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The Ask and the Task of Hearing Parents of Deaf Children learning Sign Language.

**6th Annual Coalition for Global Hearing Health Conference
Gallaudet University, Washington DC.
9-10 October 2015**

Neethie (L) Joseph, PhD



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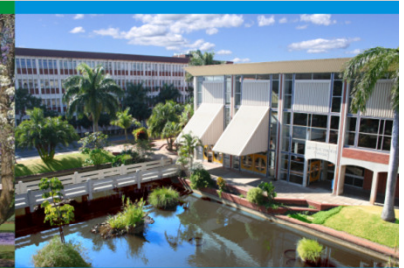
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UKZN INSPIRING GREATNESS

**R K Khan Hospital, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal,
South Africa**



V N Naik School for the Deaf, Durban



- Veditz (1904): *“As long as we have Deaf people we will have sign language”*
- History of sign language is linked to education of children and people who are deaf.
- History of deaf education in South Africa is similar to other countries, traced back to France in the late 1700s
- First school for the deaf opened in Cape Town in 1863 with signing educational methodology (Penn, 1993, Aarons and Akash, 2002)

- Domination of oralism: Signing was banned in the classroom following the Milan Conference of 1880
- Signing resurfaced in deaf education in the 1970's and 1980s during the era of Total Communication (TC)
- Sign Language gained linguistic status and credibility due to the work of William Stokoe in the 1960s
- The oral- manual debate resurfaced : what type of signing should be used in the classroom?
- The introduction of the Bilingual-Bicultural educational approach was introduced in the 1990s.

- South Africa has a vibrant Deaf Community that is promoting South African Sign Language (SASL) in education and society through DEAFSA
- SASL is still not an official language although there are 11 official languages
- SASL is recommended as a language to be used in education of deaf children (Schools Act 84,1996).
- All 8 public schools for the deaf in KwaZulu-Natal use SASL as a medium of instruction
- 2015:
 - Educational policy implementation of SASL as a formal school subject;
 - upskilling of SASL for teachers and teacher assistants

Hearing parents of deaf children

- More than 90% of deaf children have hearing parents and no previous experience with sign language
- Sign language as an additional language is seemingly imposed on hearing parents of deaf children educated through the bilingual approach that uses a natural sign language
- Teachers of deaf children have themselves struggled with using sign language and have been criticized for inadequate signing, even during the 18th and 19th centuries
- The struggle of hearing parents is complicated as they grapple with the clash of modalities caused by the meeting of visual and spoken languages

- Little is known about the history of hearing parents learning sign language
- Numerous resources were developed during the TC era to assist parents to learn to sign, with sign language dictionaries and story books, capturing signs on paper, signing and speaking simultaneously.
- Parents had tremendous difficulties learning to sign
- Learning the system of arrows, initializing of signs using the manual alphabet and speech as a bridge to signing
- SASL like all natural sign languages used in the bilingual approach does not promote the use of speech, used as a bridge and aid in learning to sign

Speech therapists and Audiologists

- In SA these communication interventionists have been introduced to SASL through the curriculum in the late 1990s
- Challenges are limited resources to learn SASL, including SASL classes; there is no official SASL dictionary
- Need to refer families in keeping with JCIH (2007) recommendations for contact with and mentoring by Deaf adults
- A foreign concept for parents: Parents need to be supported by interventionists who are themselves convinced of the value of sign language and importance of Deaf culture

- Professionals need to present SL in an unbiased way as a communication option to families
- Clearer guidelines of professional practice in EHDI programmes to ensure that all parents are adequately informed about SL and its use in early childhood communication
- Research is needed to better understand issues of communication mode match in visual and auditory based languages within traditional bilingual models and second language learning
- We need to ask the difficult questions.

- Parents is SA struggle to access and use SASL.
- They often have misconceptions of the depth and scope of Sign Language when their child is taught Sign Language at school
- Studies in KwaZulu-Natal reveal:
 - Communication mode mismatch is very common (Motala, 2000; Joseph & Alant, 2000; Joseph, 2008; Bloose, 2012)
 - The majority of parents use home signs extensively, and have low sign vocabularies
 - Only about half the number of parents of children in signing schools have attended any signing classes, and generally just a few lesson.

- There is a danger that parents underestimate the implications of sign language as an educational methodology
- They need vital information on the linguistics of Sign Language, sign characteristics and their influence on learning to sign: phonology and grammar, translucency and arbitrariness of signs, the visual nature of sign language and myths and misconceptions
- We need to demystify Sign Language.

- Audiologists need to understand sign language and be confident when counseling parents of newly diagnosed deaf children.
- Parents need explicit information at the time of diagnosis of hearing loss and commencement of intervention of the long term implications of the decisions taken
- Hoffman (2011): SA Audiologists were less confident when counseling families of children with severe to profound hearing loss than those with milder degrees of hearing loss.

Conclusion

- Ross (1997): The profession of audiology must embrace aural rehabilitation.
- Transformation of curricular of audiologists and speech therapists in working with a visual language is an important step in this direction
- We need to encourage parents to sign, and support them as it is a major mind shift and physically challenging task.
- Parents have no choice but to sign if they are to be part of their Deaf child's world.

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