

A sign language curriculum especially for parents

The Netherlands—Sign Impact; Canada – School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Parents' learning of sign language plays a critical role in the development of children with a hearing impairment. The mission of this international project is to generate parent Sign Language curricula that are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Using a CEFR design for the parent Sign Language of the Netherlands and American Sign Language classes means that the learning of sign languages has the same significance and structure as the learning of spoken languages.

"It is vital that comprehensive, research-based services be provided in order to meet the sign language learning needs of families with deaf and hard-of-hearing children."

— Ms. Kristin Snoddon, Carleton University

FACTS & FIGURES

- In 2012, two Dutch practitioners developed parent Sign Language classes that are aligned with the CEFR.
- There are seven modules to help parents become proficient in Sign Language. Each module contains 15 classes that are held on a weekly basis: 14 regular classes and 1 exam class. Each class is 2.5 hours in length.
- In 2014 and 2015, the Dutch teachers facilitated two curriculum development workshops for American Sign Language instructors in Toronto, Canada.
- 17 parents of deaf children attended the first parent American Sign Language course in Toronto, which met for 2.5 hours each week for 14 weeks. Classes and learning materials are provided free of charge.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

Until now, no formal curricula exist for teaching Sign Language as a second language to parents of deaf children. Where available, the existing initiatives have consisted mainly of informal teaching and discussions via home visits. However, this group is in great need of more comprehensive, research-based support. Without access to a sign language from an early age, many deaf children may be

negatively affected in terms of their social and emotional development and may have incomplete knowledge of any language.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

The project developed various curriculum materials, including teacher and student workbooks, sign language videos, and assessment tasks. The programme is conducted over the course of 15 weeks for the parents of deaf children. To date, the learning has focused largely on communication within everyday family contexts and on supporting parent-child communication during play. With this new curriculum, parents will be able to act as efficient communicators with their deaf children. Parents are trained through seven modules from A1 to minimal high-B2 level (based on the CEFR standard). Each participant works on his or her own learning-track and fluency, so it is possible that a specific parent will reach B1 in language acquisition and another parent reach the B2/C1 level. Parents can work on their own learning goals through a portfolio, video interaction training, home visits, and family case-studies.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

In the Netherlands, parent classes of various levels are held around the country, and new sign language teachers are trained to deliver the parent classes. There are plans to establish a network of blended learning classes consisting of e-learning classes combined with in-person classes and contact within parent networks in 3 regions of the Netherlands. In Canada, the project aims to finalize the pilot parent American Sign Language curriculum materials and to make these available to American Sign Language teachers across Canada and the United States. Plans are currently underway to develop pilot Langue des signes québécoise curriculum materials for francophone parents of deaf children. The CEFR design for parent sign language courses can easily be adapted by other countries, and can be funded by government providers or paid for by parents.

Photo: Yes

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