

## Interview with Heather Gibson

*Bilingual-Biliteracy Education and the American Sign Language Curriculum of Ontario, Canada*

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## 1 Introduction

Up to date (2023), few countries have official sign language curricula (MERTZANI, BARBOSA, FERNANDES, 2022). Canada is among these countries, with a long tradition in bilingual and multilingual education, as it recognises its three main founding groups and their languages: the Native peoples, the French, and the English. However, the *Official Languages Act* (1969; 1985) recognises English and French only as the official languages of Canada for all purposes, with equal status, rights, and privileges. The sign languages of Canada, the American Sign Language (ASL) in Anglophone communities, the Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) in Francophone communities, and the Indigenous Sign Languages (ISL) have not achieved constitutional recognition as the country's official languages. However, the 2019 Accessible Canada Act (also known as *An Act to Ensure a Barrier-Free Canada or Bill C-81*) recognises them "as the primary languages for communication by deaf persons in Canada."<sup>1</sup>

School is mandatory from 6 to 18 years of age. Public education is offered in one of the two aforementioned official languages in compliance with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). Each of the 13 provinces and territories has its own

school system, which oversees secular and separate school boards. Manitoba and Ontario are currently offering an official sign language curriculum as a first language (L1) and/or a second language (L2). For more than two decades in the Ontario Ministry of Education, Heather Gibson led the development and implementation of the ASL curriculum for first language and second language-based learners.

The educational system in Ontario comprises public and private schools, which are operated by English and French public schools and English and French separate schools. The public schools were originally Protestant but now are secular. Overall, the separate schools are predominantly Catholic. Exceptions are a small number of Protestant separate schools and the indigenous schools in the First Nations reserves, where bilingual programs (see the next section) incorporate instruction in the indigenous languages (e.g., Inuktitut, Ojibwe, Mohawk, Salish). The funding of public education is entirely under provincial jurisdiction, while the indigenous schools are federally funded. Almost all Ontario public schools and most private schools follow the Ontario curriculum<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Refer to the Purpose of the Act section 5.1(2).

<sup>2</sup>The Ontario curriculum: <<https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/what-is-curriculum/about-the-ontario-curriculum>>.

## 2 Bilingual Education in Canada

Bilingual education in Canada is well known for its immersion programs, which generally follow three approaches (DICKS; GENESEE, 2017): (a) *French Immersion* (FI), mainly for English-speaking students (but also for learners from non-official minority language backgrounds), who learn French as an L2; (b) *Heritage Language* (HL) programs for students with non-official minority language backgrounds (e.g., Ukrainian, German, Mandarin); and (c) *Indigenous Language* programs for aboriginal students (e.g., Inuit, Mohawk, Cree, Iroquois). The child spends a certain amount of time in the L2, depending on the age at which they are first enrolled in school (see WRIGHT; BAKER, 2017).

The FI programs are organized in the following three subdivisions (DICKS; GENESEE, 2017, p. 4). In the *early total FI*, all subjects are taught in French from Kindergarten to Grade 2. From this grade on, instruction in French gradually decreases until 50% of instruction is in French and 50% in English by the end of middle school. In the *early partial FI*, 50% of instruction is provided each in English and French in each year of elementary education. In the *delayed FI*, French is not taught until Grade 3 or 4. In the *late FI*, French is not introduced until Grade 6 or later. In these last forms, students receive French instruction. The aim of FI is to provide students with functional competence in French while not detracting from their academic achievement or their English (as their L1) proficiency.

Then, the HL programs are used for speakers of languages other than the official English and French (since Ontario continues to receive large immigrant populations, like Italian, Portuguese, Greek, etc.) or for the indigenous languages while acquiring the dominant societal language(s) (English and French). In comparison, the Indigenous language programs are concerned with the preservation of the language and culture among young members of the Indigenous groups.

Generally, appropriate literature is provided in the aforementioned choices of immersion programs in pursuit of bilingual education (for example, GARCÍA; LIN; MAY, 2017). However, the immersion approaches have not been seriously taken into consideration in the context of Deaf bilingual education. Hence, there is presently a great need for appropriate sign language-based literature in Deaf bilingual education. Nevertheless, due to the heterogeneous population of Deaf children, the immersion programs may involve and integrate their different approaches in Deaf bilingual education as well (see MERTZANI in this volume).

## 3 The interview background

The bilingual education environment for Deaf children is motific in the recent interview with Heather Gibson, who developed and implemented the ASL Curriculum, including the performance standards for ASL in Ontario. As an expert and experienced Deaf educator, sign language (ASL) curriculum specialist, and policy maker, she has stepped into many different leadership roles in the Ministry of Education and pioneered several significant initiatives in the education system for Deaf children's education at different levels. In 2007-2008, Heather received two highest honors - the *Premier's Award for Excellence in Leadership*<sup>3</sup> which recognized her inspiring leadership and initiative in the ASL/English Bilingual-Biliteracy education and an *Order of Ontario* award for her outstanding contributions to Education and Research. As a Principal for Ontario Provincial Schools for the Deaf, she was assigned by the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch Executive Director (PDSB) and Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, to develop a 5-year action plan for the development and implementation of a BiBi program. She has written articles related to Bilingual-Bicultural Education and ASL curriculum. Heather was involved in the development of two significant policies as a co-writer: *American Sign Language (ASL) for First Language Learners*, and in the fall 2020, *ASL for Second*

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<sup>3</sup>The Premier's Awards recognize educators and staff who excel at unlocking the potential of Ontario's young people and are open to everyone working in Ontario's public schools, boards and authorities, including teachers, support staff, principals, vice-principals, supervisory officers, directors of education and many others.

*Language Learners, three-part specialist qualifications* for the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). In the spring of 2021, she was involved in the forum consultation process regarding the OCT Additional Qualifications Course Guidelines (AQ) - Principal's Development Course (PDC) and Principal's Qualification Program (PQP).

As part of this ground-breaking initiative, she operationalized the development and implementation of the ASL for First Language Learners Curriculum, the first of its kind in North America. As the first Deaf Bilingual Education Officer working in the Ministry of Ontario, Curriculum, Assessment, Student Success and Policy Branch, she championed the development and implementation of the ASL as a Second Language Curriculum. Recently, alongside a team of Student Achievement Officers, Policy Analysts, and Education Officers, she completed a comprehensive literature review of research documentation regarding Effective Reading Instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students. Moreover, with this same team, she developed a 5-year work plan to develop the PDSB Resource Services and Outreach Program in place of the existing program and service delivery model, with a goal to redesign and implement exemplary services across the province.

A pre-set of questions was initially sent to Heather, and after receiving the first set of answers in written English, a second set of questions and comments was sent, thus providing a richer context of the information about the ASL Curriculum and its role in Ontario's educational system. The questions (and answers) are divided into three main parts, underlining the following themes: (a) sign language (ASL in this case) and bilingual-biliteracy educational policy; (b) the relationship of school educational work and the ASL curriculum (challenges, early childhood programs, school activities, etc.); and (c) teacher training and the ASL curriculum.

#### 4 The Interview

##### **PART A: Questions concerning the ASL policy and educational policy overall.**

**Question 1:** How does the ASL Curriculum fit within the bilingual policy of Canada in Ontario?

**Heather Gibson:** It is useful to have information about our pedagogical approach to understand how the ASL curriculum fits within the Ontario education context. Our Bilingual, Biliteracy, and Bicultural (henceforward, BiBi) policy provides a BiBi pedagogy and an associated program that enables students' language acquisition, critical thinking skills, learning, and social and cultural development through ASL and English. Proficiency in two languages and literacy provides students with the ability to enhance their world knowledge.

ASL and English are taught through this BiBi pedagogy, for using two languages and literacy skills enhance students' metalinguistic, metacognitive, inquiry, and numeracy skills. We use ASL and English assessment tools to assess student ASL comprehension and construction, and English reading and writing, as well as instructional practices and strategies with resources in ASL and English as part of our pedagogical approach.

Biliteracy skills:

The goal of biliteracy skills is to develop students' ability to use both ASL and English in high-order thinking. This process involves the transformation of information and ideas in two languages. Biliteracy skills are enhanced through the development of *inquiry-based* skills. Having the ability to find/locate, question, analyze/deconstruct, construct, assess, provide opinions, and validate information supports students in becoming independent learners. Biliteracy skills also give students the ability to create cross-linguistic and cross-cultural connections between ASL and English in different contexts. The development of an ASL cultural identity also enhances students' well-being and their ability to become active learners within the diverse communities in which they live.

The ASL Curriculum:

The ASL curriculum, which is used as a language of study for first language learners, is based

on Ontario's curriculum framework as part of the larger provincial curriculum. When we developed the ASL curriculum as an academic subject for Kindergarten, for grades 1-8 (elementary education), and for grades 9-12 (secondary education), we set up a framework in which language, social identity, ASL community, and ASL culture are interwoven in the Overall and Specific Expectations<sup>4</sup> of the curriculum. The ASL curriculum courses are organized into four interconnected strands, which contain these Overall and Specific Expectations. The strands are as follows: (i) ASL Conversation, (ii) Comprehension and Analysis, (iii) Construction, and (iv) ASL Media Studies and Technology Literacy.

Secondary students earn language credits for studying ASL as a first language. Language credits can also be earned by secondary school students studying ASL as a second language. In this latter case, secondary schools for the Deaf offer ASL as a second language course in which students earn three credits. Most of these students transfer in from school boards.

As in elementary schools for the Deaf, the ASL curriculum does not replace other courses in the Ontario curriculum. It is an additional course at this level. At the secondary level, the ASL as a first language curriculum focuses on expanding and deepening students' knowledge and understanding of their language, its literature, culture, and social justice. Below are some examples of course descriptions for each grade level.

*Grade 9* (14-15 years old): Students are introduced to secondary-school-level knowledge and skills needed to become highly literate in ASL. Students will develop analytic comprehension, ASL linguistic and language structures and critical thinking skills that they need for success in secondary school program. They will study, deconstruct, analyze and interpret ASL literary works and texts and also ASL media productions.

*Grade 10* (15-16 years old): Students are exposed to material and lines of study that deepen their knowledge and skills in ASL and increase their understanding and application of a variety of ASL linguistics construction principles to ASL literary works

and ASL texts. They also investigate the impact of media on ASL people and the sociological and cultural issues that confront the ASL community.

*Grade 11* (16-17 years old): The third course focuses on building on previous knowledge and skills to create a significantly higher level of ASL and media literary works. It emphasizes the development of ASL literacy skills. Students will study the content, form, style and process of a variety of ASL literary works, informational texts, and media literary works from Canada and other countries. They will analyze the figurative language (e.g., metaphors, similes, personification) used in ASL and will respond critically and creatively to them.

This course is offered primarily for students whose career paths relate in some way to post-secondary education, the workplace or apprenticeship programs. Whether it be considering a career in ASL interpreting, ASL Bilingual-Biliteracy Education, ASL linguistic research, ASL linguistic teaching at university or college level, sociolinguistic research, ASL assessors assessing ASL, anthropologist or sociologist.

*Grade 12* (17-18 years old): This course emphasizes the consolidation of ASL literacy, critical thinking and language discourse skills. Students will decipher-deconstruct and analyze a range of complex ASL literary works and ASL texts from different cultural groups who use ASL and from a variety of time periods (historical and contemporary). They will analyze and conduct independent literary research on a variety of topics. An important focus will be on using ASL as an academic language and using it coherently in discussions, arguments and academic activities. Students will also analyze different aspects of ASL media and the relationship between media industry practices, ASL literary works, ASL texts and audiences (GIBSON, 2019).

**Question 2:** In Brazil, Deaf Education is still strongly influenced by concepts and methodologies of Special Education (of a clinical-therapeutic model).

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<sup>4</sup>The Ontario Curriculum Expectations and Teacher Supports: <<https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/what-is-curriculum/curriculum-structure#curriculum-expectations-and-teacher-supports>>.

**Heather Gibson:** Even though ASL and LSQ are currently recognized in Ontario as languages of instruction, as outlined in Regulation 298, “Operation of Schools – General”, R.R.O. 1990, Section 32, ASL and LSQ ASL/LSQ people are still seen as not a full human. Neither language has been accepted fully as a natural and full-fledged language with cultures, traditions, values, and a history of their own to the same degree as other languages, such as English, French, or other linguistic groups. This is due to audism and linguicism. This is one of the major reasons why special education is trying to take over BiBi education. With its current philosophy and pedagogy, special education does not see Deaf children as complete or whole. Instead, it sees Deaf children through a deficit lens wherein being Deaf is seen as a pathological problem and not as a cultural and linguistic identity marker.

**Question 3:** How are the relationships between language policy for ASL and educational policy articulated in Canada?

**Heather Gibson:** Education, including Deaf and Bilingual Education, is under provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, there is little relationship between regulations for language, such as ASL in Ontario, and regulations at a national level in Canada.

## **PART B. Questions concerning the school educational work and the ASL curriculum.**

**Question 1:** How do schools, bilingual and regular/mainstream, work with the ASL curriculum?

**Heather Gibson:** For context around the ASL curriculum, the ASL Curriculum team used the Ministry of Education curriculum framework in designing and developing an ASL curriculum.

Methods of teaching the ASL curriculum:

In BiBi schools, the ASL curriculum is used. To understand how this is used, and for comparison, in French-language schools, French is used as a language of instruction and a language of study. In

these French schools, English is studied as a second language. Similarly, in ASL BiBi schools for ASL-using students, ASL is the language of instruction and the language of study. Like their French peers, these students would study English as a second language.

Thus, in bilingual schools, teachers' use of the ASL curriculum is guided by the Overall and Specific Expectations that include four strands: instructional strategies, assessment and evaluation of student achievement, and ASL educational resources. ASL students are introduced to information that enhances their sense of personal and cultural identity and connection with the larger ASL community and the majority and global community and culture. Such attention to the whole bilingual student reinforces the reality that while language is a means of instruction, it is also a mark of identity, of self, of membership, of culture, and of humanity.

ASL assessment is used to identify a student's proficiency level in ASL and to guide educational programming. Results of such assessment are used to:

- 1) establish a baseline for a particular student's ASL expectations and program;
- 2) make decisions about the kind of intervention a student requires to progress in ASL; and
- 3) determine a student's cognitive and linguistic readiness for English reading and writing.

The development of the ASL curriculum was done through a collaborative effort. It would never have come to fruition if we had worked in isolation. This project only became a reality because of the valuable knowledge and expertise that the ASL curriculum team brought to the floor regarding:

- ASL, ASL literacy, ASL literature, ASL culture, ASL linguistics, and social justice;
- first language-based pedagogy;
- BiBi pedagogy
- understanding both the Ministry of Education's, parents', and the ASL community's vision for this project;
- the framework and structure of the curriculum and performance standard (ASL assessment, evaluation, and reporting); and
- planning work plans and timelines.

It required the collaboration of branches within the Ministry of Education, parents, educators, and ASL stakeholders to accomplish the task. This experience gave us a new appreciation for the level of partnership and collaboration to bring us all to where we are today.

It is important to note that the majority of the team members' first language is ASL. It is also essential to recognize the value of having a team with in-depth knowledge of and expertise in the linguistic structures of ASL, ASL literacy, ASL literary works and texts, ASL assessment, the Ontario Curriculum framework, and its structure, and how they correlate to a first-language pedagogy.

Another highlight was using a social justice lens to ensure that the curriculum included a critical pedagogical approach related to ASL and ASL language pedagogy. It is also important to recognize the value of having a team with in-depth knowledge and expertise that reflects the diversity of Ontario's population.

However, in mainstream schools, the ASL as a first language curriculum is not currently used like in bilingual schools per se. While this is the case, there are Educational Consultants, specialists in ASL pedagogy, who provide ASL sessions, assessments, programming, and related resources to mainstream schools across the province.

**Question 2:** What is the biggest challenge with working with the ASL curriculum?

**Heather Gibson:** The biggest challenge with working with the ASL curriculum is the lack of infrastructure and support. By this, I mean that while there is legislation in place specific to ASL (and LSQ) which recognises them as languages of instruction, there are no supporting policies or other mechanisms to further support and maintain the ASL curriculum in its delivery and development. There is no clear language planning in place for the ASL curriculum, which has a grave effect on Deaf children's language and literacy development. By comparison, English and French both have comprehensive infrastructures for language planning across the province, with student and staff support and resources related to teaching and learning

available. Ironically, the ASL as an L2 curriculum has more infrastructure, albeit still marginal compared to English and French, than the ASL as an L1 curriculum. This again shows the level of value placed on hearing (non-Deaf) learners over Deaf learners, further perpetuating audism and linguicism.

The team at various levels found a challenge to work together virtually, which was a complex process, especially when using two languages, ASL and English, on a virtual platform. It required our interconnected team to use an inquiry-based approach to construct, deconstruct, re-construct, and synthesize complex data to develop and create an ASL curriculum. Another challenge has been that bilingual ASL pedagogy is not a foundational part of the infrastructure in BiBi schools. Without this foundation, there is a lack of consistency in teaching practice, training, assessment, and curriculum delivery in English and French schools as part of their infrastructures.

To mitigate this, our team is partnering with other branches within the Ministry of Education to develop an ASL/LSQ BiBi policy framework similar to those in place for French language policy and Indigenous Education policy. This framework and the collaboration behind its development is a huge step forward in advancing BiBi education for the system of our bilingual schools and the entire province of Ontario.

Despite all the challenges we faced, one of the highlights of the project was the professional effort and staying with the shared goal of strategies to build an ASL curriculum.

**Question 3:** The biggest challenge in bilingual education for the deaf has been the acquisition of sign language as a mother tongue in very early childhood, especially in hearing families of deaf children. Do you develop any special programs for this age group of babies?

**Heather Gibson:** We do have programs specific for this age group. The Resource Services Department that provides programs and services to Deaf and hard of hearing young children between 0 to 4 years of age has been developing an ASL BiBi pedagogical

approach specific to early childhood, such as the new ASL curriculum for ages 2 to 4. This new curriculum will work to prevent language delay and language deprivation. It will ensure all children, within the critical period, have a strong foundation in language and literacy skills in ASL. It will also ensure they have full access to the Kindergarten curriculum with kindergarten-readiness skills when they arrive at school.

One component of the new curriculum will incorporate ASL nursery rhyme. According to Kenney (2005), she discusses the importance of exposing children to the different parts of language, which, in turn, supports children in developing literacy skills.

This applies to ASL nursery rhymes, as well, as they exhibit all the language and linguistics features of ASL, including ASL phonology, which supports the development of a strong language foundation. For example, after a child is exposed to an ASL rhyme that includes the ASL words for “plane” or “flying” and “I Love You.” A child begins to discern that although the handshape remains the same, changes to the palm orientation and movement construct different ASL words: PLANE, FLY, and ILY.

Kenny's observation underscores the importance of a child developing a solid foundation in their first language, which, in turn, facilitates the acquisition of reading skills. This presumes that parents and teachers have the required proficiency in the language to be a child's language role model.

#### ASL Phonemic Awareness:

As ASL children's language skills become more sophisticated, they are able to identify and incorporate different ASL phonemes. For example, it is often observed during word play that children use ASL literary techniques in which the ASL parameters of ASL words are manipulated and created for an intended effect (e.g., humour, personification, etc.).

Another example is the proposed research project on ASL babbling currently under development. This would be an important step towards closing the gap so that young children will have more opportunities to develop age-appropriate language and related developmental skills from the early years. Our programs and services

delivery model are aligned with the vision articulated in the *Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework* (2017).

**Question 4:** Could you point out guiding principles for teaching ASL to deaf babies and children at school?

**Heather Gibson:** Play-based and inquiry-based program learning, particularly the development of higher-level cognitive processes, occurs through interaction/play/dialogue. This model prevents language delay and deprivation and ensures that all students have a strong foundation in language and literacy skills within the critical period, ensuring full access to the kindergarten curriculum by arriving with kindergarten-readiness skills. There is a sense of urgency for effective, responsive language instruction, as the youngest learners have the greatest capacity to develop.

In addition, we have created a Kindergarten ASL curriculum for ages 4 to 5 that is play-based and inquiry-based learning as its foundation. We use pedagogical documentation to track and monitor children's ASL language and literacy development. We use the ASL acquisition checklist to set baselines and regularly assess children's progress in ASL language and literacy development at this early age.

**Question 5:** Are there any differences in the curriculum for deaf students who attend a bilingual school and those who attend a regular school?

**Heather Gibson:** Yes. As mentioned above, bilingual schools offer ASL as a first language in instruction and as an L1 language of study. Conversely, in mainstream schools, ASL is taught as an L2 without the in-depth study of the language and its related literature, history, and culture. Here is some useful research from the literature on the bilingual theory.

#### Bilingual theory:

The bilingual model of education used in bilingual schools in Ontario is based on what Dr. Jim Cummins (1981) terms the *Common Underlying Proficiency Model of Bilingual Proficiency*. This is not

seen in mainstream schools. This model supports the importance of a well-consolidated first language as a foundation for gathering information about the world, critical thinking and reasoning, and effective second language acquisition. According to the model, information acquired using the L1 and skills can be effectively applied to information acquired using the L2. As aforementioned, the pedagogical approach used in bilingual schools uses the students' L1 (ASL) as a language of instruction and in the study of language. In the early grades, English, the students' L2, is studied as a language—that is, its semantics and grammatical structure are studied as students develop their abilities to read and write. As students' reading and writing proficiency develops, English becomes the written language of instruction, while ASL (L1) remains the language of dialogue and classroom curriculum delivery (GIBSON; BLANCHARD, 2010).

This approach is in accord with Cummins's data, suggesting that the more that literacy functions (like debate, critique, creative thinking, interpersonal and intrapersonal examination and problem-solving, mediation, and negotiation) are developed in ASL, the more they are likely to transfer to the development of English literacy skills. For example, during my observation, it was noted that students who studied and analyzed figurative language (e.g., metaphors or different literary devices) in ASL works, understood how figurative language related to metaphors and different literary devices are used in English, in comparison to those students who have never studied or analyzed the role and functions of figurative language (metaphors/literary devices) in their own language.

The practice of Bilingual Education with Deaf students:

It is important to emphasize that previously developed pedagogies for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to hearing (non-Deaf) learners are inappropriate for teaching English to Deaf students. This is because these ESL pedagogies are designed to teach English through an aural-oral language approach to students whose first language is also an aural-oral language. Deaf students, for whom ASL is their L1, require different teaching methods and

pedagogies. This reality has necessitated the development of ESL pedagogies specifically for Deaf students. One of these pedagogies, developed by Samuel Supalla, a retired Deaf professor at the University of Arizona focuses on the development of English vocabulary and reading skills (see SUPALLA; BLACKBURN, 2020; SUPALLA, 2017). It involves a clear developmental trajectory:

- Initially, the focus is exclusively on engaging with and immersing a young student in ASL in varied environments. ASL is used in different forms in different contexts: in teaching, in conversation, in play, in dialogue, and in different environments of the school day.

- The child is then taught a system of ASL graphemes that represent three parameters of sign production: the handshape for the ASL word, the location of its production, and its movement. These graphemes are used to decipher and deconstruct ASL words. The graphemes are then displayed together with English words, and the child uses them to decode the English.

- The child is then taught how to translate ASL words and sentences into ASL gloss, which is then translated into English (GIBSON; BLANCHARD, 2010).

Bicultural Approach:

It is first necessary to distinguish between ASL cultural awareness and ASL cultural development. Cultural awareness refers to the level of understanding that a non-native ASL person has about the norms, rules, and values of ASL culture. For example, a non-native ASL person might attend a workshop or seminar about ASL culture and come away with an increased cultural awareness. However, this person does not automatically take ownership of the culture by simply learning its language.

Cultural development refers to the expansion of cultural knowledge held by an individual who is already a part of the culture. Cultural development is addressed in the ASL curriculum, using pedagogical approaches that understand that the study of ASL as a language, its literature, and texts, including ASL media, can only be taught with strong references to the full-

fledged culture from which they stem and of which they are an inseparable part (GIBSON, 2008).

The content related to cultural development is supported by what I have witnessed in teaching the ASL curriculum using the BiBi pedagogical approach. The study of ASL and its literary works and texts provide students with a connection to cultural values and cultural interpretations of the world they live in. ASL and its culture link students to all aspects of themselves - affective, moral, cognitive, conceptual, experiential, perceptual, physical, and social. Thus, these aspects become critical to the development of both student personal and collective identity. These aspects allow both individuals and a community of individuals to convey and transmit their view of reality, their thoughts, their feelings, and their values and priorities. This enables students to take ownership of the culture of the school community and to ground themselves in the ASL community. This further fosters a sense of belonging and identity (GIBSON; BLANCHARD, 2010).

**Question 6:** Is there a way for deaf bilinguals to continue their education using sign language outside of school?

**Heather Gibson:** For students to foster their self-affirmation and sense of involvement and responsibility in the wider Deaf community and Canadian society as a whole, they need to continue their education grounded in ASL pedagogy. It will help them to reinforce their deeper understanding of the importance of belonging and, consequently, their tolerance for other cultural communities. Students can continue their education at the post-secondary level, however not in ASL, to the same extent they had in K-12 settings. That is to say, in Canada, post-secondary education is offered in English or French and is made accessible to ASL learners through the use of interpreters. These options, however, do not follow a BiBi pedagogical approach. Additionally, there are opportunities to study in ASL at the international level.

**Question 7:** Many deaf students live their schooling experience as a conflict against their teachers, hearing

classmates and professionals overall. Have you had similar experiences?

**Heather Gibson:** Yes, on a daily basis. This conflict or difference, is a lived experience between Deaf and hearing people that continues outside of education. It is important to continue to research, discuss, and review policies related to anti-audism, linguicism, language deprivation, language acquisition, and others to enhance cultural competence, deepen mutual understanding of different cultures (Deaf and hearing), and bridge the gaps of such conflicting lived experiences.

**Question 8:** How does the bilingual curriculum (if any) influence this experience?

**Heather Gibson:** The BiBi curriculum and pedagogy help students appreciate that ASL is a complete, natural language that shares the same linguistic properties as English. This will bring about an understanding of both worlds: Deaf and hearing. As Vygotsky maintained (ZAITSEVA; PURSGLOVE; GREGORY, 1999, p. 11), it is necessary to “exploit all the possibilities for linguistic activity in the deaf child, not taking a loftily contemptuous view of sign language and not treating it like an enemy.” Bilingualism is “an unavoidable [*meaning necessary*] and highly productive path of language development and education” in the Deaf child (DART, 2008).

**Question 9:** Does it increase awareness of the linguistic attitudes of deaf students?

**Heather Gibson:** Yes, it does increase awareness, as explained above.

### **PART C: Questions concerning teacher training and the ASL curriculum.**

**Question 1:** What are the thematic axes of ASL teacher training in childhood?

**Heather Gibson:** Currently, there is no Ministry-regulated teacher training specific to early ASL education in the sense of pre-kindergarten childhood

offered in Ontario or elsewhere in the country. Deaf education specialization begins at school-age (kindergarten). There are opportunities for teachers to develop such early childhood ASL language teaching practices; however, they are offered by ASL community agencies and Gallaudet University.

It is imperative that as Deaf children progress through the grades, they need to be exposed to the complexity of ASL that is found in ASL literary works and texts. ASL nursery rhymes are based on ASL's linguistic principles and structures, including the four parameters of ASL phonology: handshape, location, movement, and palm orientation.

**Question 2:** How is bimodal bilingualism treated in Universities and/or vocational training?

**Heather Gibson:** While the meaning of bimodal is understood by describing signed and spoken language modalities, we do not use the term in our Canadian context. Rather, we use the term bilingual, or more fully BiBi education and training. There are courses on ASL-English bilingualism, but they are offered as an elective course, not a mandatory or core course. This again reflects how ASL and LSQ peoples are perceived in Canada. This is compared to the status English and French are given, with the plethora of courses offered on English-French bilingualism.

**Question 3:** Are ALL teachers trained to use ASL in the classroom?

**Heather Gibson:** Currently, not all teachers are trained to use ASL in the classroom. Continued professional learning for staff that supports increased knowledge and strengthens staff understanding of the ASL curriculum and how it is related to ASL and bilingual pedagogy is needed.

ASL Curriculum Training:

Previously, the ASL Curriculum team provided training on the ASL curriculum and its connection to ASL pedagogy and teaching practices to various professionals and educators. The primary focus of the training was to demonstrate how to implement the ASL

curriculum and ASL assessment in the classroom. Teachers had the opportunity to create lesson plans and various instructional tasks designed for students to meet ASL curriculum expectations. They had the opportunity to develop long-range plans and course outlines at different grade levels. The team also discussed strategies to modify ASL curriculum expectations based on ASL assessment data for Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Opportunities were given to compare different report cards based on students' ASL and ASL literacy development.

**Table 1:** Kindergarten ASL Curriculum (2017) - ASL Conversation

<b>Specific Expectations: As the children progress through the Kindergarten ASL program, they will:</b>	<b>Making Connections: Ways in Which Children Might Demonstrate their Learning</b>	<b>Making Connections: Kindergarten ASL Curriculum Team’s Intentional Interaction</b>
<p><b>1.1</b> Explore and internalize ASL parameters (e.g., “B” handshape produces an ASL word “FISH”; students’ ASL name signs are constructed at different locations), ASL-phabet (SUPALLA, 2017; SUPALLA; BLACKBURN, 2020), ASL language structures, ASL pattern structures, and segments of ASL work using a spatial reference frame (e.g., peer to peer; peer to adult);</p>	<p><b>Articulating in ASL:</b> Using F-handshape to create an ASL poem: “CAT, WHISKER, EYE, EAR, LONG&gt;TAIL”</p> <p><b>Doing:</b> A small group of children recount an ASL poem, “BAT” using X-handshape {Lily Chin-Halas}</p> <p><b>Representing:</b> The child creates an ASL finger-play using the pictured unmarked handshape on a stick and narrates.</p>	<p><b>Responding:</b> Team encourages children to incorporate specific handshapes when experimenting with ASL handshape rhymes. Team uses pedagogical documentation process (e.g., an anecdotal record, video record) to assess for spontaneous ASL handshape and grapheme use by children.</p> <p><b>Challenging:</b> Team can ask questions (e.g., “What other animals can you describe using only the F-handshape?” “How many other ASL words can you think of that use X grapheme?”) to encourage exploration in the use of ASL parameters.</p> <p><b>Extending:</b> Team creates a centre that challenges students to create a handshape, or other parameter, rhyme game, and narrate an ASL story (GIBSON, 2017).</p>

**ASL Assessment Training:**

We also provide training on how to use the ASL assessment instruments associated with the ASL curriculum. Also, we provide training on how we connect ASL assessment with ASL pedagogy.

**ASL Resource Training:**

We also provide training on using ASL resources associated with the ASL curriculum. We need to ensure that ASL resources are aligned with the ASL curriculum expectations in order to engage students and support their development/learning of ASL language, literacy, and culture. We also have been encouraged to use Ontario and Canadian-based ASL resources that focus on pedagogy for first language acquisition/learning to support teachers in lesson planning, teaching, and learning strategies for ASL first language learners. Please see in Table 1 a sample of Kindergarten (aged 4 and 5) curriculum

expectations and how they relate to different strands of the curriculum and ASL pedagogical supports (e.g., ASL glossary, instructional tips, resources).

**Question 4:** Are there differentiated sign language teacher training policies for the Kindergarten and elementary school?

**Heather Gibson:** Yes, there are differentiated training policies for kindergarten and elementary schools. The *Ontario College of Teachers* (OCT) offers *Additional Qualification* (AQ) courses – pre-school education for Deaf and hard of hearing students. Two AQ courses are related to ASL: first language-based and second language-based. Additionally, there is an AQ course related to Anti-audism.

**Question 5:** Why is the ASL curriculum important?

**Heather Gibson:** People forget that ASL has its own grammatical structures, ASL literary works and texts, cultural references, and history. ASL is distinct from LSQ and other languages in Canada and worldwide. Learning ASL as an L1 helps one better understand their first language, culture, and identity, in addition to the cognitive benefits it offers.

The curriculum has guidelines/benchmarks for tracking students' ASL and literacy skills. These are one of the ways to monitor each child's progress in mastering linguistic structures and metalinguistic challenges. This will ensure continuity in language development and establish that our students' competencies in ASL grammatical and linguistic structures and literary skills are commensurate with the standards set forth in other Ontario language curricula.

The ASL language curriculum also supports students' success and well-being in developing/learning their own language, literacy skills, and cultural competencies, preparing them with valuable skills for their community and their lives.

The ASL curriculum is also one of the strategies to affect a change in societal attitudes towards ASL people and their language living in this province. The curriculum also encourages students to be seen through an "asset lens" and allows them to gain a positive frame of mind. It demonstrates the value of and respect for human diversity in education and offers a cultural-linguistic perspective of a linguistic minority group (GIBSON; POTMA; ROUSE, 2021).

ASL is one of four languages recognized in the Ontario Education Act and, as such, should have a place in the education system for students.

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