

# Questions Parents Ask: A Guide for Professionals



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## **QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK: A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS**

Anita Small, M.Sc., Ed.D. and Joanne Cripps C.Y.W.

### **Introduction**

As professionals, the parents who come to see you, seek advice to make fully informed decisions that are in their Deaf<sup>1</sup> child's best interests. They wish to gather and assimilate accurate information about the choices available to their child and to them as a family.

Here, we respond to 16 frequently asked questions by parents of young Deaf children. These questions have repeatedly been asked by parents and were developed by professionals who work with parents of young Deaf children. Some questions overlap but have a slightly different emphasis. In these cases we include overlapping questions and respond to the fine differences in what underlies the questions. Responses provide a guide and background references for professionals who work with parents as they journey to make informed choices for their young Deaf child.

In addition to the responses provided here for professionals working with parents, we strongly recommend that parents with a Deaf child be provided with the opportunity for ongoing contact with Deaf adults. Deaf adults are uniquely qualified to share their experience and perspectives on life as a Deaf person. They can share what was positive and worthy of note in their education as young children with their families, as teens, as young adults in post secondary education, in the work place, as parents themselves and how they contribute to and enjoy society. They can also share the challenges they have faced as a Deaf child, adolescent and adult. Nothing can replace the experience shared by a Deaf adult and the relationship that can be forged between the parent of a young Deaf child and Deaf adults. It is critical for making fully informed choices.

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<sup>1</sup> There are different perspectives with regards to using a capital or lower case D/d in "Deaf". In this guide we use the capital "D". Deaf reflects that ASL and ASL Culture are the birthright of the individual by virtue of their having been born visually based or become so in childhood, whether or not they have been exposed to ASL and the culture. This is in keeping with how authors refer to individuals from other cultural minority groups such as Black or Jewish. By using "Deaf" we emphasize the principle of not dividing the community with labels. Some Deaf students/adults who are mainstreamed feel they don't have the right to be part of the Deaf community. No one should have to choose between communities. As professionals working with families, our responsibility is to ensure that parents have all available information. This includes awareness that their child need not choose between communities. Their child and their family can be part of the Deaf community and are already part of larger society.

## **Tips for professionals communicating with parents of young Deaf children**

A recent article and video by Rachel Benedict (2013) outlines wonderful suggestions for how professionals can communicate positively when parents first learn their child is Deaf. The language we use as professionals impacts how parents perceive and relate to their newborn. Benedict (2013) offers the following recommendations for language terminology:

- Following a hearing screening test, a child can be referred with explanation rather than stating that the child “failed” the test. “Failure” causes alarm, establishes hearing as the gold standard and an overwhelming sense of general lack of success.
- Use the term “identify”, “discover” or “found” rather than “diagnosed”. Diagnosis is most often associated with disease and being Deaf is not an illness.
- Do not begin by saying, “I’m sorry”, since this indicates a sense of something negative and will automatically elicit fear.
- Mention “hearing status” rather than “hearing loss” since the child born Deaf did not have hearing that was lost and since loss provokes grief.
- Discuss communication opportunities rather than options. Options signify that you must select just one. Languages need not be pitted against one another. Opportunities indicate how the child’s life can be enriched by more than one language with both a spoken language and a signed language.
- Use the term “involvement” rather than “intervention”. An intervention signifies that there is a problem that must be stopped and solved. Involvement indicates that parents and professionals are there to support the child in their life journey and that they are not alone.
- It is important on the first visit to share that there are many successful Deaf adults whom the parents can meet. This will provide a sense of relief. Meeting a Deaf role model early after a parent has learned that their child is Deaf, goes a long way in normalizing being Deaf and providing a sense of their child being OK with a bright future ahead of them.

## **Questions and Responses**

### **1. What is ASL?**

American Sign Language also known as ASL is a language of its own with its own vocabulary, grammar and social rules of use. Dr. William Stokoe (1960) was the first researcher to identify sign languages as separate languages with grammar independent of spoken languages. There are many sign languages in the world. Throughout North America, the predominant sign language used by Deaf individuals is ASL. ASL has developed naturally over time among a community of users and exhibits all of the

features of a language (Valli et al, 2011). Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) is also a signed language used in Canada (in Quebec and some other parts of the country).

Spoken languages such as English and French depend on the order of words to show nouns, verbs, etc., in sentences. They depend on the use of a linear, auditory stream of sound. In contrast, sign languages such as ASL and LSQ depend on a visual stream of signs in spatial relationships (based on handshapes, location of the hands in relation to the body, movements of the hands, the orientation of the palm of the hands) as well as facial grammar (expressed through eye gaze, eyebrow and mouth movements) and body grammar (expressed through head shift and body movement). (Gibson and Small, 1996).

The significance of any language is its role in understanding others and expressing oneself fully. "With the help of one's first language one can conduct complicated mental operations: take several factors into consideration at the same time, solve problems, store new information, determine the relationship between different pieces of information and so on." (Anderssen, 1994, p.90). With a full language one can express deep emotion, humour, needs and wishes as well as complex ideas without bound. The complexity and subtleties of any language allow for this full expression.

What does this mean for Deaf children? ASL and LSQ are capable of achieving all these roles of language without restriction. Because ASL and LSQ are visual languages, they can be acquired naturally and with ease by Deaf children and afford the possibility of full linguistic expression and comprehension without constraint. With access to ASL and LSQ there is no language delay and acquisition of linguistic complexity is fully achieved.

## **2. If ASL doesn't use speech, how is it a language? Do Deaf children need a speech model for language development? How can I make sure that my child has a foundation of language?**

Deaf children exposed to signed languages from birth such as ASL and LSQ, acquire these languages on identical time frames as hearing children acquiring spoken languages. Language development is not dependent on a speech model – it is dependent on a language model that can be in either an auditory or a visual mode. What is essential for a foundation of language is that the child is surrounded by accessible language models. From birth through age three years and beyond, speaking and signing children demonstrate identical stages of language development. The stages of early language development are as follows:

consonant-vowel productions in spoken language or hand shape - movement productions in sign language	4 - 6 months
syllabic babbling (repeating the same syllable or hand shape)	7 - 10 months
variegated babbling (repeating varied syllables or hand shapes)	10 - 12 months

jargon babbling (continuous varied syllables or hand shapes)	12 months and beyond
first word/first sign stage	11 - 14 months
two word /two sign stage	16 - 22 months
grammatical and vocabulary development beyond the two word stage	

(Petitto, 2000)

More detailed early ASL developmental milestones for children from birth to 24 months and how to facilitate them are described by Small (2003; 2004). The milestones are a synthesis of the literature on ASL development. These stages of ASL development and how to facilitate them are also described with examples on a DVD created by the Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf (2004).

Manual babbling is differentiated from other excitatory manual gestures as it is produced more slowly and is not accompanied by excitatory leg movements. Vocal babbling of hearing infants is similarly produced without accompanying leg movements and more slowly than excitatory vocalizations. There is no modification, loss or delay with reaching any linguistic milestones in ASL or LSQ when children are exposed to ASL or LSQ models (Charron and Petitto, 1987; Petitto and Marentette, 1990; 1991). This is supported by the work of many other researchers (e.g., Bellugi and Klima, 1982; Meier, 1991).

While it was previously believed that early language acquisition was neurologically determined by the maturation of the speech mechanisms, the manual babbling and subsequent language development of babies exposed to sign languages shows that speech readiness per se does not influence language development (Petitto, 2001). Instead, infants are born with sensitivity to the temporal patterns or rhythms inherent in natural languages whether they are spoken or signed. In fact, sign language programs for newborn hearing infants with hearing parents have become increasingly popular due to the benefits that have been found in decreasing communication frustration during early language acquisition stages. Natural acquisition of a language comes from natural interaction between a child who begins these rhythmic patterns of a language and an adult who then builds on the child's pre-linguistic play. What is critical for a child to develop natural language is that he or she and has full access to language without restriction.

Hearing parents and professionals often overlook the early sign language babbling of Deaf babies at a few months of age (Petitto and Marentette, 1991). However, Petitto's (2001) discovery points to the importance of well trained native users of ASL working with hearing parents to identify this early sign language babbling, encourage its development in Deaf babies and model how parents and siblings can play with their young Deaf infants using ASL. This can establish early ASL phonological awareness a critical ingredient in literacy. Israelite and Ewoldt, (1992) have shown that Deaf children

of hearing parents have potential to learn native sign language easily and naturally when given the exposure to it.

Ahlgren (1994) reported on the results of a study of the natural transfer of knowledge of Swedish Sign Language and Deaf culture from Deaf parents to hearing parents who were paired with each other. Cited by Gibson, Small and Mason (1997), Ahlgren's positive results (1994) led the Swedish Parliament to pass a law (proposition 1980/81: 100, supplement 12) stating that Deaf children must be educated in a way that fosters both Swedish Sign Language and Swedish with an emphasis on literacy (Mahshie, 1995).

This program was expanded throughout Finland (Takala et al, 2000). It resulted in families with Deaf children learning sign language and increased communication within the families. The Deaf children demonstrated increased language, increased contact and friendships with Deaf adults and friendships established among the children (Takala et al, 2000).

Approximately 90 percent of Deaf children have hearing parents. As described by Steven Barnett in a medical journal article, "the experiences of Deaf children with hearing parents is quite different from children in most other minority groups. Communication between Deaf children and hearing family members is often quite limited ... such as being excluded from family dinner table conversations that are not being signed" (Barnett, 1999). "Many Deaf children are unable to acquire the naturally occurring spoken language of their homes because they don't hear it and they are not exposed to sign language. This prevents them from fully participating in family member interactions that are crucial to their linguistic, cognitive and social development. They do not develop a strong linguistic base with which to express themselves"(Erting and Pfau,1999). Generally, this group of Deaf children enters school linguistically, cognitively and experientially well behind their hearing peers who have had the benefit of acquiring native language competence within their home environments (Griffith, Johnson and Dastoli, 1985). Exposure to sign language in the home reverses this effect as we see from the results reported by Ahlgren (1994) Mahshie (1995), Takala (2000) and Gibson, Small and Mason (1997). Deaf children with hearing parents exposed to sign language at an early age do achieve linguistic competence and milestones comparable to their hearing counterparts (Petitto, 2001).

**3. Is there a critical period for learning language? Does this mean I should make sure my child has spoken English now while he or she is young? Should my child learn how to speak first? What effect will early sign language have on the development of spoken language?**

There is much research that demonstrates that Deaf children who are exposed to ASL at an early age develop fluency in ASL and also develop spoken language competence.

While proficiency in spoken language varies among Deaf children who are exposed to sign language, evidence suggests strongly that it is not an either/or proposition. Snoddon, (2008) reviews the literature demonstrating that learning signed language has a positive effect on the spoken language development of pre-school Deaf children who have received cochlear implants (Preisler, Tvingstedt, & Ahlström, 2002; Schlesinger & Meadow, 1972; Yoshinaga-Itano and Sedey, 2000).

Children with cochlear implants who developed the most spoken language also had well-developed signed language skills. While signed language did not, in and of itself, guarantee spoken language development, those children who had insufficient, or discontinued, signed language development also had very little, or no, spoken language abilities. As well, when children with little signed language improved their signed language abilities, their spoken language also increased (Preisler et al., 2002). Yoshinaga-Itano and Sedey (2000) studied 147 young Deaf children 14–60 months who received cochlear implants, ASL and auditory oral language therapy. They found that the primary predictors of speech development in order of impact are chronological age, expressive language development, degree of hearing loss and language modality. Both expressive signed and spoken language ability was a significant predictor of speech development in young Deaf children with cochlear implants. Increased language development predicted increased intelligibility. Snoddon (2008) points out that earlier studies also demonstrate a significant relationship between linguistic ability such as verbal communication intentions, mastery of syntactic rules as well as skills in vocabulary and semantics with speech intelligibility in Deaf children (cited in Yoshinaga-Itano and Sedey 2000 Blamey, 2003).

While success in spoken language varies among children, evidence suggests that when Deaf children are exposed to both signed language and to the majority spoken language that signed language strengthens their success in spoken language rather than weakening it (Snoddon, 2008).

#### **4. It's fine that my child is learning ASL. What about English? What are the effects of a sign language on learning another language?**

Research on the biological foundations of language teaches us that the learning of a language is what is crucial rather than the learning of a spoken language per se. Early language acquisition is not dependent on the development of speech. Petitto (2000; 2001) studied both hearing and Deaf bilingual children who were learning both spoken English and ASL, as well as spoken French and LSQ. She found no negative spoken language effects for both Deaf and hearing children using ASL and LSQ on their spoken English and French. These results support earlier neurological studies reported by Sacks (1989). Furthermore, Garcia, (1999) describes and reports positive results from ASL programs designed specifically for hearing children to facilitate their spoken English development.



Another body of research demonstrates that Deaf children with Deaf parents grow up with exposure to sign language and Deaf culture naturally in their home. They enter preschool programs ready to participate in the regular curriculum. Their knowledge and mastery of ASL serves as the conduit for learning to read and write English (Dragow, 1993; Mahshie, 1995) and they tend to achieve better academically than their Deaf counterparts with hearing parents. Israelite and Ewoldt cite numerous studies of Deaf children of Deaf parents outperforming Deaf children with hearing parents in linguistic, academic and social achievement (1992, pp. 6–15). There is much evidence that their performance is equal to that of their hearing peers (Israelite and Ewoldt, 1992, pp. 16–23). There was no evidence that the acquisition of a sign language will interfere with your child's ability to learn to speak.

Mahshie reports that when Deaf children increase their awareness of both a sign language and spoken language this can contribute to their emerging speech development in some children (1995, p. 32). As they increase their grasp of the meanings in the languages this can bring increased meaning to the task of developing their speech production and speech reading. Hansen (1980), echoes her comments.

Parents must decide if they wish deep, meaningful communication with their child using a visual language that is comfortable and natural for him or her. Ease of communication is the key to Deaf children flourishing in so many areas just as hearing children flourish from natural early exposure to spoken language. Children's ease with ASL will not hamper their ability to develop a spoken language. ASL can increase world knowledge, provide ease of communication, sharing of deep emotion, abstract thought and complex ideas.

“Given that a sign language such as ASL is visual, if you use it with your child, you would give your child opportunities to be comfortable, be him or herself, to communicate freely and fully. Your baby can see, can touch, can get up and explore. He or she will learn language naturally. This is not to say your child will not be able to speak as well. What we do know is this... sign language as early as possible...from infancy through high school age, or the moment the child becomes Deaf . . . there is a culture with other Deaf people . . . as you learn about it, your family will lead a rich full life” (Priesler, 1990, pp. 122-123).

## **5. What is Simcom? Should we use it with our Deaf child?**

Simcom stands for "simultaneous communication" and uses signs and voice at the same time. Simcom has also been referred to as Sign Supported Speech (SSS), the Combined method, Pidgin Signed English and Total Communication (a combination of spoken English, signs used in English order, fingerspelling, visual aids, speech reading and writing) (Gibson, Small, and Mason, 1997). Simcom has also used artificial sign systems

such as Seeing Essential English (SEE1) and Signing Exact English (SEE2) together with spoken English. It tries to present spoken language visually on the hands in an attempt to make English more accessible to the Deaf child or adult. It was thought that it would benefit both Deaf and hearing people in a conversation since both the spoken language and signs would be used. Therefore, both Deaf and hearing conversation partners could be comfortable using it. These artificial systems did not evolve through natural use in the community as did ASL and LSQ and all other languages. These systems were designed to represent spoken English and break down words into their component parts. For example “butterfly” would be broken down into “butter” and “fly”. When shown on the hands it therefore changes the meaning of the word and is confusing for a young child or adult.

Simcom involves a variety of artificially invented sign-based codes that are not as efficient as natural languages. Simcom is a hybrid of two languages. It combines parts of spoken language structure and parts of signed language structure and so does not possess the full grammar of either of the two languages from which it is derived (Marmor and Pettito, 1979).

The visual-auditory (modality) continuum as a framework is used at times to justify use of Simcom. Languages are not typically described by modality and are not expressed simultaneously. In linguistic terms, it doesn't matter if a language is spoken or signed but rather that it is rule governed. Typically two voiced languages are not expressed simultaneously because it is impossible to use two spoken languages at the same time. We seem to inherently know that we would be selecting parts of each language and losing the integrity of both languages. The rules governing the languages are lost when they are used simultaneously.

In contrast to Simcom, first and second languages expressed as separate entities can support each other. When a Deaf child learns ASL it can contribute to his or her learning of English (written and/or spoken), and vice versa. The child's knowledge in one language contributes to his/her development in the second language. In that sense the languages are interdependent. However, when used simultaneously, both languages suffer.

Any form of Simcom distorts both English and ASL as languages. Imagine trying to speak French and Italian simultaneously. Every language has its own grammatical structure, words evolve through use, and social rules develop for the use of this language. People do not typically attempt to say the same word in two languages at the same time as it is not physically possible. However, we naturally think we can combine a spoken language such as English with a manual language such as ASL since one is articulated primarily in the mouth and the other is articulated primarily on the hands. Much research has found that the integrity of both languages is lost when people do combine spoken English and ASL (Johnson, Liddell and Erting, 1989). When using Simcom, people produce signs in the order of the spoken language that necessarily eliminates use of ASL grammar. Many

signs are deleted and the spoken English used in Simcom does not follow the natural or natural prosody (intonation, stress patterns, etc.) of English. Trying to combine ASL with spoken English is like watching a written language performed in the air without any periods, commas, dashes or semi-colons, and without any clues about what is important. Most of the signs are performed with the same intensity (Hansen 1975) and the grammar that is naturally efficient and clear is missing.

Swisher (1984) examined the simultaneous communication of hearing mothers with their Deaf children. Six mothers who had been using simultaneous communication for at least two years were videotaped in their homes with their children who were between 4 and 6 years old. It was found that the mothers deleted an average of 40.5 percent of the signs from their utterances when they spoke while they signed. The young children in this study did not have any complete language fully accessible to them. The spoken language was still beyond their hearing reach and the sign systems used in Simcom were erratic and did not reflect the full grammar of either English or ASL.

In *Unlocking the Curriculum: Principles for Achieving Access in Deaf Education*, Johnson, Liddell and Erting (1989) demonstrated how adults using Simcom misarticulate signs to the point where they are not ASL signs or an unintended sign is produced. The signs do not match the spoken words and many signs were eliminated in an idiosyncratic way. Furthermore, adults in these situations "*generally believe that because they are signing, the children have access to the information put out in their speech*" (Johnson, Liddell and Erting, pp.7).

Johnson, Liddell and Erting cite Paul (1988:3), "*since the 1970's, most deaf students have been educated in Total Communication programs in which some form of signing and speech is used simultaneously for communication and instructional purposes. Despite improvement in the development of tests, early amplification, and the implementation of early intervention or preschool programs, most students are still functionally illiterate upon graduation from high school*" (p.2).

Although individuals intuitively think that Simcom can be helpful for Deaf children and their families because it encompasses both sign and spoken language, research does not support this.

## **6. Can my child learn everything in ASL? How can my child follow the Ontario Curriculum if he/ she doesn't have a foundation of the English language?**

What is critical is that Deaf children have full access to information via any language. For Deaf children, the most accessible language is a visual language and in North America that would be either ASL or LSQ. Based on the research by Cummins and Swain (1986), cognitive development and academic knowledge gained in one language, transfers positively when children are learning a second language. Concepts gained through a

foundation in ASL transfer over to concepts received in English. Cummins (2005) outlines transfer of concepts, transfer of metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies, transfer of pragmatic use of language, transfer of specific linguistic elements and transfer of phonological awareness from one language to another. When the languages are quite dissimilar, Cummins states that the transfer is primarily in the areas of conceptual and cognitive elements. This world knowledge contributes to proficiency in English provided that the child is exposed to written English. Snoddon (2008) proposes that further study of the elements that transfer in the case of ASL and English is warranted. She highlights Preisler and Ahlström (1997) who demonstrate positive effects of signed language on the language, social and emotional development of pre-school hard of hearing children who are bilingual in Swedish Sign Language and spoken Swedish. Research studies have also shown that proficiency in ASL supports English literacy in Deaf children (Hoffmeister, 2000; Padden & Ramsey, 1998, 2000; Singleton et al., 1998; Strong & Prinz, 1997, 2000).

This body of research, demonstrating a positive correlation between ASL proficiency and English literacy skills supports the theory that knowledge and mastery of ASL serves as the conduit for learning to read and write English (Drasgow, 1993; Mahshie, 1995). In Israelite & Ewoldt's (1992) summary of research the general finding is that native ASL users (Deaf children with Deaf parents) demonstrate higher English literacy than Deaf children who learn ASL later in life. (This is expanded upon under question seven below.) Deaf children who grow up with exposure to ASL and Deaf culture enter preschool programs ready to participate in the regular curriculum, use ASL to learn new information, and outperform Deaf children who are not exposed to ASL prior to entering school in linguistic, academic and social achievement. In general, their performance is equal to that of their hearing peers (Israelite and Ewoldt, 1992).

### **7. I have heard that my child will have a low literacy level because he or she is Deaf. Is this true?**

In general, English literacy levels of Deaf children in North America are significantly lower than literacy levels of hearing children. Deaf children with Deaf parents tend to outperform Deaf children with hearing parents in literacy, academic achievement, and social development (Israelite and Ewoldt, 1992). Yet, 90% of Deaf children have hearing parents.

English text is a second language for Deaf children. While it is visually accessible, it is based on spoken English which is based on sound and not fully accessible to Deaf children.

In 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training supported a bilingual policy in the three provincial schools for Deaf children. That same year, the provincial government passed Bill 4 recognizing ASL and LSQ as languages of instruction for Deaf

children in Ontario (Gibson, Small and Mason, 1997). Schools under the Provincial Schools Branch now recognize the value of ASL and LSQ. According to Cummins and Danesi (1990) knowledge gained from first language fluency (in this case ASL and LSQ) can be transferred to their literacy development in English and French.

Cummins has demonstrated through much research with bilingual hearing children that cognitive development and academic knowledge gained in one language transfers positively when children are learning a second language (Cummins and Swain, 1986). The theory that has emerged from these findings is called the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) Model and explains why children who have high literacy levels in their first language tend to also have high literacy levels in their second language. Related to Deaf children, it makes sense that having full access to world knowledge through a visual language like ASL or LSQ will positively influence their literacy development in written English or French - they have already acquired the background knowledge needed to make inferences and to make sense of what they read in different subject areas in the second language.

This CUP Model of bilingual acquisition has been consistently supported by the findings of Collier (1992), Bialystok (1991), Garcia (1994), Genesee (1994) and others. Collier's (1995) review of the research demonstrates that academic skills, literacy development, conceptual formation, subject knowledge and learning strategies gained in acquiring their first language all transfer to the second language. Young children from a variety of linguistic backgrounds who have had schooling in their first native language reach age and grade level norms comparable to their native English speaking peers more quickly than children who have not had instruction in their first native language. In examining large sets of data across varied research sites, Collier found that the amount of formal schooling in the first language had the most significant effect on their performance in the second language, including literacy levels. This was true regardless of country of origin, socio-economic status and other student variables.

This is in keeping with the research by Israelite and Ewoldt (1992) demonstrating higher English literacy among native ASL users (those who acquire ASL earlier in life) compared to Deaf children who learn ASL later in life. These results are further solidified by numerous studies on Deaf children with hearing parents demonstrating that proficiency in ASL supports greater English literacy (Hoffmeister, 2000; Padden & Ramsey, 1998, 2000; Singleton et al., 1998; Strong & Prinz, 1997, 2000).

## **8. What is literacy in ASL and English?**

There are many different perspectives on the definition of literacy. The definitions we cite have much current research to support them. As you examine our definitions of literacy think of how you, your family and your community can encourage literacy for your child.

We have included the three literacy levels as defined by Freire and Macedo (1987). Their framework is crucial in helping us to identify which literacy level we are encouraging with our Deaf children. Do we have the means to communicate with them using the language sophistication and cognitive concepts befitting a high level of literacy? What is our role in ensuring that critical literacy is being achieved? How can we expand the literary resources in our community and in our homes?

Literacy simply means "to be literate"; "to be educated or cultured" (Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature, 1995). Literacy is "having or showing extensive knowledge, experience or culture" (Webster's Unabridged Dictionary).

In 1965, UNESCO adopted the view that rather than an end in itself, literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man [or woman] for a social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing. (Literacy, Gateway to Fulfillment, special issue of UNESCO Courier, June 1980 cited in the Oxford Companion to the English Language, 1992).

Freire and Macedo (1987) have provided an important framework for looking at literacy in our children. They identified three levels of literacy cited in McLaren (1988):

- a.) Functional literacy is the technical mastery of particular skills necessary to decode simple texts such as street signs and instructions.
- b.) Cultural literacy involves familiarity with particular linguistic traditions or bodies of information. It includes acquiring knowledge of selected works of literature and historical information necessary to participate in the political and cultural life of a people.
- c.) Critical literacy is the ability to decode the ideologies embedded in texts and media such as television and film in order to reveal their selective interests and perspectives. It entails the ability to analyze and challenge unjust characteristics of a society so that a more equitable and democratic society can be created.

Literacy in both ASL and English involves true mastery of all three levels so that children

- can decode in both ASL and written English
- can understand and appreciate the cultural significance of the literature they are exposed to in ASL and written English and
- can analyze, critique and respond to the values inherent in the literature they see and read in both ASL and English.

Deaf children gain ownership over literature when they see themselves in it, as in Deaf heritage literature that is written in English and has Deaf characters and experiences in

it. It is empowering literature (Small, 2000). Children also gain ownership as they gain technical mastery of the literature.

ASL literature refers to stories, legends, poems, riddles, humour and other genres told in ASL that have been passed down from one generation to another by culturally Deaf people. It arises from the thoughts, emotions and experiences of culturally Deaf people (Byrne, 1996). Since ASL is an unwritten language, ASL literature is of the "oral literature" tradition (Bahan, 1991), told through the air rather than written down. It is recorded on videotape, CD Rom, DVD, on film, and on the Internet.

Deaf heritage literature refers to written stories, poems, songs, non-fiction and other genres, which include Deaf characters, Deaf culture, Deaf identity and Deaf experience written by Deaf people (Jacobowitz, 1998). The significance of Deaf literature to Deaf children is that they see themselves in what they read and can identify with it.

ASL literacy can provide positive experience and a foundation for English literacy and Deaf heritage literature can provide motivation and excitement for children's English literacy development. As pertains to ASL literacy, the Ontario Provincial Schools for Deaf Students have established ASL Curriculum benchmarks that are being field-tested for reliability. ASL benchmarks not only track linguistic competence but also ASL literacy.

Cummins and Early (2011) discuss identity texts as a critical approach for teachers to facilitate English literacy development for second language learners. They say that "Identity texts" refer to students' creative work or performances produced in the classroom and promoted by teachers. They note that students share their identities as they develop their texts, which can be written, spoken or signed and can incorporate visual art or performance art such as music, drama, or combinations of the arts and text. This approach, embedding students' identity within their work, is relevant to Deaf children developing literacy in English as a second language. Students are likely to gain affirmation of self as they share their identities through their work with peers, educators, family and the media, (Cummins and Early, 2011, ch.1, pg. 7).

Small and Cripps (2011) discuss Cummins and Early's (2011) work in order to address the role of identity texts in creating "identities of competence" (Manyak, 2004). It is summarized below.

In examining the process of identity text development, Cummins and Early (2011) draw upon the work of Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis and Cummins (2006) to describe a progression of three pedagogical approaches for identity text development:

- First is a transmission-oriented approach which is the most narrow in focus. It aims simply to transmit the knowledge and skills required in the curriculum. It may acknowledge the child's cultural background but this is not viewed as an intrinsically important part of the exchange between the teacher and student.

- The social constructivist approach draws on higher order thinking. Pedagogy is experiential and collaborative. Both teacher and student co-construct meaning. The child is an active co-participant in their learning.
- The transformative pedagogical approach focuses on critical inquiry and social action as an integral part of the curriculum. It broadens the focus to examine with the child, the interplay of knowledge and power. The child is encouraged to apply his or her experience to analyze and impact the power relations in his or her life. This pedagogical approach encourages students to apply what is learned in an active way for meaning-making and to transform their lives and their environment.

They view these three approaches as nested within each other. This multi-layered pedagogical approach proposed by Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoulis and Cummins (2006) summarized by Small and Cripps (2011) is in keeping with the three broad literacy levels identified earlier by Freire and Macedo (1987).

### **9. What is bilingual bicultural Deaf education and what should I look for in a bilingual education program?**

*"Bilingual bicultural Deaf education recognizes both the native sign language of the Deaf community and the majority language/s of the country in which the student resides. It also fosters Deaf culture and appreciation of the many cultures comprising the broader society"* (Gibson, Small & Mason, 1997).

*"Bilingual Bicultural education is first and foremost an empowering education. . . . An empowering education teaches Deaf students to develop the confidence necessary to exercise their basic rights, accept their responsibilities, to advocate and to learn to participate in the decision making process."* (Malkowski, 1995).

Bilingual bicultural programs for Deaf children should reflect an empowering educational environment both in their teaching and in the structure of the program. An empowering educational environment is one where Deaf and hearing staff model for the children:

- respect for one another
- respect for the signed language of the students
- respect for Deaf culture
- collaboration in decision making and
- advocacy for the rights of Deaf children and adults within and outside of school

While there are many different models of how bilingual bicultural education could be implemented, all of them must have at its basis, a structure that reflects Deaf



empowerment. The bilingual bicultural environment would be a truly empowering context for Deaf children where they are central in their environment. This necessitates a model that incorporates the school environment, the residence, the home, the Deaf community and the hearing community. Together they create an enriching bilingual bicultural experience to encourage Deaf children to take active roles in their communities and eventually as empowered citizens in society. Here are some aspects of the program you can look for:

### **The School Environment**

- Deaf and hearing teachers would be using natural, fully accessible language with Deaf students; ASL or LSQ, for conversation and instruction throughout the day, whether they teach in the same classroom or in different classrooms.
- ASL would be recognized as the language of conversation, of instruction for all subjects and as a language that requires instruction of its own grammar, its own literature (ASL poetry, stories, drama, tales and legends by Deaf people in ASL) as well as Deaf literature (by Deaf people in written English about Deaf experience).
- ASL literature would not occupy the margins of the curriculum. It would be integral to the program.
- The school environment would also provide much written English through printed materials in texts, computers, on blackboards, smartboards, the visual PA system, through notes and TTYs. (TTYs are in use less frequently today and are being replaced by mobile phones, text, video phone, IP relay and video relay [video relay is used currently in the US and is expected to come to Canada soon]. English literature would also play a key role and would be shared in print and through printed stories told in ASL.
- Deaf and hearing teachers would collaborate with one another whether they team teach in the same classroom or have different classrooms. The system would be structured to encourage collaboration among all Deaf and hearing staff. This means that both Deaf and hearing people have a role in developing and promoting the cultural needs of the children.
- Deaf culture would not only be part of the curriculum from preschool through high school, it would be reflected in how decisions were made and in the school environment beyond the classrooms (such as in the hallways, lunchroom, and playgrounds) as well as in the residence and at home.

- Appreciation of other cultures that make up our society would also be highlighted, respected and nurtured in the school to develop mutual respect among children whose families reflect the rich cultural diversity of our society.
- Staff would demonstrate an understanding of first and second language acquisition principles that they apply both inside and outside the classroom.
- Staff are knowledgeable about Deaf experience, Deaf history and Deaf culture. These are an integral part of the children's curriculum. Some examples include Deaf historical figures and events, prominent Deaf individuals and groups such as Deaf clubs, Deaf Olympics and the World Federation of the Deaf, knowledge of Deaf rights and Deaf experience.
- The school environment would be equipped with flashing lights for doorbells and alarm systems and with TTY's and flashing lights so that all phones provide equal access for Deaf and hearing people on campus, with video phones for any rooms that have a phone (board rooms, offices and/or classrooms). This provides access on the campus and an important model for children and adults regarding how to ensure full access in the community and at home as well.
- The bilingual bicultural school environment would also ensure availability of full time interpreters for meetings with non-signing staff, parents, students and visitors.
- Extra curricular activities are a vital component of school life and learning. Students love participating in Deaf sports teams, playing against each other in the schools with Deaf students as well as with hearing teams as well. These sports teams must be promoted. In the past, Deaf high school teams have played against hearing high school teams. Deaf teams have won championship games such as in football and other sports.
- Bilingual bicultural education is about providing a fully accessible environment for Deaf children so that they feel and are central in their educational environment. A fully accessible language is needed for any child to acquire world knowledge. Deaf children have the right to learn free of barriers. The right to learn spoken language must also be respected and would be provided in addition to the child's right to learn new information without barriers in the classroom. Spoken language would not take precedence over the need to ensure a fully accessible learning environment that would include ASL literature, written English, course content, etc.) for all children in the classroom. If a child or family wants to develop the child's spoken language skills it is their right to do so. Time and place would be set aside for spoken language development for children who wish to develop those skills. It would be provided in a way that does not interfere with classroom curriculum and full

accessibility for all students. The classroom focus is on the learning of world knowledge for all students.

### **Home or Residence**

- Families can take advantage of many services in the community that support the bilingual nurturance of their child's development. In the province of Ontario, Deaf ASL Language and Literacy Consultants are available for parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children from the time of discovery until their child enters school. These consultants provide free ASL instruction, advice on ASL storytelling, sharing books using ASL, language interaction with the child, the Deaf community and resources for parents with their child (McLaughlin, Small, Spink-Mitchell & Cripps, 2004). As the child grows older, parents can continue to take ASL classes available through the Canadian Hearing Society and through some agencies that provide Deaf services. A qualified Deaf ASL instructor/ consultant may be hired by the family for personal instruction. Some provincial schools resource departments offer sign language classes as well. When a family from another country immigrates to Canada, the federal government subsidizes English as a second language instruction classes for both children and adults. They have a right to have English language instruction available to them and to communicate in Canada with depth and ease. Similarly, parents of a Deaf child whose most accessible language is ASL, have a right to communicate with depth and ease with their child. ASL classes ought to be subsidized for these families. Families can contact their local clubs to consider subsidizing ASL classes.
- Families can also hire a Deaf baby-sitter to provide a good language model for their child at a young age and to be a natural role model for the child and family. Families must be sure to check out references as is true for any baby-sitting situation.
- Visual technology in the home or residence is a key component for full access and full participation in home life. Visual technology to be installed includes TV caption decoders, TTY's, flashing lights for the doorbell and phone ringing. Parents can contact the Canadian Hearing Society for visual technology. These are available through the Assistive Device Plan. Every five years they pay up to 75 percent for a TTY for a Deaf individual. Currently, TTYs are diminishing in use and are being replaced by videophones via internet access on computers.
- Families are encouraged and are always welcome to participate in Deaf community activities. Examples are sports events, parties, ASL storytelling, performances, arts awards programs, exhibits, summer camps, family fun days, Deaf festivals such as Mayfest in Ontario and many other Deaf community events.
- Families and residence are key in providing a literature rich home environment. Access to much ASL storytelling is critical and can be achieved by borrowing ASL

storytelling videotapes from the provincial resource services library, perhaps their local library and purchasing ASL videotapes from the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf book store (see [www.deafculturecentre.ca](http://www.deafculturecentre.ca)) and by going frequently to Deaf community events.

- Providing much visual written English is critical - through the use of TV caption decoders, TTY, email, phone text, written notes (shopping lists) or just notes for fun!
- Open communication at home using ASL is vital to any child being and feeling central in their family's life and for the family to be central in his or her life. This barrier free visual language is the key to ongoing nurturing and a deepening relationship between parent and child throughout their lives.

### **Deaf Community**

- Bilingual bicultural education necessarily involves the Deaf community since they are the backbone of support for Deaf children and their families. The Deaf community uses ASL and so it naturally provides a free flow of communication for Deaf children and a wonderful natural way for families to grow in their use of ASL and understanding of Deaf people. Families are always welcome and form part of the Deaf community.
- The Deaf community runs organizations such as Sports Associations, Cultural Associations and Deaf Associations. Community events are organized throughout the year including Deaf sports, ASL storytelling, cultural performances, exhibitions, family programs, community celebrations, etc.
- The community advocates for the rights of Deaf people and celebrates Deaf culture, ASL as a language and its literature. The Deaf community is a vital resource for any bilingual bicultural school for Deaf students, for Deaf children and for their families.

### **Hearing Community**

- Local libraries can establish ASL centres with ASL storytelling videotapes, Deaf authors, Deaf publications (such as Silent News, DeafNation) and information about Deaf issues of concern and interest (such as cochlear implants) including a Deaf perspective.
- Libraries can arrange ASL storytelling time with interpreters so that hearing as well as Deaf children can enjoy ASL stories at the library.
- Libraries can purchase Deaf heritage materials available through the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf.

- Local city halls can be contacted to establish a separate fund to pay for interpreting costs for recreational classes such as cooking and quilting and for any special events such as parties or special guests. A contact person should be appointed to book an interpreter when needed in the community for these public activities or events.
- Deaf presenters can be contacted through Deaf community organizations to provide information on Deaf culture, the Deaf community, ASL literature and many other topics.

## Summary

The examples cited here are by no means exhaustive. They provide some indication of the many ways in which the school, home or residence, Deaf and hearing communities can provide accessible and enriching environments for every Deaf child. In so doing, Deaf children can enrich these environments with their full and active participation.

Bilingual bicultural education is about the learning of two languages and two cultures. It is about Deaf children appreciating who they are, feeling accepted for who they are and appreciating others. It is about developing their abilities to the fullest and becoming empowered to express them without bounds. Through an empowering bilingual bicultural education, Deaf children can meet the world with the wholeness of who they are.

## 10. How do I choose a program for my child?

A Deaf child is a minority in our society. Deaf children have parents as advocates and to teach them to advocate for themselves, as they get older. The Deaf child and parent can naturally be enriched by both ASL and English, by the ways of Deaf people as well as the ways of hearing people. The children can feel proud of who they are and what they have to offer our diverse society. Renowned bilingual educator and researcher, Jim Cummins, highlights an empowering education as the key factor in success for all minority language children. Cummins and Danesi have outlined the necessary components for an empowering education for minority students in Canada. In *Denial of Voice: The Suppression of Deaf Children's Language in Canadian Schools* (Cummins and Danesi, 1990, p. 87), a framework is provided which can help guide you to find an empowering and inclusive educational program for your child. The framework identifies four areas for examination of the educational setting:

- Cultural/linguistic incorporation
- Community participation
- Interactive pedagogy and

- Advocacy oriented evaluation

Small and Cripps (2011) distinguish between an “inclusive” environment and a truly empowering one. Inclusive environments provide access but a Deaf student still must “constantly expend energy in attempts to be a genuinely equal participant in the school system. Enormous attention goes toward ensuring basic access in the classroom, for instance. Interactions take place through interpreters, auditory systems, and notetakers. In what we tend to call an ‘inclusive’ environment, Deaf students must expend increased effort in attempts to establish direct and deep interactions with fellow students and teachers in their academic setting. Rarely are they effortlessly in the centre of interactions” (Small and Cripps, 2011). Research by Canadian interpreter and former David Peikoff Chair of Deaf Studies, Debra Russell, points to the limitations of interpreters for true inclusion in regards to both classroom instruction and social interaction (Russell, 2012).

In contrast, empowering environments go far beyond “inclusion”. Such an environment embodies Deaf Cultural Space and “includes ASL, Deaf culture, Deaf role models and a setting where students are already in the core of the system both in academic studies as well as in the social arena where much learning takes place by osmosis” (Small and Cripps, 2011).

In keeping with this framework, parents need to examine whether the setting they are considering for their child, incorporates a visual language that is fully accessible and natural to their child. Does it include Deaf cultural experience, Deaf history, ASL and ASL literature as well as English literature, English texts, the multi-cultural experience of Canadian society and Canadian and world history?

Does the program encourage the participation of Deaf community members to share their history, literature and experience as well as your participation as parents? Does it legitimize both the Deaf community and parents to join together in school-wide events and to share your experiences with each other?

Does the school program encourage interactive, experiential learning and critical thinking in all areas of the curriculum?

Is the goal of assessments to advocate for the rights of the child and educational needs rather than to label possible weaknesses?

What are the academic outcomes of Deaf children who attend the school?

What opportunities for socialization do Deaf children experience in the school program and extra-curricular program?

What leadership opportunities do Deaf children assume as they get older?

Anderson et al (1999) discuss the unique contributions of Deaf teachers and the importance of leadership development. Each Deaf child benefits significantly from access to Deaf role models and opportunities for their own leadership development. Deaf teachers can provide active support in a school or community environment. They can offer parent education from a Deaf perspective. A Deaf adult can be someone that the child emulates.

Renowned psycholinguist, Harlan Lane (1992), presents an educational checklist identifying the properties of successful programs for minority students developed by the Danish sociolinguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, one of the world's leading authorities on bilingual education. Check through this list adapted specifically for Deaf children and see how the programs being considered by parents would fare. Parents can ask themselves the following questions:

- The linguistic goal is two languages, i.e., ASL and written English or LSQ and written French. Is this promoted in the school you are considering?
- The social goal is positive for the class as a whole and does not keep the Deaf child in a powerless subordinate position. Does the school have high expectations of your child's potential and future success?
- Choice exists for learning different languages e.g. your school may offer language courses such as Chinese, or Spanish. In Canada, LSQ and ASL may be offered or/and ASL/ LSQ exchange programs. Exchange programs with a bilingual school for Deaf students in another country, such as Sweden or Denmark may also be a possibility. Does your child's school offer such possibilities?
- Are the teachers bilingual, well trained and familiar with the Deaf experience and do they have a positive connection with the Deaf community and parents?
- Are bilingual materials made available in your child's school? (e.g., *Deaf Heritage in Canada* by Clifton Carbin (1996) offering a rich history of Canadian Deaf heritage and a variety of ASL literature on DVDs and websites.
- Cultural content of the course materials is appropriate for your child. Does your child's school provide access to ASL literature, Deaf literature, Deaf View Image Art (De'VIA) and Deaf World News, etc.?
- The teachers are supportive with high expectations rather than authoritarian. Can the teachers communicate fluently with your child? Can the teachers explain things in depth so that your child can participate fully in discussions and activities?
- Would your child be allowed to use ASL/LSQ with pride?

- Is your child developing high self-confidence and know there is a good chance to succeed? Is this reinforced with high expectations of your child?
- Is your child's first language development promoted? Does your child have access to a variety of language models using different registers in appropriate language settings?
- Is there cognitively demanding subject matter for your child?
- Exposure to and experience with written English/French needs to be frequent and rich. Is there adequate exposure to the majority language and meaningful discussions of it in peer group contexts?
- Does exposure to the majority language use appropriately challenging material at an interest level matching your child's linguistic proficiency and cognitive development?
- Is your child exposed to the majority language in formal contexts (e.g., an interpreted lecture) that provides opportunities to learn the discourse structure of English/French versus ASL/LSQ?
- Is your child exposed to Deaf adults, Deaf cultural and literary events, Deaf arts presentations, Deaf sports events, etc.?

Parents want their children to have the best education possible, to have all doors open to them, and to be able to explore all of life's possibilities. While parents have no doubt met many professionals, they have probably met few, if any, Deaf adults whose perspectives have been shaped by years of firsthand experience. Over time parents will have new questions. There are no definitive answers one person can have for a parent. We encourage parents to feel comfortable approaching many Deaf professional adults as they move along this journey with their child.

### **11. Will my child be ostracized?**

Many parents fear that their child will be isolated in mainstreamed public school programs known to have the philosophy of “educational inclusion”<sup>2</sup>. These constitute the majority of educational settings for Deaf students today. Ninety two percent of Deaf students in Ontario, Canada are mainstreamed as special education students in hearing public school board programmes. Ninety-seven percent of Deaf students attending these local public school board programmes are dominated by spoken language (Malkowski, 2011). Across Canada, 99% of Deaf children (junior kindergarten to grade 12) are enrolled in mainstream school board programmes. Less than 1% attend the

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<sup>2</sup> Note discussion on “inclusion” in question ten of this document.



provincial schools for Deaf students. Although schools for Deaf students are known for providing rich signing environments, mainstreamed or “inclusive” education in non-signing schools is currently a clear priority in Canada. Current research on interpreting in educational environments across Canada, reveals that Deaf students often find themselves in less than optimal social communication situations outside of the academic interpreted classroom environment (Russell, 2012).

Parents can consider examining sending their child to a school where they will have access to Deaf friends, sign language, Deaf mentors, and Deaf cultural content infused with their Ontario Curriculum. If in fact their child does attend a local public school, parents can seek social interaction for their child with other Deaf children through Silent Voice, Deaf summer camps through Deaf organizations such as the Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf and the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf who sponsor programs for families with young Deaf children. The Ontario Deaf Sports Association also sponsors Deaf youth athletic programs which provide opportunities for Deaf youth to meet from across the province. There is no reason why a Deaf child cannot avail of both Deaf and hearing friends.

Signed language is also becoming more common among hearing individuals with the rise in signing programs for hearing infants with hearing parents and increasing numbers of ASL classes offered in high schools across the country. We can foresee a day when large numbers of hearing individuals know ASL as well as Deaf individuals such that it becomes part of universal design with benefits for all. Sign language could be used in noisy environments, or in particularly quiet environments such as libraries. It could be used to communicate across a large room as well. Just as ramps have come to be part of universal design benefitting all (such as parents with strollers or individuals with shopping carts or with luggage on wheels, sign language could come to benefit Deaf and hearing individuals alike and broaden the communicative circles for Deaf and hearing individuals in a large variety of settings. With the loud music listened to by youth today and the increase in number of individuals with acquired hearing loss expected as this next generation ages, sign language as part of universal design could become a welcome addition to society at large (Supalla, Small and Cripps, 2013).

## **12. What does the research on self-esteem, self-efficacy and Deaf identity development tell me? How do different parenting styles apply to me and my Deaf child?**

### ***Self-esteem and Deaf identity***

A person’s sense of “self” is developed during childhood, and continues to strengthen, consolidate, and differentiate during adolescence. Research on self-development has tended to focus unduly on the importance of self-esteem rather than on self-efficacy. More recent research provides evidence that a person’s high self-esteem must be based

on realistic or well-founded feedback. If a person's self-esteem is not based on realistic self-appraisals with respect to things like competencies, it actually has a negative impact. Côté (2012) states that eventually a student whose self-esteem is not based on realistic competencies that he or she possesses, may experience anxiety or depression as it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the illusion of competence in an area that may actually not be their strength. A dis-illusion could lead to a personal crisis if the student has continued in an educational or occupational direction for which he or she is not well suited.

In contrast, students who base their academic self-esteem on a sense of self-efficacy so that they are actually good in that subject or skill, will likely have future positive experiences with it. The subject becomes truly inherently rewarding. Self-efficacy becomes a solid foundation for the transition to adulthood and the formation of adult identity (Côté, 2012).

This evidence relates specifically to the experience of many Deaf children. Deaf adults often report that they were told that their speech was good when they were children. Professionals, teachers and parents would do this in order to bolster the child's self-esteem and to provide encouragement. However, in social situations the child could see that their speech did not have a positive impact. Deaf adults often report this experience as having a negative impact on their sense of self even though they were given great encouragement. As adults they could reflect on the fact that the feedback they were often given as children was unrealistic or false feedback. These reports from Deaf adults point to the value of realistic feedback and differentiation of Deaf children's competencies. As reported by Côté, children need to know what they are good at and to have that fostered rather than attempting to boost self-esteem by encouraging unrealistic expectations in areas of lesser competencies.

### **Parenting styles and Deaf identity**

(Côté, 2012) cites much research on parenting styles, and its impact on children's identity development. Children who are encouraged to think for themselves and granted more psychological autonomy to explore their potentials and social opportunities but who abide by parental guidance, tend to show the best outcomes in many areas of functioning.

Côté, (2012) reports that the most popular framework defines parenting styles in terms of "demandingness" and "responsiveness." "Demandingness" refers to parents' expectations and demands for their children to comply with their expectations. "Responsiveness" is the parents' sensitivity to their children's messages, needs, and states. These dimensions produce four parenting styles: the "authoritative" style is high on both responsiveness and demandingness. It sets the stage for effective psychological autonomy. The "authoritarian" style exhibits high demandingness but low responsiveness. The "indulgent" style is low on demandingness but high on

responsiveness. Finally, the “indifferent” style is low on both responsiveness and demandingness. These last two styles are permissive styles of parenting.

Numerous studies cited by Cote (2012) indicate that authoritative parenting is the most favourable parenting style for identity development. It encourages independent problem solving and critical thinking, therefore providing opportunities for proactive exploration of ideas. The literature suggests that young people raised with permissive styles are not encouraged to become self-regulating. Authoritarian parents can discourage proactive exploration of ideas and independent thought. It fosters unquestioning dependence on parental control and guidance. Research shows that young people who are over-controlled by authoritarian parents or under-controlled by permissive or neglectful parents are not provided opportunities and encouragement to simultaneously explore ideas and self-regulate behaviour.

The literature suggests that moderate connectedness through shared affection and acceptance of individuality, provides the psychological foundation and security for adolescents to develop proactive identity formation. In contrast, weak affectionate bonding with parents and poor communication levels seem to provide an insecure basis for identity exploration and experimentation. In addition, extreme affection that blurs the boundaries between young people and their parents, and limited family tolerance for individuality, can discourage proactive identity formation (Cote, 2012).

Small and Cripps (2012) relate these findings to Deaf children. General findings related to mentoring children, duplicate what we know facilitates their development by parents. Agency or intentional self-directed behaviour seems most crucial in positive impact mentoring relationships. When young Deaf children have agency – their developmental results socially and academically improve. It follows that when they have an active role in negotiating their conversations fully and their language is fully understood – it has a positive impact on their development. So too, when all facets of their “being” as a Deaf child including their culture, heritage, literature, language and community are accepted and nurtured the greater the possibility of positive impact on their identity development. Then Deaf children have the full range of their potential sense of belonging and affiliation available to them and can proactively explore its relevance to them. This sense of collective as a resource for identity development is referred to as Deafhood (Ladd, 2003).

**13. If a Deaf child's parents use a different language, e.g. Italian, Russian – what should be used with the child? Is learning a second language possible for a Deaf child?**

If a Deaf child’s parents use a spoken language other than English/French in North America, we would still recommend that the Deaf child acquire ASL/LSQ as a fully accessible visual language and a language that makes new information accessible. The child will also learn written English/French. Note that if the family uses spoken French or

lives in parts of the country where LSQ is taught in the schools for the Deaf then we would recommend that the child and family acquire LSQ as it is the other recognized signed language used in this country. Some Deaf individuals in this country have multiple signed languages because they come from different parts of the world and may also have multiple spoken languages (primarily expressed in the written format). They learn ASL/LSQ and written English/French when their family moves to Canada. There are exchange programs where Deaf students from Canada can travel to other countries and learn another signed language, broaden their horizons, meet Deaf students and families from around the world and learn about multiple cultures. Students can apply for exchange student grants from the Lions Club, Optimist Club and Rotary.

**14. If my child were hearing we would share Mother Goose rhymes. Can I do that with my Deaf child?**

Definitely parents can. They can easily share ASL Mother Goose rhymes. What is important is the family bond and natural language acquisition that develops through interaction during sign language rhyme play. Parents and children can learn so much from each other, communicating directly with each other using ASL. Hearing siblings will benefit from this too. There are qualified trained ASL Parent-Child Mother Goose Program teachers in Ontario who can help families gain confidence as ASL learners, communicators and as parents using ASL with their child. Rhymes in ASL will increase natural language acquisition for their Deaf child and will increase second and/or third language learning for parents and siblings. Natural language acquisition through playful rhymes, rhythms and stories is fundamental to early social interaction and literacy. Sharing favourite ASL rhymes, rhythms and/or stories together creates an ever-lasting bond.

It is important to note that the ASL Parent-Child Mother Goose Program does not use books and/or props such as toys. It focuses on interactive rhymes, rhythms and stories. The pace is slow and relaxed with plenty of time for repetition of handshapes, locations and movements of ASL and create the rhythms and rhymes of ASL poetry. Parents will gain skills to enable them to create positive family language interactions with their child/children, Deaf and/or hearing. They will learn what the ASL handshapes, locations and movements are that make up ASL words and how to incorporate those into fun ASL poetry they can share with their young child. The ASL poems help decrease frustration, increase communication, interaction between parent and child and natural language acquisition in a fun supportive environment. There are also resources that parents can purchase with samples of ASL Parent-Child Mother Goose Rhymes (Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf, 2004; 2008) and a guide for parents with multiple examples of effective parent child playful language interactions that facilitate language acquisition (McLaughlin, Small, Spink-Mitchell and Cripps, 2004).

## **15. There is much discussion about cochlear implants. What are they and should I get one for my child?**

As explained by the Hospital for Sick Children Cochlear Implant Program (2014), the cochlear implant is a device that bypasses damaged or missing hair cells in the cochlea or inner ear. It has a small wire with very small electrodes along it placed down inside the cochlea. Electricity goes through the electrodes, and directly stimulates the auditory nerve assuming that the auditory nerve is intact. Although different implants are made by different companies, the basic parts of the cochlear implant are the same and are inserted in a surgical procedure. There is an internal coil which the doctor places into the cochlea and an external part including a microphone, a transmitting coil, a speech processor, and the cords that connect these parts.

The goal of the cochlear implant is to make the child as “hearing-like” as possible (Valente, 2011). Even after the surgery, the child is Deaf. The cochlear implant does not restore hearing. Cochlear implant use requires many hours of speech therapy by a therapist and many hours of commitment from parents. Members of the Deaf community tend to object to cochlear implants for Deaf children not only because of potential medical risks or complications from surgery (Snoddon, 2008) but primarily because a child with a cochlear implant is often denied access to a signed language which would provide them full language exposure from birth.

It is our recommendation to professionals that spoken and signed language not be placed in competition with one another when addressing parents’ concerns. For a Deaf child, ASL provides access to a language without obstacle. Parents CAN learn ASL establishing ease of communication with their child. This does not negate the child’s ability to acquire a spoken language as has been addressed in questions two, three and six of this document. ASL is minimally “an insurance policy” that the child will acquire at least one language during the most critical language acquisition years. Maximally, it provides the foundation of a language that is the basis of human communication we all share and it provides access to an entire rich heritage and culture, with its own literature, and to a community in which their child can feel a strong sense of belonging. Parents too, can develop strong connection to the Deaf community and strengthened bonds with their children by accepting them for who they are.

## **16. Is there visual technology that I can use with my child?**

It is good to provide as visual an environment as possible for any Deaf child. This does not mean that parents must negate the sound environment. However, by providing this visual environment parents are allowing their child to experience greater inclusion with the family and those around them.

### **Closed and Open Captioning**

These are actual written texts of the spoken language provided on the screen of any visual media such as television, DVD's and internet. The abbreviation, **CC**, is now the symbol for closed captioning. Increasingly more movie theatres are providing CC on a special screen visible only to the guest and can be requested when you enter the theatre.

### **Visual Alerting Systems**

A doorbell or a phone ring alerts you through sounds. Parents can install the lighting system to flash visually at the same time that the sound rings. It is convenient. When someone rings the doorbell or the phone rings, the light will flash several times and the child knows someone is at the door or that someone is phoning.

There is a fire alarm with steady flashing lights or strobes. They are very bright and can wake up a person if there is a fire. It is best to install the visual fire alarm in the bedroom, not in the hallway where sound alarms are installed in most homes. You can install several visual fire alarms in different places in the home.

These items are available at the Canadian Hearing Society.

### **TTY to Voice/Voice to TTY**

A teletypewriter, known as a TTY, allows you to communicate over the phone via typed messages. If one person has a TTY and the other does not, then a Relay Service operator is used. The operator responds to the hearing person using spoken language and to the person on the TTY through text. When the participants are ready to receive a response, it is customary to say/type "Go Ahead" or "GA" to indicate they are ready for a reply. "Stop Keying", "SK", or "Ready to hang up" would be said/typed when the participants are ready to hang up. It should be pointed out that with constantly changing technology, TTYs are slowly fading out; however, the older generation who are not as familiar with the internet still use them.

### **IP Relay Service or Web-based text relay services**

IP Relay Service provides functionality similar to the TTY to Voice/Voice to TTY services, replacing the TTY and telephone line with a specialized computer program and internet connection. Some internet service providers such as Bell, Rogers and Eastlink provide this. Check with your internet service provider to see if they have the IP Relay service in place. There is no cost to this program.

### **Video Relay Service**

Video Relay Service (VRS) allows people who use signed language to place phone calls by signing instead of typing. The video interpreter uses a webcam or videophone to interpret signed language messages to voice and vice versa.

### **Video Remote Interpreting**

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) allows people in the same room who use sign language to communicate with those using spoken language . VRI has proven to be useful for people in business meetings, at doctor appointments, for minor surgical procedures, and for court proceedings, etc. It can be used via a mobile laptop and/or tablet or virtually any mobile device with a webcam built in and that has internet/wi-fi connection.

### **Webcams or video camera**

Known as video links, these are in-built to a computer, tablet, laptop and some mobile phones. It is increasingly more common and it is very convenient. It must be connected to wi-fi which is very low-cost and/or internet connections. Anyone can use this via skype and oovoo which are compatible with any computer or laptop. Facetime and ichtat are additional video software you can use if you are using an Apple computer. With this you can converse using sign language on video, typing in text and/or speaking.

### **Glossary<sup>3</sup>**

**American Sign Language (ASL):** A system of relatively arbitrary symbols and grammatical signals that change across time as all languages do. ASL is used by members of the Deaf community in Canada and the U.S. to interact with each other, to communicate their ideas, emotions and intentions and to transmit their culture from generation to generation. ASL is a distinct language and is very different from written or spoken English. Signs for objects and concepts are rarely “finger-spelled” letters, but rather consist of rule governed hand shapes and arm movements for signed words arranged in space. Facial expression, eye gaze, head movements and body posture are key to grammatical relationships in ASL. ASL has its own vocabulary, grammar, and its own social rules of use just as all languages do. ASL has its own way of organizing ideas in space, its own history and literature that reflects the unique heritage of Deaf people.

**Artificial Sign Systems:** Devised by a small group of people to try to represent a spoken language on the hands. Unlike signed languages, artificial sign systems have not evolved through the natural use of a community of users over time and are not efficient as natural languages are. Sign systems do not have their own grammars and distort the meaning of words as words are broken down into parts.

**ASL Literature and ASL Non-fiction Texts:** “American Sign Language (ASL) Literature refers to stories, legends, poems, riddles, humour and other genres told in ASL that have been passed down from one generation to another by culturally Deaf people. It arises

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<sup>3</sup> Glossary definitions are taken with permission from the 1st edition of *Questions Parents Ask* (Small and Cripps, 2003) and from *Cultural Space and Self/ Identity Development Among Deaf Youth* (Small, Cripps and Côté, 2012). Some definitions from these sources are modified in this document.

from the thoughts, emotions and experiences of culturally Deaf people” (Byrne, 1996). ASL non-fiction texts refer to literature based on factual information, presented in ASL. Information is structured according to ASL discourse and so Deaf children can follow it naturally and easily. Since ASL is an unwritten language, ASL literature and ASL non-fiction texts are of the "oral literature" tradition (Bahan, 1991), told through the air rather than written down. It is recorded on videotape, CD Rom, on film, or on the Internet.

**Authoritarian parenting style:** An approach whereby parents demand mature behaviour, but they are not sensitive to their children’s needs and emotional states.

**Authoritative parenting style:** An approach in which parents are sensitive to their children’s needs and emotional states, but they also communicate expectations of maturity and require that their children comply with those expectations.

**Bilingual Bicultural Deaf Education:** “Bilingual bicultural Deaf education recognizes both the native sign language of the Deaf community and the majority language/s of the country in which the student resides. It also fosters Deaf culture and appreciation of the many cultures comprising the broader society” (Gibson, Small & Mason, 1997). Bilingual bicultural education is first and foremost an empowering education. “An empowering education teaches Deaf students to develop the confidence necessary to exercise their basic rights, [to] accept their responsibilities, to advocate and to learn to participate in the decision making process.” (Malkowski, 1995)

**Deaf:** In the Canadian context “Deaf” with a capital “D” reflects that ASL/ LSQ and ASL/LSQ Culture are the birthright of the individual by virtue of their having been born visually based or become so in childhood, whether or not they have been exposed to ASL/ LSQ and the respective culture. Deaf is in keeping with how authors refer to individuals from other cultural minority groups – Chinese people, Jewish people, Deaf people.

**Deafhood:** A process of affirming an existential state of Deaf ‘being in the world’ whereby Deaf collective existence emerges as a positive resource for the individual and society (Ladd, 2003).

**Deaf cultural space:** Embodies an empowering Deaf environment that includes ASL and ASL literature, Deaf culture, Deaf role models, Deaf heritage, Deaf history, and Deaf arts (Ladd, 2003). Deaf students are in the core of the system both in regards to academic studies as well as in the social arena where much learning and interaction take place by osmosis.

**Identity texts:** Students’ creative work and/or performances produced within the classroom and promoted by classroom teachers become a mirror reflecting students’ identities back to them and for others to appreciate. An empowering tool whereby



students share their identities as they develop their texts, which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form (Cummins and Early, 2011).

**Inclusion:** A concept that claims to provide access to education for all students. In the case of Deaf students though, they must constantly expend energy in attempts to be genuinely equal participants in the school system. Enormous attention goes toward ensuring basic access in the classroom through interpreters, auditory systems, and notetakers. Deaf students must expend increased effort in attempts to establish direct and deep interactions with fellow students and teachers in their academic setting. Rarely are they effortlessly in the centre of interactions.

**Indifferent parenting style:** One of two forms of permissive parenting where parents have few expectations for mature behaviour, and they are not sensitive to their children's needs and emotional states.

**Indulgent parenting style:** One of two forms of permissive parenting where parents have few expectations for mature behaviour, but they are (overly) sensitive to their children's needs and emotional states.

**Language:** A system of relatively arbitrary symbols and grammatical signals that changes cross time, that members of a community share and use to interact with each other, to communicate their ideas, emotions and intentions and to transmit their culture from generation to generation.

**Personal agency:** The capacity for intentional, self-directed behavior, especially in face of obstacles such as a lack of opportunity or discrimination.

**Personal identity:** How a person experiences the self in the interpersonal realm and is known by others in terms of reputation and personality/ behavioral characteristics.

**Proactive identity formation:** An overall stance involving a willingness to think ahead in one's life in a planning and purposeful manner, and to explore and experiment with future possible selves and identities.

**Self-esteem:** A self-assessment of how well one is perceived in various situations, how good one is in certain activities, and how well one performs different roles. This sense of self involves a comparison with others, as in how physically attractive one is compared to others.

**Self-efficacy:** The sense that one's actions can produce certain predictable outcomes in a given realm of life, like doing well in certain school subjects, languages, or sports. It is based on a belief that matches a realistic outcome (e.g., believing that one is good in math, is matched with doing well in mathematics). Importantly, the belief can influence

the outcome, because if one does not try to be good at something, one does not practice; and if one does not even try something in the first place, one cannot become successful at it.

**Speech:** Any aspect of oral communication involving vocal tract movements for sound production.

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