



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: ASLIA National
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: NSW

Summary

Summary of recommendations

In order to achieve excellence in education for deaf children and raise literacy levels, it is recommended that:

- All Auslan/English interpreters used in schools be required to hold NAATI accreditation
- After receiving NAATI accreditation, a system similar to the EIPA be adopted throughout Australia to ensure regulation of Auslan/English interpreters so that all deaf, signing students are provided with interpreters with the necessary accreditation and skills to work in an educational environment, thus giving these students access to quality teaching and learning.
- Interpreters be given their own employment category, rather than being employed as Teacher's Aides.
- Deaf mentors be employed as language and cultural role models for deaf students, and language models for interpreters.
- Note-takers be made available to deaf students in secondary schools.
- Centres of deaf education be established throughout Australia, based on the models of Shenton College, Klemzig and Toowong.

Main submission

Submission – Achieving Educational Excellence in Australian Schools review - Deaf students using Auslan/English interpreters

Background

The history of deaf education has followed trends since the Milan Conference of 1880 which proclaimed the benefits of oralism. Since that time, debate has continued within education systems, not only here in Australia, but in other

countries and regions such as the United States, Britain and Scandinavia, with oral, total communication, Signed English and bilingual education methods all being used at varying stages since Milan. This has resulted in divergent views among medical, allied health and education professionals regarding the 'best method' for language choice and education of deaf children. The advent of the cochlear implant has further fuelled this debate, with many considering this to 'cure' deafness. However, in spite of this, the average reading age of deaf students of school leaving has improved little above that of a Year 4 student, even with the advent of cochlear implants (Morere, 2011).

The chequered history of deaf education has left Auslan undervalued, and in spite of being recognised as a language in 1989, it is not considered by many to be a 'real language' and is considered second-rate, usually only taught to deaf children if their families have requested it (and usually, advocated strongly); if the children are from deaf families who use Auslan (according to Johnston (2004), less than the commonly cited 5-10% of deaf children are born to deaf parents, but not all of these use Auslan); or if the child has considered to have 'failed' at oral methods, which is sometimes not detected until after starting school. However, research on sensitive language periods (Morgan, 2014) indicate that if language acquisition is delayed until after 5 years of age, this delay has a detrimental impact on the cognitive abilities and mental health of deaf children which can never be caught up. "A consistent finding in the research is that a strong first language (L1) foundation (regardless of the language used for L1) is critical to reading success," (Morere, 2011). Therefore, we have an obligation to ensure that deaf children have a strong first language so they can achieve excellence in education.

The current situation in Australia

All of this has left deaf students who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language), and those who would benefit from its use, which arguably includes the majority of deaf children, in a very vulnerable position. Without value being placed on Auslan among professionals who work directly with deaf children and infants, our own state education systems suffer as a result. The families of deaf children in all sectors of the education system are required to advocate for their children to gain full-time Auslan interpreting in order to gain access to education. Currently, there are no known qualified Auslan interpreters working with deaf, signing students in NSW. The majority of interpreters in other states are also unqualified. The only exception to this is Western Australia where there is a higher proportion of qualified interpreters due to the model of deaf education that has been established at Shenton College. The lack of qualified interpreters means that deaf students, often with significantly delayed language for reasons mentioned above, are regularly provided with 'interpreters' who are not fluent in the language. As less than 10% of deaf children are born to deaf parents and Auslan is not their native language, most are the only

deaf child in the local mainstream school. These children are often not exposed to the Deaf community or Auslan role models, with the interpreter becoming their language role model.

There are no mandated standards for Auslan/English interpreters in Australian schools, including those in WA. Additionally, in most cases there is no assessment of skills, with applicants being interviewed for positions without anyone present who has knowledge of Auslan or the complexities of the interpreting process. Additionally, schools are usually unaware if deaf students are experiencing language delay, or the extent to which such a delay may impede their day to day communication, let alone their ability to learn new and increasingly complex concepts. Deficits in learning are largely attributed to the internal factors of lack of motivation, effort or ability of the child, rather than to any external factors, resulting in these being continually overlooked.

If a school employs an individual who does not possess the necessary skills and qualifications to interpret, this is not a 'reasonable adjustment', and therefore contravenes the DDA, 1992, 5(2). By giving the appearance that a 'reasonable adjustment' has been made, the student is further disadvantaged with the blame for failures in education being attributed to them. An example of this is a deaf student in senior secondary school who recently withdrew from school due to the inability of the 'interpreter' to sign complex discourse, choosing instead to enrol in a TAFE course where qualified interpreters are employed (anecdote shared with student's permission).

Deaf students who access learning via an interpreter in secondary school, particularly in senior years, are unable to take notes in class as it is impossible for them to watch an interpreter and write notes at the same time. Currently, the majority of students rely on handouts from teachers and shared notes from other their peers. However, other students are often unwilling to share their notes, may have illegible handwriting, or may not make notes in a way that suits the learning style of the deaf student. Note-taking is also an issue for other deaf students who do not use interpreters, as many of these students rely on watching the teacher's lip-patterns to support their auditory skills in understanding what is being said, therefore they are also unable to look down to take notes without missing information.

Those employed as 'interpreters' in schools fall under the same employment category as a teacher's aide (SLSO, EA, SSO, ES etc. – title varies by state). In a 2017 survey (unpublished) conducted by ASLIA (Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association) seeking information on the current state of Auslan/English interpreting in schools, a common complaint was that as SLSOs, interpreters are expected to perform other duties, including assisting other students with special needs during classes, photocopying, playground duty and toileting of students with high support

needs. Examples of expectations of educational interpreters can be seen by the following link shows an example of a 2014 NSW job description for a Teacher's Aide (Special – sign interpreter):

<https://web1.highlands-s.schools.nsw.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Time-for-Teaming-Up-reprint-2014.pdf>

As interpreters providing communication access, they need to be available to deaf students for all classroom communication, not just when the teacher is talking. Interpreters also need to be available for students to attend co-curricular activities and to meet with teachers during breaks. In addition to this, interpreters require time to pre-read lesson materials as this background information allows them to interpret effectively, but this time is rarely available to them. Interpreting is physically and mentally fatiguing, therefore having appropriate breaks is essential.

Another finding of the ASLIA survey into educational interpreting was that in the states that have deaf mentors, these staff members are highly valued and beneficial to deaf students and interpreters. Deaf mentors are employed in Western Australia and Queensland. A deaf mentor is a deaf adult who works in the school environment and acts as a linguistic and cultural mentor and mediator for deaf students, which has been shown to foster a strong sense of identity in deaf children (Nikolarazi & Hadjikakou, 2006). Having a strong sense of identity ameliorates mental health issues which are known to be more prevalent in deaf people than the wider population (Beyond Blue, 2014; Brown & Cornes, 2015), therefore also impacting positively on educational and social outcomes, as well as post-school education, employment and community participation. A deaf mentor acts as a role model for deaf students as they navigate life in a world that 'primarily relies on audition' (Hauser, O'Hearn, McKee, Steider & Thew, 2010), as well as supporting educational interpreters and providing guidance on linguistic choices.

Recommendations

NAATI is the accreditation body for interpreters and translators in all languages in Australia. Auslan/English interpreters employed by state and federal government organisations including TAFE colleges, universities, Department of Human Services and hospitals, as well as all interpreters employed by interpreting organisations such as NABS (medical interpreting) and the Deaf Society are required to hold NAATI certification. It is recommended that NSW DET adopt the same requirement.

An educational interpreter performance assessment tool (EIPA) has been developed in the United States. This includes rating scales and protocols for employing interpreters in schools. In accordance with best practice the EIPA (Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment) was established in the United States by the Diagnostic Center at Boys Town National Research Hospital in response to the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA), and No Child Left Behind, with the Center

being ‘committed to making a difference in the quality of education for deaf and hard of hearing student.’

Additional information regarding the EIPA and required skillset and criteria for rating educational interpreters can be found on classroominterpreting.org website which was established with funding from the United States Department of Education.

EIPA – what educational interpreters need to be effective:

<https://www.classroominterpreting.org/Interpreters/effective/index.asp>

EIPA rating scale descriptions

<https://www.classroominterpreting.org/EIPA/performance/rating.asp>

It is further recommended that other states consult with relevant personnel in Western Australia and Queensland, and the Deaf Mentor model be duplicated throughout Australia.

Centres of deaf education need to be established at various locations throughout each state so that deaf students are not educated in isolation. Unlike students with other disabilities whose ‘least restrictive environment’ may be the local, mainstream school, for many deaf students this model is isolating rather than inclusive. For a deaf student, particularly a signing student, the ‘least restrictive environment’ is one where there are no barriers to communication and they are able to communicate directly with their peers and teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that models such as Shenton College (WA), Klemzig Primary School (SA) and Toowong Public School (QLD) be evaluated as models of ‘best practice’ and duplicated in other states.

Summary of recommendations

In order to achieve excellence in education for deaf children, it is recommended that:

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