

# Bilingual Education for the Deaf in South Africa – Can it Work?

Claudine Storbeck

Division of Specialised Education  
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

---

## ABSTRACT

*Deaf Education in South Africa has reached the point at which inquiry and reflection have become paramount. Education levels remain low with the majority of Deaf students leaving school functionally illiterate, yet this unsatisfactory status quo is manifest in passive consent. Researchers are currently favouring a move toward Bilingual Education for the Deaf, even though the field remains saturated with contentious debates and insufficient evidence to marshal adequate support for one solution. Bilingualism, as an educational paradigm in Deaf Education, acknowledges that the Deaf child's primary language is Sign Language. In addition, the Bilingual approach recognises that the majority of Deaf children (90%) grow up in a hearing community without natural access to their primary language or the natural ability to acquire the spoken language of their family. Consequently, the language of the community/ family is accepted as the **second** language, with the primary focus on second language literacy. This paper will highlight some of the problems in Deaf Education and the subsequent benefits of the bilingual-bicultural approach to teaching Deaf learners. It will also raise crucial questions and concerns which need to be reflected upon and worked through before Bilingual Education (or any other approach) is accepted as the panacea of Deaf Education.*

**KEY WORDS:** Deaf Education, Bilingual Education, Sign Language, Second Language, Bicultural.

## INTRODUCTION

Deaf Education has been plagued by contentious debates, with the central debate focusing on the mode of communication. Despite this age-old dichotomy and the subsequent dissidence among professionals (including educators and therapists), parents and Deaf people alike, the aim of Deaf Education has always been a shared one: equality for all Deaf learners. Implicit in this shared goal is learner-centredness at best and at the very least, a mutation of the learner-centred approach which states that everything is done for the long-term good of the learner.

In an attempt to reconcile this schism, proponents of Bilingual Education for the Deaf are upholding bilingualism as a possible solution to the age-old debate. In order to grasp the depth of this complicated debate in Deaf Education and the subsequent claim of this paper that Bilingual Education for the Deaf can be seen as a key to bridging the chasm, the central argument will be preceded by a brief overview of the great debate. The discussion will end with answers to some questions, but more importantly will question some of the proposed answers to the debate.

## BACKGROUND TO THE GREAT DEBATE

The intricacies of working and communicating with Deaf people have raised many issues such as position in society, development, education and communication. However, the bifocal issue of mode of communication - of having to choose between manualism and oralism - has remained central in

the debate. Despite the significance of this debate it has somewhat petrified.

The manual paradigm views the Deaf community as a unique community and focuses on the abilities and strengths of the Deaf person. Subsequently, the visual modality of communication - Sign Language - is upheld as the primary language of the Deaf learner and thus as the legitimate language of communication and education. In contrast, oralism, as an approach to teaching and communication, holds that Deaf people should be able to fit into mainstream society, thus highlighting the need for oral communication as central. To this end oralists advocate auditory-oral communication which includes auditory training, speech and lip-reading and disallows signing of any sort.

In an attempt to marry the strengths of oralism and manualism, the philosophy of Total Communication was born. As a philosophy, Total Communication proposed that Deaf learners be taught through any means and modality necessary. Despite this noble philosophy, Total Communication in practice has come to mean simultaneous communication (Woodward, 1982), which means signing and speaking at the same time. Given that the lexicon and the grammatical structure of the two languages - Sign Language and the spoken language of the community - are different, this simultaneous communication leads to both the signed and the spoken parts of the message being conflated and the emergence of two-way language interference in the grammars. Despite this effort to harness the strengths of both the manual and oral approach, this approach has fallen short of success in practice, as a large

percentage of school graduates are still functionally illiterate, remain unemployed and the fortunate ones reach reading levels of eighth graders (DEAFSA, 1997). In a continued effort to find solutions to the array of problems in Deaf Education, present researchers and educators are pointing to Bilingual Education as a potential solution (Strong, 1988; Mashsie, 1996).

Bilingual Education for the Deaf appears to harness the strengths of the various approaches to educating Deaf learners effectively. However, in applying Bilingual theories in Deaf Education, certain questions need to be raised.

### **BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

Bilingualism refers to the use of two or more languages, usually the family language (minority language), and the language of the community (majority language). Competence in and use of these languages usually include one or more of the five skills in both languages: listening<sup>1</sup>, speaking<sup>2</sup>, reading, writing, and thinking (Baker, 1996; Hamers & Blanc, 2000).

There are many types of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education which can be broadly categorised into "transitional" bilingualism and "maintenance" bilingualism, otherwise known as "enrichment" bilingualism. The former approach has as its aim, the transition from the minority to the majority language, with social and cultural assimilation into the language majority the underlying aim (Baker, 1996, p173). The latter approach embraces skill in both the primary and second language, with ongoing emphasis on the minority language and culture throughout the development of the second. The latter model forms the foundation of this paper.

Bilingualism (within this enrichment model) thus encompasses the use of two languages and has as its aim a high level of competency in both the languages, at both the basic interpersonal communicative level, and the cognitive academic language level (Cummins, 1984a, 1984b). Bilingualists within this paradigm work from the premise that first language competence is necessary in order to develop normal cognitive processes, and is essential to effective second language development (Cummins, 1979; 1984a; 1984b; 1991). Within the second language development the primary language plays a crucial role, both as language of instruction and bridge to second language literacy.

In accepting the enrichment model of bilingualism as the theoretical foundation of bilingual education for the Deaf, Deaf Education has been defined as education for rather than **through** Bilingualism, (cf. Johnson, 1992). However, the Cummins' concept is that academic language skills which are required in the language of instruction, require that they be well developed in the primary language in order for any meaningful transference to take place. In Deaf Education, therefore, there is a real concern for the long-term maintenance of two viable language systems.

### **BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR THE DEAF**

Bilingualism, as an educational paradigm in Deaf Education, acknowledges that the Deaf child's primary

<sup>1</sup> Listening and speaking in the oral-aural modality can be substituted with signing production and reception in the visual-gestural modality.

language is Sign Language, in addition to recognising the importance of the Deaf community and Deaf Culture. This approach also recognises the language of the family (and the hearing community) as the second language, primarily in the written form, and the necessity to learn about the culture of this community.

A crucial distinction between the standard form of the bilingual education model and bilingual education for the Deaf is the additional issue of bimodality, where the one language is visual-gestural (Sign Language) and the other is written, with the aural-oral component (spoken version of the written language) as an option. This modality issue adds an as-of-yet unplumbed level of difficulty to the whole enterprise.

This paper argues, that in order for bilingualism to be effective in Deaf Education, the extent of this approach be augmented to include bimodalism and the intricate implications thereof, including strategies for teaching second language literacy through a first language which by its very nature is without a written form.

An exploratory investigation into Deaf Education in South Africa was recently conducted to investigate the Deaf Educational experience (Storbeck, 1994). This study will be briefly described, after which a proposed model of Bilingual Education for the Deaf in South Africa will be discussed.

### ***Bilingual Education for the Deaf: A South African Perspective***

In an initial qualitative investigation into Deaf Education in a South African school for the Deaf, bilingualism emerged as the favoured educational approach. Consequently a model for bilingual education for Deaf Education in South Africa was designed (Figure 1) drawing on the empirical evidence and contemporary theory in bilingual education (Storbeck, 1994; Storbeck & Henning, 1998).

### **METHOD**

#### **AIMS**

The investigation took the form of a case study, which is seen as a "holistic" study taking in "real-life events" (Yin, 1989; Stake, 2000) within natural settings. The researcher was a full participant action researcher (Wagner, 1993), allowing for "rich" descriptions and explorations through the eyes of the participants. Giving the Deaf the opportunity to "speak" for themselves is a crucial aspect of research into Deaf Education as it is the "deaf themselves who are proper experts in knowing what it is like to be Deaf and what it is like to communicate without access to spoken language" (Svartholm, 1994).

This exploratory investigation involved eight Deaf students in the Grade Six class. The class consisted of five girls and three boys and was culturally representative. The Deaf students were seen as participants and informants rather than subjects, as their emic views both guided and shaped the study (Spradley, 1979).

The aim of the study was to describe eight Deaf children's perceptions and experiences rigorously and methodically in a class where South African Sign Language (SASL) was used as the mode of communication. The investigation extended over an academic year within a natural classroom setting, allowing for an authentic, in-depth description of

the situation.

The research question in this investigation was conceptualised from a variety of conflicting opinions on Deaf Education in South Africa with specific reference to the modes of communication and thus language and modes of educating Deaf learners. The school at which the research was conducted reflected this state of confusion in both their policy and practice. An additional exacerbating factor in this field of Deaf Education in South Africa, until very recently was the lack of specialised teacher training programmes for teachers of the Deaf (Storbeck, 1998).

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Four methods of data collection were used to ensure that the data were representative; focus group interviews and individual interviews, as well as field notes and documentation. The validity and reliability of this study were further ensured by verifying the findings on the validation model of Miles and Huberman (1994).

#### **Focus group interviews**

These involved the whole class discussing preselected topics (Frey & Fontana, 1993; Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981; Morgan & Spanish, 1984). The three unscheduled sessions were held on different days and the questions entailed discussing their feelings about the school and class and comparing their class with other classes. The final question during the focus group addressed whether the students would prefer an oral teacher or a signing teacher.

#### **Individual interviews**

In addition to the focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with each of the eight pupils. These “nonscheduled standardised interviews” (Denzin, 1978 cited in Le Compte & Preissle, 1993, p169) gave each pupil the opportunity to discuss the class from his/her own perspective without additional peer pressure. Both types of interviews were conducted in Sign Language. Video recordings were made of all the interviews and were then transcribed from South African Sign Language (SASL) into English.

#### **Field notes**

These were made throughout the year, through unscheduled observations made by the participant researcher. These field notes were compiled in a log-book format and concentrated mostly on ‘critical’ incidents within the class, as identified by the teacher/researcher.

#### **Documentation**

Two forms of documentation were used to accumulate data: students’ written work and school reports. Students responded privately to questions regarding their class. School reports were collected for the three years prior to the investigation and one year following the investigation. These reports included the psychological, the academic, and the speech, language and hearing reports. These documents allowed the researcher a look at records compiled by people outside of the research context, thus having a triangulating function (Stake, 2000).

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis involved data reduction, data display and the drawing of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction in this investigation took place by means of clustering, conceptualization (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 248-250; see also Bryman & Burgess, 1994), narrative discourse, and dendrogramming (see Krippendorff, 1980 as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were recorded chronologically and then either grouped together in these three-columned figures (dendrograms) in order for concepts, and conceptual categories to be identified, or analysed by means of descriptions of written text, such as narrative discourse. Once the data were consolidated, interpretations were made which led to the resulting recommendations and proposals.

### **RESULTS**

Throughout this qualitative investigation the following issues emerged: mode of communication (including Sign Language, oral mode, and signed English); teachers; the classroom as learning environment (including the smaller categories of work, feeling and future); parents and other hearing people. The results presented in this paper will focus on mode of communication, as this appeared to be the fundamental finding of the research project.

#### **SIGN LANGUAGE AS MODE OF COMMUNICATION**

This was described throughout the investigation as the mode all the students preferred and understood, as “Sign language is easy for people, English is difficult, but Sign Language is interesting. When it is Sign Language I never have to ask what something means, or don’t understand - I always understand”.

Students’ expressed feelings of “happiness” because the teacher was able to sign, “We were all happy because of Sign Language ... Sign Language is interesting, we all enjoy it”. These data were further strengthened by the students’ personal sketches as well as data from written reports and observations which echoed their preference for, and interest in, Sign Language as the mode of communication.

The category of Sign Language, which was the central category that emerged, was fundamentally part of all the other categories that emanated from this research. Teachers were discussed according to signing proficiency and those who signed were preferred. Furthermore, classrooms were categorized into the signing and non-signing classes and the pupils all appeared to like the signing classes more but said that there was more work to do in these classes and that the work was more difficult. The general perceptions and experiences toward Sign Language as medium of instruction were positive. In contrast to the overall positive experiences of the students toward Sign Language as the mode of communication, the oral method was described with considerably less enthusiasm.

#### **ORAL MODE OF COMMUNICATION**

In contrast to what emerged within the Sign Language category, the oral mode of communication drew negative responses. Many times throughout the research the students expressed their dislike, even hate for the oral method of communication, “I like signing, but I hate oralism

... because oralism I didn't understand, I don't like it, but signing I really enjoy - it's fun". Students referred to lip-reading and speech interchangeably in statements such as these: "I like signing, but I hate lip-reading. I don't understand lip-reading and then I feel fed up. When I sign my arms feel fine, but if I talk my voice gets sore- I hate it, then I sign again and ignore oralism".

In contrast to these strong negative feelings however, some of the students also shared more positive experiences toward learning how to speak and lip-read. One student said that he "like(d) signing, but a little bit of lip-reading. When something is signed I understand it, but words I like to lip-read ... For me, I can understand lip-reading". Another pupil wrote in her personal sketch, to the surprise of the researcher, that she wanted to be spoken to without sign as she wanted to learn to talk without signs (or maybe just a few, she added). This surprise finding, where one pupil requested to be spoken to, is supported by research and will be expanded upon in the discussion section.

The last aspect of communication the learners discussed was the issue of signed English as the mode of communication. A noteworthy finding was that the children's responses to both signed English and the oral mode were alike, as they appeared to view these two in a similar manner.

#### **SIGNED ENGLISH AS MODE OF COMMUNICATION**

Signed English was described as "difficult to understand" and even "impossible" leading to "children hate(ing) those teachers". On the contrary the pupils who could lip-read well said that they "like(d) Signed English" and that it made "everybody understand."

The apparent contradictory findings emanating from the data, where both manual and oral methods of communication were advocated, were categorised. All the main categories identified in each of the data collection methods (individual and focus group interviews, observation, personal sketches, school and individual reports) were summarised, networked and further condensed into a concept map of the central ideas (see Figure 1). The main idea that emerged was that when Sign Language was accepted as the first language and used as mode of communication in the class, the result was motivated and happy learners.

#### **DISCUSSION**

Throughout this qualitative investigation the following trends were consistently manifested: all the participants at different times and in different contexts said that they preferred Sign Language (and not the oral method of communication) as the medium of instruction; reading was identified as important, and some of the students also wanted to learn to speak and lip-read. Despite the unanimous support for Sign Language as the main medium of instruction, it is interesting to note that the students gave different motives for using Sign Language within the classroom. Their different reasons included accessibility, interest and effect.

The clear preference for Sign Language as the mode of communication became quite evident in the above data. This preference can be ascribed to the fact that Sign Language is the Deaf students' natural language and is acquired naturally when exposed to it by Deaf adults and peers (Kyle

& Woll, 1985; Johnson, Liddell and Erting, 1989; Brennan, 1992; Penn, 1993; and Petitto, 1993).

The teacher/researcher noticed that in this class, the pupils did not seem accustomed to the amount and difficulty of the work presented. In other words, they had previously been delivered a curriculum less ambitious in scope and pace. It is speculated that due to the students' easy and quick understanding of the work in Sign Language (as is evident from the data) the amount of work had increased from the classes in which more oral modes were applied. It is interesting to note that, although students made reference to the amount and difficulty of the work having increased, they always seemed to understand it.

If the central aim of education is the generation of understanding (Perkins, 1992; Gardner, 1993), and this is only possible through a message that can be understood successfully, Deaf children need to understand the message fully in order to be educated. Consequently they will have constructed meaning.

Effect is also important. A possible explanation for the "happiness" expressed by the children in relation to their new signing teacher could be that they felt accepted. Acceptance of the learners' language, culture and identity is a key issue in the deep sense of education.

The negative experiences toward the oral mode of communication, identified in the data are supported by the personal reflections of James Tucker, an 'oral' deaf child, when he recalled feeling totally isolated in the class. He went further to describe those oral years as his "dark years" (Tucker, 1993). These perceptions of oralism are further supported by Deaf people's feelings as referred to in Lane (1984, p.395): "the pure oral method has been....detest[ed], despise[d], abominate[d]".

In contrast to these negative experiences toward oralism however, one girl wanted to be spoken to without signs so that she could learn to speak, and another expressed the fact that he liked lip-reading. This unexpected finding is supported by research that interviewed Deaf students and found that they wished to see Sign Language used by teachers, but that they also identified speech and lip-reading as important (Kyle & Allsop, 1982, p71).

Signed English (which the students seemed to describe as similar to the oral method of communication) is in essence the recognition of both signing and speech, where English speech is supported by signs (Conrad, 1979; Johnson, Liddell and Erting, 1989). Johnson et al (1989) refer to this mode as "crypto-oralism", and this somewhat negative description is supported by the perceptions of the students interviewed.

In conclusion, the findings of this research project seem to suggest that these Deaf students preferred Sign Language as the main medium of instruction but that they recognized the value of English, speech and lip-reading. In order to accommodate the students' perceptions of their learning environment, the researcher has started designing a bilingual model for Deaf education in South Africa. This proposed bilingual model will look at the various aspects identified in this investigation, as well as contemporary research on bilingual education for the Deaf (Strong, 1988; Plant 1990a; 1990b; Woodward, 1982; Johnson, 1992; Andersson & Lindahl, 1990). On application of this model the researcher would like to speculate that students' perceptions and experiences of their classroom life in South Africa will improve.

**A MODEL FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR THE DEAF**

To reiterate, the following findings were the strongest in the research:

- Sign Language was preferred as medium of instruction in the class;
- the oral methods of communication (including what they referred to as signed English) were disliked (even

- “hated”), and
- a need was shown for learning speech, lip-reading, and reading written English.

This preference for Sign Language in the class can be ascribed to the fact that it is a naturally accessible language to Deaf students (Brennan, 1992; Johnson, Liddell & Erting, 1989; Kyle & Woll, 1985; Petitto, 1993). Sign Language is a language which allows Deaf students to participate actively in the learning process as they are able to appropriate the

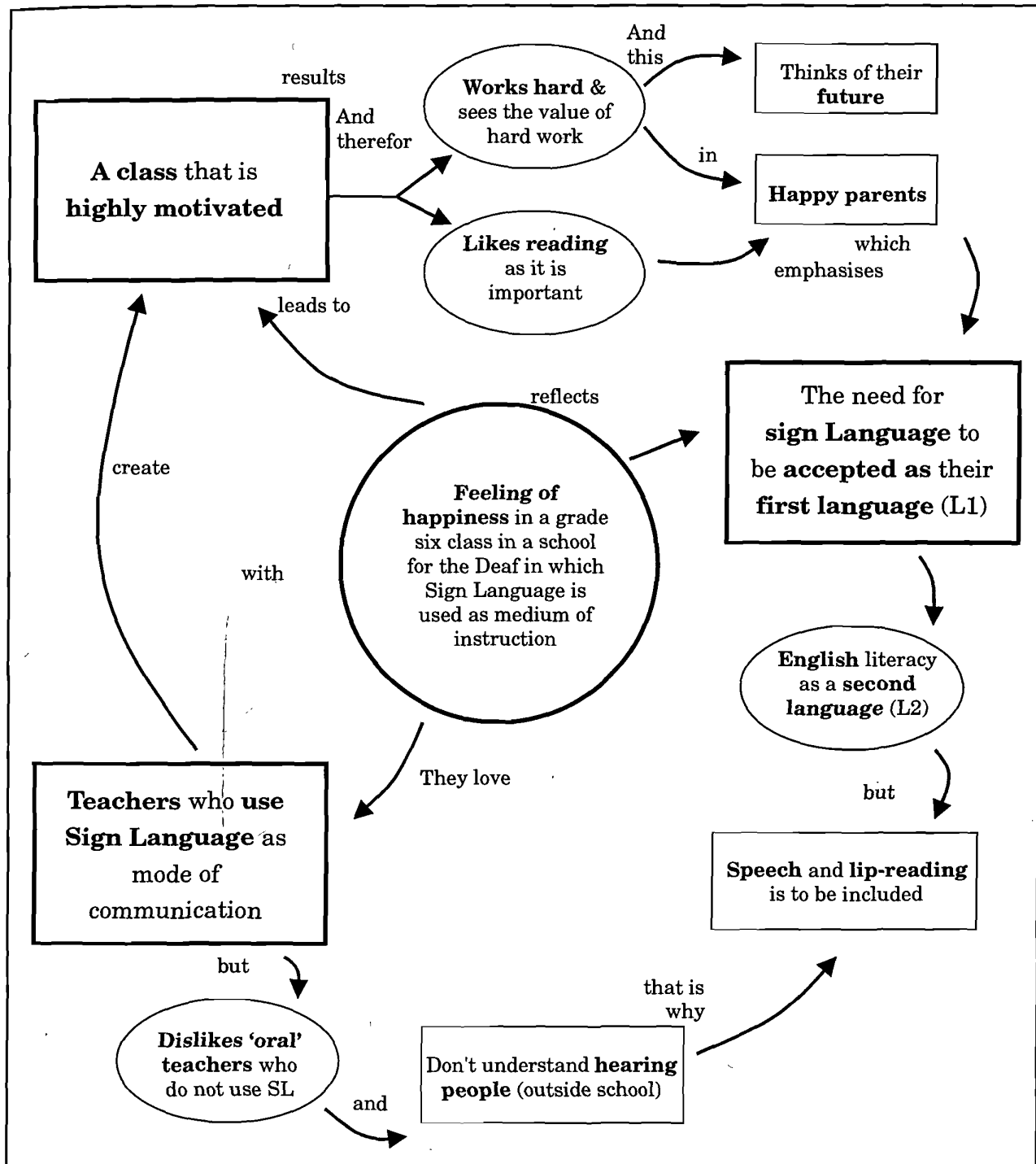


FIGURE 1. A Concept Map of the Central Findings (Storbeck, 1994)

signed message and actively respond to it (Wertsch, 1991). As Sign Language is a language that exposes a Deaf child (who has sign as a first or native language) to content/information in a language mode that is easily accessible and which requires no effort on the part of the child to understand. The signing environment is referred to as the least restrictive environment (White Paper on an Integrated Disability Strategy, 1997) which is required within educational settings.

In order to accommodate what these students experienced in their class, the researcher started exploring bilingualism as proposed by various researchers such as Andersson & Lindahl, 1990; Johnson, 1992; Mashsie, 1995; Plant, 1990a; 1990b; Strong, 1988; Woodward, 1982). However, in the literature on bilingualism, methods varied and bilingualism did not appear to have a consistent definition and model. The discussion often appeared confusing. For this reason the researcher decided to design a clearly defined bilingual model based on the literature, taking into account the present research findings. This proposed bilingual model for the education of the Deaf in South Africa would allow the students to be taught in SASL (or the Sign Language of the community), have a strong focus on the written word (English would be taught as a second language through the written code) and include speech and lip-reading skills. The proposed bilingual model is displayed in Figure 2 below.

This first component of this model proposes that the primary language (Sign Language) of the Deaf child be acquired naturally from as young an age as possible in order for the child to have "normal cognitive development" (Strong, 1988, p117). A strong argument in support of early Sign Language acquisition in the bilingual model is the research by Fischer (1995) and Bochner & Albertini (1988), on critical period and language acquisition of Deaf children. In order to take advantage of the critical period effects it is "imperative that children be given exposure to accessible language as early as possible, or they will lose out both linguistically and experientially" (Fischer, 1995, p11). This acceptance of the Deaf child and the development of a naturally accessible first language, is reported to lead to a sense of identity for the child, as well as a positive self-concept and high self-esteem as a Deaf child (Head, 1990; Andersson & Lindahl, 1990; Johnson, 1989). By means of a well-established primary language the child becomes able to think about his/her own language (that is, to reflect on it) and is able to participate in discussions on the second language. Thinking and talking **about** language is called using metalinguistic awareness and knowledge. The Deaf child "needs to have a certain metalinguistic awareness which can aid in his understanding of what Sign Language is, of what Swedish [or English] is and of the fact that the two are different languages" (McLarey, 1995, p14).

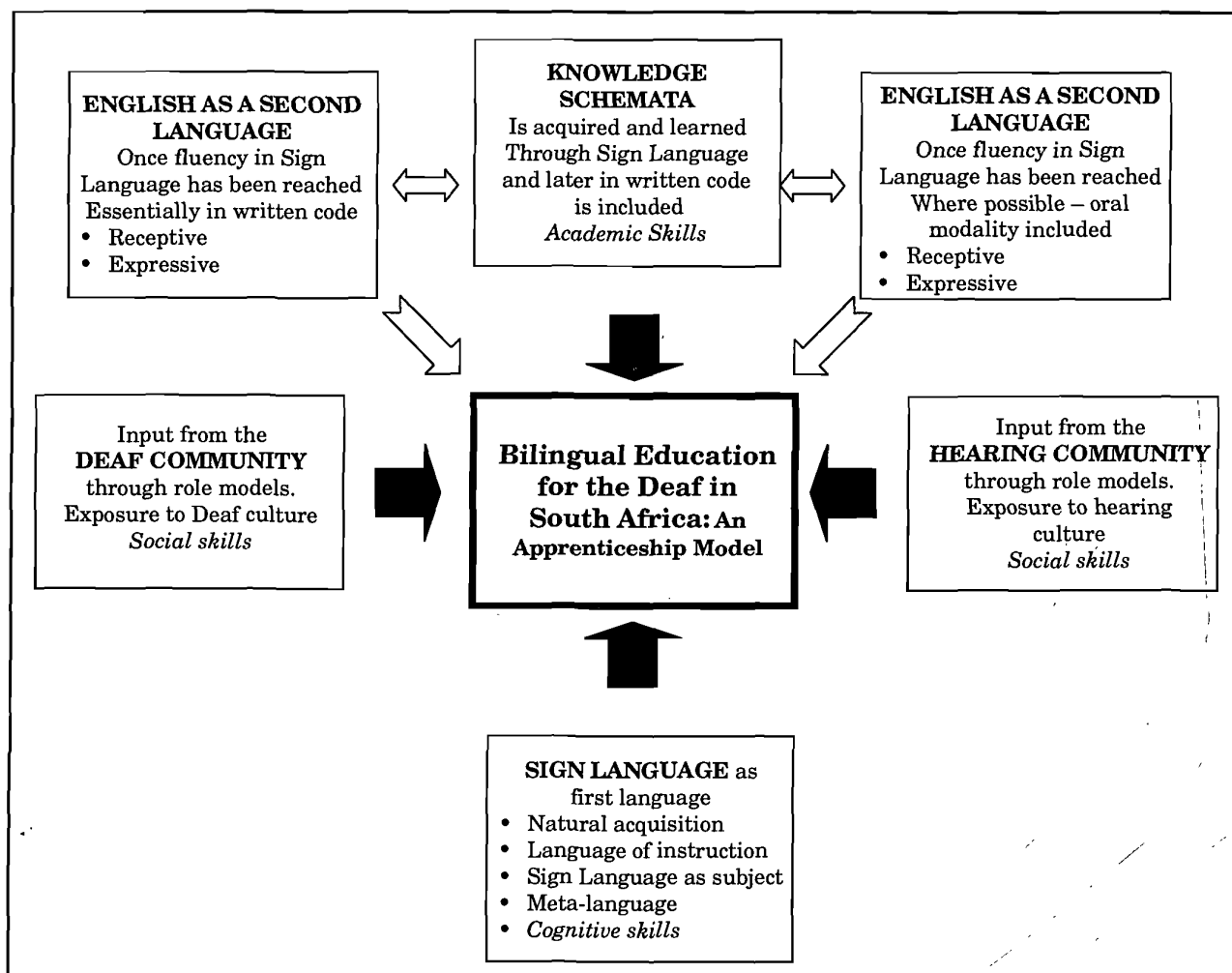


FIGURE 2. A Model for Bilingual Education for the Deaf in South Africa (Storbeck 1994)

This argument is further supported by the following recommendations made by the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD) in their report on the status of Sign Language. They recommend that the WFD call for the right of Deaf children to have full early exposure to Sign Language and to be educated as bilinguals or multilinguals with regard to reading and writing, and that Sign Language be recognized and treated as the first language of the Deaf child (World Federation of the Deaf, 1993, p11).

The second facet of the model in Figure 2 proposes that academic knowledge schemata be learned through the first language, namely Sign Language. In the knowledge-building process, learners need to be actively involved in appropriating this knowledge (Rogoff, 1990; 1993) and for this to take place the language needs to be decodable and therefore accessible. This concurs with the Swedish National Curriculum Statement that says “Sign language is the Deaf student’s primary tool for the appropriation of knowledge... .” (cited in McLarey, 1995, p10).

The third element of this model is the second language component (in this case, English). Research has shown that a well-established first language is advantageous and could even presage the learning of a second language (Strong, 1988; Denmark, 1989; Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991; Davies, 1991; Johnson, 1992; Paul & Quigley, 1994; McLarey, 1995). The second language is taught essentially in the written code, through reading and writing. Where possible speech and lip-reading skills are included in a fun way, separate from all academic instruction. It is vital in this model that the “Sign Language and the spoken language... be kept separate in use and in the curriculum” (Johnson, 1989, p10) by both the student and teacher, as their being “conscious of and attentive to the first language and its relationship to the second language, acquisition of the second language ... can be facilitated” (McLarey, 1995, p11).

The fourth aspect of the model in Figure 2 proposes contact with both the Deaf and hearing community, thereby fully preparing the child as a member of the Deaf Community, within a hearing world. Contact with the Deaf Community exposes the Deaf child to signing (linguistic) role models, gives the child a clear understanding of Deaf Culture (Plant, 1990a) and encourages normal social development among Deaf peers. The researcher proposes that this is done through parent support systems, where Deaf parents with similar age children (Deaf or hearing) interact with the hearing parents and their Deaf child on a regular basis. This support system exposes the Deaf child to Deaf role models and Culture, but also highlights the equality of the hearing culture of their parents. The second, but equal subsection of this cultural exposure, is thus exposure to the hearing culture. Social activities between Deaf and hearing peers are encouraged as the Deaf child needs to function in a majority-hearing world. Speech and lip-reading skills are integrated through this interaction with hearing peers, in comfortable, authentic situations.

Bilingualism of a similar ilk appears to be having positive results in both Sweden and Denmark (see Hansen, 1989; Andersson & Lindahl, 1990; Davies, 1991) where a bilingual model in Deaf education has been in practice for just over ten years. These positive results include:

- the improvement of reading skills (in the second language) through the first language (the signed language of the country), and
- the improved self-esteem and confidence among the Deaf

children who have been exposed to it.

Similarly, but on a far smaller scale, after two years of being exposed to SASL, the pupils who were initially a part of the investigation described in this paper, appeared to be pedagogically and communicatively empowered and were seen to reflect upon their Deafness and their language in a critical manner. With this evidence and more general research findings, the researcher has therefore proposed bilingualism for Deaf Education in South Africa and has designed a clear and defined model for the bilingual method of education. This is encompassed in the model described in this paper.

In summary therefore, the bilingual model has as its goal a well rounded, bilingually competent person, fluent in her/his primary language namely Sign Language and skilled in reading and writing in the second language. Lip-reading and speaking in the second language are also important elements in this model. Furthermore, the social aspect of adapting to both the hearing and the Deaf Culture are essential parts of this model, as such a large portion of the Deaf population are born into hearing families, yet are naturally a part of the Deaf Culture. This study aimed to give a clearly presented bilingual model for Deaf education by focusing on Deaf students’ experiences, in order to provide an authentic, grounded argument on Deaf education through the eyes of the Deaf themselves.

#### **QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE PROPOSED MODEL**

The Bilingual-Bicultural model for education - proposed by many as a solution to the great debate - states that SL is the first/ primary language of the Deaf and that it should thus be used as language of communication. This model for Deaf education continues by stating that Primary language proficiency will inevitably, given exposure, lead to the acquisition of second language (English) literacy. In practice however, this has not transpired.

Despite the clear benefit of being educated in a barrier-free learning environment by teachers who know and respect your language and culture, and the subsequent improvement of self-esteem and academic achievement (Johnson, 1989; Head, 1990; Andersson & Lindahl, 1990; Mashie, 1995), very little rigorous research and concomitant evidence has been given to support the claim that Bilingual education for the Deaf leads to improved literacy levels.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Due to the lack of conclusive evidence crucial questions and concerns need to be addressed before accepting Bilingual education as the panacea of Deaf education.

In the argument based on Cummins’ Interdependence Theory, which purports that first language competency is necessary in order to develop normal cognitive processes and subsequently second language development, natural first language acquisition is assumed. Consequently, as the majority of Deaf children are born into hearing families (90%) and thus do not naturally acquire a primary language, the acquisition of a second language is essentially impeded.

A further issue to consider regarding Deaf education, second language learning and Cummins’ Interdependence Theory, is whether this theory can in fact be applied to the Deaf situation. Mayer and Wells (1996, 1997) argue

convincingly that this argument is “based on a false analogy”, and that “deaf education does not match the conditions assumed by the linguistic interdependence model” (p93).

Presently the effective implementation of Bilingual education for the Deaf in South Africa is being hindered by the following:

- the lack of sufficiently trained teachers of the Deaf;
- the severe lack of Bilingual teachers;
- the status (or lack thereof) of Sign Language and
- lack of research into literacy development (Sign Language to English)

In searching for answers to the problems raised in this paper, it is proposed that the central question to be raised should be how theories of Bilingualism - that are based on two spoken languages - can be applied directly to Bilingualism in Deaf Education, where the one language is visual-gestural and the other is the written version of an aural-oral language. In starting with the correct questions, it is believed that we will be well on our way in searching for answers in the age-old debate of Deaf Education.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to St Vincent School for the Deaf for allowing me to do research at the school, and in particular my class for allowing me to discover their valuable perceptions of classroom life.

#### REFERENCES:

- Anderssen, R. and Lindahl, U. (1990). Deaf teachers in the bilingual education of deaf in Sweden. Paper presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the International Congress in Education of the Deaf. Rochester, New York.
- Baker, C. (1996). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Bamford, K.W. & Mizokawa, D.T. (1991). Additive bilingual immersion education: cognitive and language development. *Language Hearing*, 41(3): 413 - 429
- Bochner, J. H. & Albertini, J. A. (1988). Language varieties in the deaf population *Language* and their acquisition by children and adults. In M. Strong, (Ed.), *Learning and deafness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brennan, M. (1992). The visual world of British Sign Language: an introduction. In D. Brien, (Ed.), *Dictionary of British Sign Language*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Bryman, A. & Burgess, R. G. (1994). Reflections on qualitative data analysis. In A. Bryman, & R.G. Burgess, (eds), *Analyzing qualitative data*. London: Routledge.
- Conrad, R. (1979). *The Deaf School Child: language and cognitive function*. London: Harper Row.
- Cummins, J. (1979). Linguistic Interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research*, 49, 222 - 51
- Cummins, J. (1984a). *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (1984b). Wanted: a theoretical framework for relating language proficiency to academic achievement among bilingual students. In C. Rivera (Ed.), *Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (1991). Interdependence of first and second language proficiency in bilingual children. In E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language Processing in Bilingual Children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, S.N. (1991). The transition toward bilingual education of deaf children in Sweden and Denmark: Perspectives on language. *Sign Language Studies*, 71: 169 - 195.
- Deaf Federation of South Africa. (1997). *Higher Education and the needs of the Deaf Community - Discussions with the University of South Africa (UNISA)*. Johannesburg: DEAFSA.
- Denmark, C. (1989). Is English the first language of deaf children? *Bilingualism - Teaching English as a Second Language to Deaf Children*. Proceedings of a conference held in Derby, November, 1989.
- Fischer, S. D. (1995). *Critical Periods for Language Acquisition: Consequences for Deaf Education*. Paper presented at the 18th International Congress on Education of the Deaf, Tel Aviv, Israel.
- Frey, J.H. & Fontana, A. (1993). The group interview in social research. *Social Sciences Journal* 28: 175 - 189.
- Folch-Lyon, E. & Trost, J. F. (1981). Conducting focus group sessions. *Studies in Family Planning* 12 (12): 443 - 449.
- Gardner, H. (1993). *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*. London: Fontana Press.
- Hamers, J.F. & Blanc, M.H.A. (2000). *Bilingualism and Bilingualism* (2nd Ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hanson, B. (1989). Trends in the progress towards bilingual education for deaf children in Denmark. Copenhagen: The Centre for Total Communication.
- Head, S (1990) The bilingual project. In: Bilingual Education for Deaf Children: from policy to practice. Proceedings of a conference held in Nottingham, November 1990.
- R.E. Johnson, (Ed), (1989). *Access: Language in Deaf Education. Gallaudet Research Institute Occasional paper 90-1*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press
- Johnson, R. E. (1992). Possible influences on bilingualism in early ASL acquisition. Paper presented to the Fourth International Conference on Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research, August, San Diego, California
- R.E. Johnson, S.K. Liddell, & C.J. Erting, (Eds.), (1989). *Unlocking the curriculum: principles for achieving access in deaf education. Working paper 89-3*. Washington, DC: Department of Linguistics and Interpreting at the Gallaudet Research Institute.
- Kyle, J.G. & Allsop, L. (1982). Communicating with young deaf people: some issues. *Journal of British Teachers of the Deaf*, 3: 71-79.
- Kyle, J. G. & Woll, B. (1985). *Sign Language: The study of deaf people and their language*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Lane, H. (1984). *When the Mind Hears: a History of the Deaf*. London: Penguin Books
- LeCompte, M. & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*; 2nd ed. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Mahshie, S. (1995). *Educating deaf children bilingually*. Washington, DC: Pre-College Programs.
- Mayer, C & Wells, G. (1996). Can the Linguistic Interdependence Theory Support a Bilingual-Bicultural Model of Literacy Education for Deaf Students. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 1 (2) 93 - 107
- Mayer, C & Wells, G. (1997). The question remains: a rejoinder to Mason. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 2 (4): 280 - 282.
- McLarey, K . (1995). Literacy and deafness : a look of some dimensions of literacy among deaf children in a bilingual program. Örebro : SiH Läromedel.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*; 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, D. L. & Spanish, M. T. (1984). Focus groups: A new tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology* 7 (3): 253 - 270.
- National Government of South Africa, 1997: *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy*, November 1997. Ndabeni, Western Cape: Rustica Press (Pty) Ltd.
- Paul, P.V. & Quigley, S.P. (1994). *Language and Deafness*. San Diego: Singular Publishing Company.
- Penn, C. (1993). Signs of the times: Deaf language and culture in South Africa. *The South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 40: 11-23.
- Perkins, D. N. (1992). *Smart Schools: From training memories to educating minds*. New York: Macmillan, Inc.
- Petitto, L.A. (1993). On the ontogenetic requirements for early language acquisition. In: B. De Boysson-Bardies [et.al.] (Eds.).



- Developmental Neurocognition: Speech and face processing in the first years of life.* London: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Plant, P.** (1990). Bilingualism: Longwill's approach. In *Bilingual education for Deaf children: From policy to practice*, 39 - 42. Nottingham: Laser Publications.
- Plant, P.** 1990b. Bilingualism and the classroom. In *Bilingual education for Deaf children: From policy to practice*, 52 - 53. Nottingham: Laser Publications.
- Spradley, J. P.** (1979). *The ethnographic interview.* Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Stake, R.** (2000). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln, (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Storbeck, C.** (1994). *A Case Study of Bilingual Education in a school for the Deaf.* Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University.
- Storbeck, C.** (1998). *A Professional Development Programme for Teachers of the Deaf in South Africa.* Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University.
- Storbeck, C. & Henning, E.** (1998). Experiences and Perceptions in a South African Sign Language Class. In A. Weisel, (Ed.), *Issues unresolved: New perspectives on language and deaf education.* Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Strong, M.** (1988). A bilingual approach to the education of young deaf children. In M. Strong (Ed.), *Language learning and deafness.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.)
- Svartholm, K.** (1994). Personal communication. April
- Tucker, J. E.** (1993). The Austine School and MSD. *The Maryland Bulletin*, Vol xiii (4): 4 - 5
- Vygotsky, L. S.** (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wagner, J.** (1993). Educational research as a full participant: challenges and opportunities for generating new knowledge. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 6 (1): 3 - 18.
- Wertsch, J. V.** (1991). *Voices of the mind: A socio-cultural approach to mediated action.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Woodward, J.** (1982). *How you gonna get to heaven if you can't talk to Jesus: On depathologizing deafness.* Maryland: T.J. Publishers.
- World Federation of the Deaf.** (1993). Report on the status of Sign Language. Helsinki: World Federation of the Deaf.
- Yin, R. K.** (1989). *Case study research, design and methods in applied social research methods*, vol. 5. London: Sage Publications.