages to senior managers in the City of London. I then worked in France for four years as a language consultant (interpreting, translation, communication skills and language learning) before returning to the UK in 1997. At this point I went on an ITI training course run by MITI Florence Mitchell and had the good fortune to meet a tutor from the translation and interpreting department at the College of North West London (CNWL).



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She invited me to start teaching the DPSI English Law qualification. This led me to also teach the DPSI Health and Local Government, and the Certificate in Bi-lingual Skills and Community Interpreting Certificate.

I worked at CNWL between 1997 and 2004 to develop the teaching programmes and materials for interpreting studies. London Metropolitan University then head-hunted me to teach on the

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MA Interpreting. It was a brand new course, so I had to design teaching materials and pedagogy from scratch. Designing courses and teaching methodologies is what I enjoy most.

You're currently undertaking a PHD exploring the Community of Practice model for interpreting studies – can you tell us a bit more about this?

The Communities of Practice (CoP) concept was first established by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in 1994. It is not new. My aim is to design a CoP model adapted to interpreting studies. The CoP model encourages a certain approach to communication and knowledge sharing. It is based on a network of trust and therefore encourages a strong bond between community members – who are experts in or have a strong interest in a certain domain. Community members can choose and move between different levels of involvement. The levels

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tend to include a core group that is highly involved, those who are less active but very interested, experts who can join depending on the



domain and observers. It is a horizontal structure. Successful CoPs often include a facilitator who can channel energies and talent.

Communities of Practice are, I think, the missing link in interpreting studies and the profession. Sometimes members of professional organisations think that if they disagree with one organisation they must move away and set up a separate organisation. This leads to confusion. Imagine if all the interpreting organisations came together, so that we had one unified interlocutor to represent the interests of our relatively young profession. This would make a huge difference.

In 2007, I designed a Masters in Public Service Interpreting (MAPSI Health and Legal) at London Metropolitan University. I consulted the users of public service interpreting, universities teaching public service interpreting, and interpreting organisations when designing the curriculum. They all had so much to offer in terms of expertise and knowledge. I knew that if they could be brought together there was a great opportunity for a CoP that could communicate and exchange knowledge for the benefit of the PSIT profession. Consequently the Public Service Interpreting and Translation Network Group (PSIT NG) was set up in 2008.

The strength of the PSIT NG is that it employs a horizontal structure. We come together to share knowledge and create synergies. PSIT NG has to date organised two conferences with the aim of sharing good practice and training the trainers for PSIT courses. The main objective is to support PSIT in the UK.

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The CoP model is also helpful when applied to teaching. Conference and public service interpreters are naturally competitive about their skills and knowledge and that can create a level of anxiety in a learning environment. The CoP model, however, encourages an atmosphere of trust and generates a bond based on the shared commitment to interpreting studies. So far interpreting students have enjoyed the approach and the benefit to their learning experience.

You have some interesting ideas about different educational centres pooling teaching resources to provide greater facilities for rare languages, for example. Can you tell us something about these?

I am looking at the possibility to create a consortium of universities and other PSIT teaching centres that would allow for the pooling of resources and knowledge, facilitate the organisation of language combinations according to demand and optimise ways of working together to increase the quality of

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teaching and learning. This would enable PSIT students to enjoy access to more expertise and learning opportunities. Language specific Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP) would allow students not close to a study centre or without a tutor specialising in their language to get the specific support they need online. Rare languages can then be catered for.

It's absolutely vital. PSIs need to be fully qualified and trained.

At London Metropolitan University we're already using VCoP for conference interpreting education. Working with partner universities in the EU, interpreting students are exposed to new speakers during virtual classes and experience different language combinations that are not always on offer on their course.

You work hard to ensure your students obtain practical experience through placements and extra curricula activities. How important do you think that is?

Informal learning is an important part of students' professional development. That's why I introduced the Ambassadors' Scheme at Londonmet. The Ambassadors, all of whom are interpreting graduates of the University, are encouraged to reinforce their skills by organising additional interpreting practice for postgraduate interpreting students. Guided visits to London attractions provide the perfect setting for interpreting practice on the go. Ambassadors are empowered through their own practice and mentoring, while interpreting

postgraduates are reassured to receive support from graduates of their course.

How important do you think it is for PSIs to get qualified?

It's absolutely vital. PSIs need to be fully qualified and trained. I think the DPSI qualification is great, but it doesn't assess ethics, business skills and the ability to face challenging situations. Students don't currently have to gain any practical experience that has been assessed by someone equipped to judge their performance as part of the qualification either. I think it would be great if students undertook compulsory placements, and they were able to meet professional interpreters as part of the course. They could then reflect on interpreting assignments together. This would highlight the added value of Continuous Professional development (CPD). The introduction of a formal professional Mentoring Scheme would also be fantastic.



What advice would you give someone with language skills who would like to make interpreting their career?

Before thinking about a career in interpreting, you need to know the market you are moving into.

I meet a lot of potential students

and always ask them the same questions: have you investigated the market? Have you done your research? Do you want to be self-employed? Do you know any interpreters? Have you contacted a professional organisation?

Imagine if all the interpreting organisations came together, so that we had one unified interlocutor to represent the interests of our relatively young profession. This would make a huge difference.

At Londonmet, we organise Open Days and use social media such as Facebook to share information about the profession and its challenges. We also webstream our simulated weekly conferences so that potential interpreters can understand what is involved.

It's worth finding out about your nearest course and talking to other students and course leaders. LinkedIn Groups are a good source of information about the profession as well as a networking opportunity. There are careers events organised by the National Network for Interpreting and the newly formed National Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation. ■