

## INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT HOFFMEISTER

### A discussion about the Sign Language Curriculum

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#### Introduction

Since 2018, the Sign Language Curriculum in two states of Brasil - at least - started putting flesh on the bilingual education of deaf<sup>4</sup> children as two Libras curricula were published in close collaboration with the corresponding prefectures and municipal educational secretaries. In the city of Sao Paulo, Barbosa worked with two curriculum proposals: for Portuguese as an L2 (in its written form) and for the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as an L1. Mertzani and Fernandes, down in the South, in the city of Rio Grande, commenced the Libras curriculum with the close participation of the city's bilingual school for the deaf. This latter, had its base on the national Greek Sign Language curriculum (2004), which, in turn, was founded on the American Sign Language (ASL) curricula and programs of the 1990s (MERTZANI, 2019). The publication of these curricula presented Libras as a compulsory component in the national curriculum, in the area of *Languages*, and hence, as a mandatory unit to be studied on its own right throughout the school grades.

Working towards the same scope, we joined our expertise and experience, organized seminars and workshops to open discussions concerning the teaching and learning of Sign Languages as the L1 at schools and their position in the national curriculum (to mention a few: BARBOSA, 2019; FERNANDES, 2019; MARINS, FERNANDES, 2019; MERTZANI,

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<sup>4</sup> In the introduction section, we use the term *deaf* in order to avoid any judgements about the linguistic and cultural identity of deaf people (see NAPIER, LEESON, 2016, p. 2). In the main body of the interview, the term *Deaf* is used as it is coined to the works of Professor Robert Hoffmeister.

BARBOSA, PPGEDU-IE FURG, 2019; MERTZANI, BARBOSA, 2019). Fruit of these exchanges are some of the topics approached in this interview, such as adapting and implementing existing Sign Language curricula in one's Sign Language reality, viewing Sign Language as the L1 of the hearing child with deaf parents, and as the L2 for the deaf child with or without a cochlear implant; and the creation of Sign Language learning materials, among other topics. These are compelling matters with which bilingual schooling of deaf children is facing and to which current Sign Language research is just beginning to answer.

In particular, our experience with constructing and implementing the Libras curriculum in the city of Rio Grande, as an adaptation of the aforementioned international Sign Language curricula, drove us to organize this interview with Dr. Robert Hoffmeister, because he participated in their authoring teams, and, more importantly, his research advocates ASL (and by extension, any Signed Language) as the natural language of the deaf and its exclusive use in the classroom. The ASL is *language*, and as such, teachers need be fluent in its use in schools to enrich the deaf child's learning experience; and for deaf students to use it to express themselves fluently throughout their schooling.

Since the 1970s, Dr. Robert Hoffmeister studied the acquisition of ASL of d/Deaf children with d/Deaf parents (HOFFMEISTER, 1988; HOFFMEISTER, MOORES, 1975; HOFFMEISTER, WILBUR, 1980), and in the 1990s, with Harlan Lane and Ben Bahan, published the book *A Journey into the Deaf World* (1996), a publication that marked how we view deaf people, their community and education. These works impacted the structuring of sign language curricula, especially those relating to ASL acquisition, for they were used (among other studies) in determining Sign Language mastery levels as an L1 (in terms of Sign Language developmental milestones), and deaf learner profiles and content (linguistic, cultural, etc.) such as syntax, grammar and vocabulary components (see also: HENNER, CALDWELL-HARRIS, NOVOGRODSKY, HOFFMEISTER, 2016; NOVOGRODSKY, FISH, HOFFMEISTER, 2014; NOVOGRODSKY, CALDWELL-HARRIS, FISH, HOFFMEISTER, 2014; NOVOGRODSKY, HENNER, CALDWELL-HARRIS, HOFFMEISTER, 2017).

In the 2000s, ASL proficiency was shown to correlate strongly with English literacy (HOFFMEISTER, 2000), a result that came to support the deaf child's bimodal bilingual education in programs where Sign Language has a leading role in his/her literacy learning. At

present, this finding is a strong argument for justifying the inclusion of Signed Languages as subjects of study in the national curriculum and the establishment of bilingual educational policies in deaf education. Further studies on this relationship of ASL with English academic learning (SCOTT, HOFFMEISTER, 2017), led to the presentation by Hoffmeister and Caldwell-Harris (2014) of a three-stage theoretical model of how children could, in principle, acquire a language via print (reading and writing) by relying, at least at the beginning of their schooling, exclusively on ASL. The outcomes of such a practice (where applicable) remain to be demonstrated, although our on-going evaluations of the Libras curriculum implementation in some schools of the Rio Grande do Sul State, RS-Brasil, support this exact need; prioritizing the exclusive teaching of Libras in the kindergarten and the two first years of elementary education.

A Sign Language curriculum also needs assessment tools to evaluate the students' Sign Language skills and progress throughout the school grades. With his team in Boston University, Hoffmeister developed the online ASL Assessment Instrument (ASLAI) (see HOFFMEISTER, KARIPI, KOURBETIS in this volume; also HENNER, NOVOGRODSKY, REIS, HOFFMEISTER, 2018; HENNER, CALDWELL-HARRIS, NOVOGRODSKY, HOFFMEISTER, 2016; ROSENBERG, LIEBERMAN, CASELLI, HOFFMEISTER, 2020), which includes sub-tasks that assess ASL analogical reasoning and ASL complex syntax. These tools (in addition to those of other Signed Languages), firstly, permitted a unique understanding about the development of ASL (and by extension, of any Sign Language) by the deaf child across the grades in elementary and secondary education. Secondly, they yielded important insights into practices and strategies in developing Sign Language activities for the classroom routine (e.g., using distractors in video/picture task choices), focusing on both the lower-level language skills (e.g., phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary), and on the higher-level language comprehension skills (see ROSENBERG, LIEBERMAN, CASELLI, HOFFMEISTER, 2020).

Having in mind this long trajectory, we contacted Dr. Robert Hoffmeister (most people know him as Bob) in March 2021 and agreed to conduct this interview from a distance and in parts by disposing a first set of questions in a shared online document. At that time, Dr. Vassilis Kourbetis communicated the news of a new book released in April 2021. Apart from our

intention to honor Robert Hoffmeister in this present volume, colleagues from North America had done so in the edited book *Discussing bilingualism in deaf children. Essays in Honor of Robert Hoffmeister* (ENNS, HENNER, MCQUARRIE, 2021). This collection was initiated as a tribute, drawing on Hoffmeister's impact in the field of bilingual deaf education, and included contributions to discuss its theoretical underpinnings, teaching strategies for deaf students, and Sign Language assessment. The concept of a strong Signed Language as an L1, critical for the deaf child's academic development, is highlighted throughout the book. The paper by Kourbetis and Karipi (2021) is indicative: *How can you talk about bilingual education of the deaf if you do not teach sign language as a first language?*

There was a gradual exchange of questions and answers, a process that gave us the opportunity to connect with and understand even more of Bob's important work concerning Sign Language as an L1 (in our case, in relation to the Sign Language curriculum), and the work of new (for us) and familiar colleagues in this field, like Vassilis Kourbetis and Spyridoula Karipi. The interview is presented in the next section.

## The Interview

**Question 01:** How did it all start? How did you get involved in the construction of the ASL curriculum?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** As director of the Boston University program in the education of the Deaf and Deaf Studies, one of my main interests was working on a curriculum for teaching ASL as a subject matter in K-12 education settings. My prior experience in conducting research on ASL acquisition along with the expansion of research on ASL acquisition provided us with a developmental schematic from which to structure a curriculum. Observing 'language arts' in both Hearing and Deaf programs, the actual implementation of what this meant was very different when applied to Deaf students. First, the Hearing native speakers of English all arrived in the classroom speaking English, and this implies they knew English. Secondly, based on this factor 'language arts' actually means teaching English speaking children *about* English. The focus depending on the grade level was on expanding vocabulary, mapping this new

vocabulary to print (implicitly and explicitly teaching how to read), recognizing correct vs. incorrect sentences, understanding morphology (e.g., tense), and how to build sentences (using *and* or *but*, etc.) and much more. Essentially Hearing students were being taught how the language they use and know is constructed. Hearing students were learning the structure of English not the actual language itself, except in vocabulary expansion. In learning how to write, sentence construction, such as using embedded clauses supported the application of what they already knew in new expanded and concise ways.

When I observed (and in my early teaching of Deaf students) the use of ‘language arts’ as a subject meant the actual teaching for the purpose of acquiring English via print, which is in reality teaching how to read. This teaching of ‘language’ to Deaf students resulted in two simultaneous goals: the acquisition of English and the teaching of how to read. Up to now this continues to be implemented without the Deaf students knowing English or more critically, having a first language (Signed Language). When Hearing curricula is adapted, it became a complicated mix where instruction required the learning of a language (English) and the learning how to read. These are two separate and distinct functions that have been conflated in the education of the Deaf. In the beginning of my career, in the 1970’s, I learned and observed that ‘language’ instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children was about learning English. All measures of ‘language’ were via English, mostly through print, but speech was also used to determine language knowledge. In all cases, Deaf children had no chance to succeed in school unless they were exceptional and could learn in spite of the instruction. Ironically, there have been a huge number of studies that demonstrated the success of Deaf Children of Deaf parents. In some studies, a small number of Deaf children of Hearing parents who learned a Signed Language very early in their lives were also successful in school.

I was also fortunate to have worked with some schools for the Deaf and some classroom programs where we began working with ASL as the ‘language’ to be learned/acquired. In the late 1970’s, I created a program where Deaf graduate students were assigned to support Hearing families with newly diagnosed Deaf children. This program was structured to accomplish two goals: to offer a language (ASL) role model for *both* parents and children, and for Hearing parents to meet high functioning Deaf persons. This program was very successful. In the late



1990's, I was given the opportunity to work at the Scranton School for the Deaf with Todd Czubek and Kristin DiPerri.

Todd and Kristin were on site advocates who worked directly with Deaf students and other teachers. They established a modified program of the one above, where Deaf people from the community were trained to work with teachers in a co-teacher relationship. The Hearing teacher presented the academic materials needed to be learned in concert with the Deaf co-teacher. The Deaf person was viewed as an equal partner not an aide, thus co teacher is the appropriate focus of responsibilities. The Deaf students now had language models they could learn from and identify with. The Deaf co teacher was fluent in ASL, the Hearing co teacher was a good L2 user of ASL, but originally learned to teach using simultaneous communication (basically signed English and its variants). Together this team of Deaf and Hearing co-teachers presented academic material where students received input from fluent language models and could comfortably interact in class lessons as students should. As a result of this work Todd, Kristin, Vassilis Kourbetis, and others, in collaboration with me, began discussing what a 'language' curriculum for Deaf students should look like.

My approach is analytical and structural, incorporating contrastive discussion. Todd approached the learning of ASL as descriptive, contrastive and natural, using the Signed Language that Deaf students brought to the class. It is important to remember there were two classes of language instruction. One class included the Deaf and Hearing co-teachers, who were modeling the acquisition of the language, and in the second class Todd was teaching about the language learned in the co teaching class while in the third class Kristin was teaching about English as a language to be learned using Signed Language in a co teaching model. Thus, we began to each develop curricula from our perspectives. In developing a bilingual model curriculum, Todd focused on ASL and Kristin focused on English. Their curriculum is the first bilingual ASL/English that I know of and is currently in progress with the first four grades available today.

As part of this collaboration, I should mention that those who worked with me on curricula were all graduate and undergraduate students at Boston University. We also had the benefit of others who brought expertise from different areas. Rama Novogrodsky from Israel joined us when we were developing the ASL Assessment Instrument (ASLAI). Catherine

Caldwell Harris, a faculty member in psychology, was also a member of the team. The team included Deaf faculty (Bruce Bucci, Andrew Bottoms, and Marlon Kuntze) who participated in discussions as to what an ideal curriculum should contain and numerous Deaf graduate students (Rachel Benedict, Jon Henner, Sarah Fish were the lead people). Many other Deaf graduate students supported the work we were doing. There are too many to list here, but three leaders stood out, Marie Phillip, Ben Bahan, and Janis Cole. Vassillis Kourbetis was a long distance collaborator and was with us when we initially began discussing the idea of a language curriculum for Deaf students and continues to work with us to this day. Many Hearing graduate and undergraduate students contributed to this work and continue to work teaching Deaf students today.

**Question 02:** After the ASL curriculum, you were a co author of the Greek Sign Language Curriculum, back in 2004, teaming with Vassilis Kourbetis. Can you tell us about this experience too please?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** In the initial team discussions circa 1996, a number of curricula ideas were circulating. Vassilis and the US team have been in discussions for a number of years. In the early 2000's, the team expanded to include heads of schools for the Deaf, other university colleagues, Deaf teachers and Deaf graduate students. This expansion resulted in many different curricula ideas. In concert with Vassilis, we all collaborated in supporting his ideas of a curriculum centered on Signed Language as a first language for Deaf students. Vassilis had the benefit of the team's initial thinking and began to move in a direction of his choosing. I continued to work with him on developing a Signed Language as a first language curriculum. The focus of this curriculum was both analytical and functional. Functional in that we needed to think of a way to present Greek Signed Language (GSL) to young Greek Deaf children as a model to learn the language.

At the time, video technology was just beginning to take off. Vassilis is a very creative and energetic leader as was most of our team members. However, his ideas began taking shape very early. As part of his work, he was able to employ a number of Greek Deaf adults, fluent in GSL. This was a key factor developing a bilingual curriculum devoted to learning/acquiring

a Signed Language and learning *about* a Signed Language. Having a team of fluent Signed Language users, who are able to intuit knowledge about the language, and who are also able to provide constructive feedback to ideas of presenting GSL to children, not only for learning GSL but to enable their learning of other important subject matter. This began the initial structure of the GSL curriculum. Once the idea of how to provide Signed Language input for acquisition was on the table, next the discussion and development came around to what instructional structures were needed.

In the beginning, we started developing ideas around the teaching of GSL as a subject matter. This was one of the main ASL concepts directly carried into the GSL curriculum. Once accepted, then the goal was to work with the language that the Deaf children knew. Once the Deaf students were familiar with the concept of Signed Language as a subject matter, implementing instruction about the components of a Signed Language began to take shape resulting in the beginnings of teaching Signed Language as a curriculum subject. Then we examined how the Greek language is discussed in Hearing schools to see what principles were comparable to discussing GSL.

**Question 03:** These are interesting developments indeed, thinking, at that time, not only the type of video technology available, but also the fact that few countries created a first Sign Language curriculum. The USA, for example, had some ASL curricula. Overall, how did the ASL curriculum contribute to the construction of the GSL curriculum?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** In developing the GSL curriculum we had the advantage of the thinking of the US's team's differing approaches to curriculum development. The ASL curriculum (as a subject) was developed by examining how English speaking Hearing children were taught 'language' in their classrooms. It was evident that teaching 'language' meant teaching about English and not teaching English to learn the language. The ASL curriculum was developed in a contrastive model process. Hearing language curricula is initially focused on learning how to categorize (nouns, verbs, etc.) and how to match words they know with pictures and symbols (print). Using this approach, more higher order learning is encountered. For example, Hearing children are taught to identify words (vocabulary) in sentences. Simple ideas, such as the



placement of incorrect vocabulary, can result in two issues: a semantic error or a sentence structure error. More and more expansion of these ideas lead to elements of understanding where students learn to figure out categories of words by their placement within sentences and how to extract the meaning of a word if the meaning is not readily known (using context as a strategy).

These types of language understanding are fundamental to learning higher and more complex levels of language knowledge and language use. For example, how morphology is used to extend information (plural) or change meaning (tense). Basic principles such as these were taken from Hearing curricula and used as building blocks for a GSL curriculum. In Greece, it was relatively easy, because the government required the same curricula for the whole country. One advantage was that the first law for the educational recognition of GSL was passed (Law 2817/2000, Government Gazette 78/20.3.2000), explicitly stating in article 4.a that: "*The language of deaf and hard of hearing students is Greek Sign Language*". Legislative recognition led to strong support for the development of the first curriculum for the teaching of GSL as a 1st language in compulsory education.

In the US, curricula is determined by each state and/or by a local school district. The advantage of the US is that a number of different curricula can be examined to find the commonalities across the thinking of what is considered important. Having this approach, allowed us to select the principles, goals, objectives and thinking that many of the Hearing curricula deemed essential. Having this foundation, supported the development of the GSL curriculum.

**Question 04:** You recently participated in co authoring the most recent ASL Curriculum (2018). What is different now, when you go back and compare this new one with the old ASL curriculum?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** I believe you are referring to the *ASL Content standards* that were developed over an eight year period. This work was completed after many ‘think tank’ type of meetings, where a large number of ideas were circulated and discussed. The resulting ASL standards reflect goals and objectives that should be used to design a comprehensive Signed

Language curriculum. This work was very different from what I would see as an ASL curriculum. An ASL curriculum is a guide on how to teach what is referred to in the ASL Content Standards. The ASL Content Standards developed through a contract with the Gallaudet University Clerc Center, laid out what an expansive team of University, Secondary, and Elementary level professionals with an extensive background in working with Deaf children agreed should be known by students at different grade levels.

A curriculum should translate what should be known as listed in the ASL Content Standards into teaching techniques, strategies, and outcomes. Outcomes should be assessed at different age levels.

I just did a recent search on the web to find ASL curriculum designed for K-12 Deaf students and found that Canada Manitoba (Charlotte Enns) and Ontario (Heather Gibson) appear to have the beginnings of a curriculum. Most of the other websites, are mostly about teaching ASL as a second language. I had expected the ASL Content Standards to encourage the development of ASL curricula but I realize that, to my knowledge, only the Bilingual Grammar Curriculum (BGC) (Czubek and DiPerri) is available for schools and programs serving Deaf children.

This gap in curricula has been filled by the work of Kourbetis, Karipi, Czubek, and DiPerri along with their colleagues in developing actual curricula for the teaching of ASL. I think that technology will enable the younger generation to create and design Signed Language curricula based on the fact that Signed Languages are visual languages. The most difficult part of developing materials for Deaf students depends on the visual technology available at the time. Digital possibilities create spaces that allow educators to bring the principles necessary to enhance learning about Signed Language and what is both required and needed to learn a Signed Language as a first language. Fortunately, we now have a great deal of linguistic and technological resources available to implement our ideas. For bilingual instruction, Vassilis and his team of computer experts developed a platform where Signed Language and print could be both presented (passive) and interactive. This technology is finally becoming available to allow more expanded thinking about visual presentations of two languages. This is a critical factor in exposing Signed Language to young Deaf children and their parents and, most importantly, continuing this exposure through their development. It is important to recognize that I am not

the only author but a co author and part of a team that develops curriculum. Many of the people that I have worked with are far more intelligent about curriculum development than I am.

**Question 05:** Thinking of technology, how do you see the future of Deaf children's education and Signed Languages, especially now with the rise of cochlear implants?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** Deaf people have been with us since the beginning of time. In the past 200 years there have been a myriad of technological advances that purport to make Deaf people's lives better. In my nearly 80 years knowing and living with Deaf people, whatever their upbringing or technological cyborg input, as adults they have always gravitated towards the Deaf World. The Deaf World is changing to meet the times, but that's what makes it so exciting. Deaf people have demonstrated extraordinary adaptability to whatever the Hearing world throws at them. The bilingual movement will open the door to ALL Deaf and many Hard of Hearing persons to walk through it. Recognizing two languages (or more), with Signed Language as the legs, will support Deaf and Hard of Hearing children to become academically strong and leadership wise to lead the Deaf World into the future. Cochlear implants will not deter this process. After all, when the implant transmitter is removed, the person cannot hear, the severity of which makes them biologically deaf and culturally Deaf. The only control we have will be how we introduce learning into the early education classrooms of Deaf children.

**Question 06:** Shall we consider teaching Signed Languages as second languages for deaf children with cochlear implants in the curriculum ?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** This is an interesting question. I have to think more about this. For me all children with a hearing loss are Deaf. I believe when a Deaf child reaches adulthood they should have the right to make their own decisions as to who they are: linguistically and, of course, culturally.

This issue enters into many more complications that need to be thought about. For example, for those who are able to communicate with their parents (those who become bilingual), if you follow my beliefs, this can lead to viable discussions among their peers, their

parents and others who make decisions for them. What is missing from the implant debate is the fact that the Deaf child has no say in this process and there has been only anecdotal results as to what happens with many implanted adults. These types of discussions will be needed to ascertain the development of a healthy child. A child who should be able to raise questions and receive answers. Even if some of the answers are not what they expected. I believe this approach will lessen the animosity between parents and their Deaf children as they develop into functioning self sufficient adults.

**Question 07:** How do you view the school reality (basically and primarily) in relation to the ASL curriculum as well as to the existing Sign Language curricula worldwide?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** As I mentioned earlier, Deaf people are the “people of the eye”, visually based in language and in learning. A Signed Language curriculum is not that difficult to create, design, and produce. It's the implementation that will be the key factor in the impact on Deaf children. The world must acknowledge two critical and foundational factors: Deaf people are visual learners, and ironically ALL Deaf people eventually become bilingual. Advanced learning can be accomplished if we understand and develop our educational programming on the visual requirements that impact learning. In reality, the Hearing world's implementers of education (teachers) will need a major shift in attitude and their training requirements will need major adjustment. A move towards making instruction much more visual by recognizing that Signed Language as a first language is the first factor in educational preparation. Bilingual instruction will require that all teachers learn to become proficient at least and fluent at best in the Signed Language of the Deaf child's community. All teachers arrive in the classroom with fluency in the spoken language of the community. It is not a difficult change in attitude to learn the language of their Deaf children. Recognizing that we are now working from a belief that TWO languages are critical to the academic success of ALL Deaf children we can begin to analyze our teaching practices to develop curriculum that will be implemented to most efficiently enhance learning in Deaf children. We must keep in mind that language is the foundation for the development of learning in all children. It is the key to unlock the acquisition of knowledge: the goal of schooling.

Some keys to implementing a Bilingual curriculum for Deaf students must include:

1. Deaf community members (include all levels from professionals to grass root people): Teachers must be made comfortable to interact and fully understand the different points of views of Deaf adults. After all, Deaf adults are the product of our educational system.
2. High quality Signed Language as an L2 training of Hearing teachers to increase production fluency and substantially increase comprehension skills. We demand nothing less of our Deaf learners, it should also be demanded of our teachers.
3. The development of teams of Deaf native and fluent non native signers, skilled teachers (Deaf and Hearing), skilled interpreters sanctioned by Deaf members, linguists versed in Signed Language structure, psychologists skilled in Deaf community knowledge (to work with parents), and parents willing to participate in a bilingual setting for their Deaf children. The team approach permits those participating to air their point of view. A rule within team interaction is to create a safe place to discuss ideas. This supports legitimacy for ideas that some may not be fully comfortable with. This does not mean that all ideas need to be accepted, it means that all ideas must be heard. Ideas must be discussed and those accepted can be continued. To assume parity there must be equal numbers of qualified Deaf professionals and qualified Hearing professionals. This will require good ideas and uncomfortable ideas to be accepted and discussed across both sides of the table. This will be the only way to move forward with ideas that work, and both sides of the table must agree and work out equitable solutions.

Bilingual education recognizes that there are at least two languages under implementation. As with language learning, one language will be dominant depending on the environment. For Deaf students, Signed Language as a first language will dominate. Recognizing this, one can then proceed to teach print using a first language and a second language via print, using the resources of the first language (see HOFFMEISTER, CALDWELL HARRIS, 2014; CALDWELL, 2021). A critical piece of bilingual learning.

**Question 08:** Thinking again the theme of this volume, the Signed Languages in school curricula, and the fact that they are the mother tongues of hearing children with Deaf parents too... In fact, reading the book by Enns et al. (2021), *Discussing Bilingualism in Deaf Children*



- the book is initiated as a tribute to you - we came across the info that you are a CODA as you were brought up by Deaf parents. What is your personal view with regards to offering and teaching Signed Languages as first languages to hearing children with Deaf parents? What happens in this case? Can we think of offering Signed Languages for these children in the curriculum? And if yes, how?

**Robert Hoffmeister:** I am humbled to think that a book has been written in my honor. The book has many excellent chapters addressing critical issues in bilingual education of Deaf children. The question of teaching Hearing children of Deaf parents about Signed Language is an interesting one. This question intersects with the issue of placement in schools for Deaf children. We are talking about low incidence populations which always enters into how to educate Deaf Children. A number of years ago, Sam Supalla established a school that had Deaf and Hearing children in the same classroom (Tang, G. has examined classrooms with Deaf and Hearing students in the traditional mainstreaming model but with some interesting twists). In Supalla's school, Deaf children from Deaf and Hearing parents were enrolled. And most interesting to me, there were Hearing children of Hearing parents also enrolled. Sam's program was not in a school for Hearing children but was a school that was part of the local school district. Deaf and Hearing teachers both cotaught and also each taught other subjects. The instruction was all in ASL. Supalla, S. and his team (Wix and Blackburn and others) developed a curriculum for teaching about ASL.

This team developed graphemes to support the mapping of phonological components of ASL to print. These graphemes were considered a bridge to learn how signed vocabulary can be mapped to print. In addition, Sam's team also used glosses for ASL vocabulary. This combination provided two advantages. One was there was a way to map ASL phonology to print and the second, there was a print form (symbol) that allowed a direct discussion of ASL for the students. Catherine Harris and I were influenced by these ideas in generating our 2014 paper. Todd Czubek has incorporated some of Sam's and his team's ideas into the BGC curriculum and extended more ways to teach about ASL as a subject. We must understand that DCDP's (Deaf Children of Deaf Parents) initial exposure to print does not mean they see print or are learning print as English (or print in any other spoken language). DCDP and maybe

Codas are mapping print to ASL. The recognition that print represents a spoken language is not realized until much later. All of these ideas have great merit in advancing our discussion of how to develop a Signed Language curriculum. We need more research to support not only how these ideas improve both first and second languages in Deaf children but also its impact on learning in other subject matter.

**Question 09:** This approach of putting Deaf and Hearing students together ignites an alternative approach to schooling. For example, bringing Hearing children (of Hearing parents) in the Deaf schools/Deaf classes, and/or planning classes in the mainstream school with the signed language as the medium of instruction for all, Deaf and Hearing. These are interesting twists indeed, and there is certainly the need for more experimentation and research.

**Robert Hoffmeister:** One major problem I see when including Deaf and Hearing students in the same classroom is how to control attention behaviors in those who hear. I observed how difficult it is to avoid attending to those students who ‘yell’ out for attention by Hearing teachers. For a Hearing person it is extremely difficult not to automatically turn your head and acknowledge the voicing. For me this is one reason that having Deaf teachers is crucial if we are to structure classes with Deaf and Hearing students. It is critical to improve the numbers of Deaf teachers in all levels and types of programs, especially in the earliest ages. We need to closely examine how a bilingual classroom for Deaf children is best structured. We need to perfect the most productive model of education that is using bilingualism as its framework. For me this means that bilingual language support must begin at the hospital (time of identification). Deaf persons who are interested in working with Hearing families need to be trained in

- a) how to comfortably interact with Hearing parents without an interpreter;
- b) what priorities are to be managed in working at home with Hearing parents. Hearing parents should be able to interact in the privacy of their home with a trained Deaf model. This allows Hearing parents to become comfortable with Deaf people and most importantly ask any questions they many have about the world of the Deaf;
- c) how to work as a Signed Language model for very young Deaf children; and
- d) how to nurture not only the Deaf child but the Hearing family they are working with.

It is critical that we bring more regular Deaf members of the community into equal relationships with families of Deaf children.

**Question 10:** The bilingual school in Rio Grande does receive Hearing children of Deaf parents. This subject is really intriguing ... The movie *Coda* (2021) has just come out and won an academy award putting K/CODAS in the spotlight. Can we compare K/CODAS with bilingual children of minority backgrounds and communities, where their first languages are other than English for example? Here in Brasil we have the cases of the indigenous communities, in which the tribes use as their first language, the Guarani, Kaingang, and so on.

**Robert Hoffmeister:** CODA International Inc. conducted a panel discussion on the movie Coda. I was a participant and if you are interested in Coda's of the USA opinions and discussions I refer you to *Codas on the CODA Film (2021)*: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhcnuKrNLRM>>.

Comparing young Codas with bilingual children of minority backgrounds is a very difficult and interesting question to answer. First, I have no professional background in terms of how a young or any aged Coda compares with bilingual children of minority backgrounds. I recall that Ms. Bonnie Kraft completed a very good masters thesis on this topic. Your question involves a two part comparison: comparing Codas (as minority persons) to other children of minority backgrounds and comparing minority Codas to bilingual minority children.

There is very little discussion regarding issues faced by Codas who are members of minority populations. The issues that minority Codas face are just beginning to come to light. Its only in the past decade that minority Deaf have grown to present their own issues. In the US there are organizations presenting on Black Deaf issues (<<https://www.nbda.org>>) and organizations representing Hispanic Latino (<<https://www.nhlad.org>>). This is not my area of expertise. I know that in Brazil Roniche de Quadros, in collaboration with Diane Lillo Martin and Debra Chen Pichler have been investigating bimodal language acquisition in young Codas (<<https://slla.lab.uconn.edu/bibibi/#>>). They have produced a number of research papers addressing Coda language acquisition.

As to my personal opinion, we would have to start with two critical issues: The variation in Signed Language fluency in Deaf parents and the fluency in the SL achieved by Coda children. Knowledge, fluency and attitude across Deaf parents is immense. In my own family Signed Language was considered bad grammar. We were constantly surrounded by Hearing people who, although many used signed language, considered it inferior to spoken language and voiced this opinion often. Parental attitudes stem from their upbringing and their use of Signed Language at home is shaped by their experience. This attitude is internalized by Codas when young and impacts their development of social interaction with their Hearing peers. Codas are very careful and protective of their parents and sometimes shield them from the attitudes of the Hearing world. This is an area worthy of further research.

Coda variation in Signed Language ability is also wide ranging. Sibling birth order plays a huge role in family dynamics. In my observation the oldest female tends to become proficient in Signed Language, the younger siblings may learn some Signed Language but most likely will depend on their older sister to interpret for their parents. Many times the oldest male will become fluent in Signed Language but soon relinquishes the reins to the oldest female sibling. Societies tend to view females as the necessary caretaker of families, any family.

The societal stigma of having Deaf parents pushes Codas not to use their Signed Language in public. Having said these things, I could believe that Codas and DCDP share some things with indigenous and minority people. When there is a community of speakers of a language, I would guess the community is small but tight. Members of the community look out for each other. And, all members are users of the indigenous community or minority language. The issue of how skill in a first language (not just knowing it) impacts learning in schools has been discussed and researched for decades (see Jim Cummins work). Having young Codas as a cohort could provide some very important results. Seeing Codas as first language users of a Signed Language for schooling purposes would take a massive change in the educational system. This would require the cultural attitudes of school personnel (from special education to speech and hearing personnel) to change to make the schooling environment welcome. I think this question is an interesting one that could use more extended discussion with bilingual educators of the Hearing and Deaf bilingual educators of the Deaf and Codas.

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# MOMENTO

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