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RESEARCH-BASED CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND ASSESSMENT IN A

deaf bilingual program

By Laura Peterson

The California School for the Deaf (CSD), Fremont, is a deaf-centered bilingual program. Our approach to curriculum development, instructional pedagogy, and assessment integrates best practices in deaf education, bilingual education, and general education. The goals of our program are outlined in our Expected School-wide Learning Results.

Core Values

Since the authors of *Unlocking the Curriculum* (Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989) proposed "...the use of ASL as a first language and as the language of instruction for deaf children," CSD has consistently and continuously celebrated its status as a bilingual school for students who are deaf. We have a holistic view of deaf children as healthy individuals who are culturally distinct, have language rights, and deserve to be educated in a language-rich environment. This approach is supported by the World Federation of the Deaf (2012), which notes on its website:

Deaf children learn best in sign language. A bilingual approach is becoming more popular in many countries. It means that the teaching language is sign language in all subjects for Deaf children. At the same time, it has a strong emphasis on teaching reading and writing skills of the language used in the country or society. This approach has facilitated in good learning results because it supports the natural learning and communication environment of a Deaf child.

Photos by John T. Consoli



Bilingual Instruction and California Curriculum

As an accredited public school in the state of California, we teach to the California State Board of Education Standards and use state-adopted materials. In addition, great effort has been made to develop American Sign Language (ASL) curricula within our ASL/English bilingual program. We believe that proficiency in the first language of ASL will lead to proficiency in English. We have relied largely on the work of Jim Cummins (2006), a Canadian researcher who focuses on bilingual education, to understand how a strong foundation of conceptual knowledge in ASL can and does transfer to literacy in English.

To assist our students in developing

grade-level fluency in ASL, the school has allocated instructional time to teaching ASL and invested in curriculum and materials development. Over the past few years, ASL teachers and specialists have been hired and formal courses established within each department. Immersion courses are available to elementary students. Much of our work has been guided by language planning training given both by our own staff and by the Gallaudet University Language Planning Institute's Center for ASL/English Bilingual Education and Research (CAEBER), which provides guidance and technical assistance in the implementation of ASL/English bilingual professional development in schools and programs across the nation. Our Deaf Studies



resource teacher and ASL teachers meet weekly to work on the signacy framework, an outline of the components of a solid teaching program for ASL. They also focus on producing materials that teachers can use in the classroom. We have invested heavily in visual media technology such as MacBooks that are used to allow students to receive content and produce work in both ASL and English.

Bilingual Best Practices

Every teacher receives training in bilingual best practices. Texts include Colin Baker's *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* and Freeman and Freeman's *ESL/EFL Teaching*. Following the model first established by CAEBER in ASL/English Bilingual Professional Development, teachers meet in groups, read research, and participate in follow-up activities and reflections during a two-year, weekly professional development program. All faculty members (in their second year of teaching and beyond) have completed or are in the process of completing this training. By requiring all CSD teachers to participate in this professional development, we have a common understanding and a shared educational

language that informs and strengthens our discussions about students, instructional practices, and curriculum development.

Assessment

In addition to developing curricula and instructing students, our teachers serve on an ASL Assessment Committee to develop appropriate assessments to measure student proficiency in ASL. These assessments, in addition to our English proficiency tests, measure growth in proficiency and guide instruction. Students who need additional development in ASL are provided with support such as one-to-one pull-out services or immersion courses. All students take an ASL class as a core subject to build their language proficiency and higher-order thinking skills. Lessons are developed that address all parts of the ASL assessment rubric.

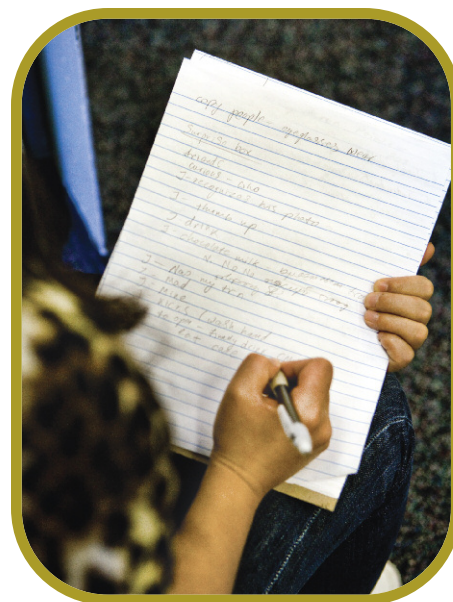
Expected School-wide Learning Results

Last spring a group of community members, parents, students, and staff members was called upon to participate in a two-day summit with the purpose of revising and expanding our Expected School-wide Learning Results.

Participants were carefully chosen to represent the diversity reflected in our school community, and they included stakeholders from our Community Advisory Council; our Association of Parents, teachers, and counselors; representatives from local colleges and universities; and other advocacy and activist groups.

Members of the CSD community are very mindful of our membership in the Deaf community. Our students and staff learn about shared experiences, language, culture, and society—concepts emphasized by Paddy Ladd (2003) in *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*. As a reflection of working in a collective community, an interactive, collaborative process was used as participants developed a list of desired outcomes for our students. After the summit, these Expected School-wide Learning Results were reviewed by staff members and parents, and both stakeholder groups were given the opportunity to provide feedback. The resulting statements reflect the hopes and values of the CSD community for our graduates:

- Students will have healthy Deaf identities through shared experiences, language, culture, history, and society.



- Students will be competent bilinguals in ASL and English.
- Students will be prepared to achieve their academic, career, and personal goals.
- Students will demonstrate good character and lead healthy lifestyles.
- Students will be competent and responsible users of technology.
- Students will be lifelong learners with critical thinking skills.
- Students will contribute to their communities as advocates for human rights and social justice.

Our core values and status as a bilingual school are clearly reflected in the vision of our stakeholders. These values have guided and will continue to lead our mission of educating our deaf students.

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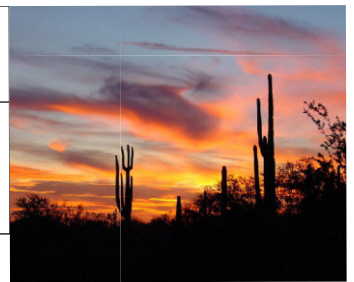
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Resource

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American Society for Deaf Children

The American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC) is a national, independent, nonprofit parent organization that supports and educates families of deaf and hard of hearing children and advocates for high quality programs and services.



23rd Biennial ASDC Conference June 26–29, 2013

The ASDC Biennial Conference provides families with information and fun! Daytime workshops captivate parents while children participate in educational and recreational activities. Evening events bring families together, providing the opportunity to form new friendships and peer support.

Mark your calendars now for the 2013 conference hosted by the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind in Tucson.

For more information, contact conference chair Kelly Birmingham at (520) 770-3725 (Voice) or e-mail Kelly.Birmingham@asdb.az.gov.



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