

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP 2002

**PROMOTING AND INVESTIGATING STRATEGIES TO
FURTHER DEVELOP THE LITERACY SKILLS OF DEAF
STUDENTS WITHIN A BILINGUAL (AUSLAN – AUSTRALIAN
SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH) P-12 EDUCATIONAL SETTING**

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Contents

	Page
1. Acknowledgements	3
2. Executive Summary, including Findings and Recommendations	4
3. Program of Visits	7
4. Program Overview, including Findings and Recommendations	10

Acknowledgements

The success of my 2002 Churchill Fellowship program visiting Sweden, Denmark and United States of America, to promote and investigate strategies to further develop the literacy skills of deaf students within a bilingual (Auslan – Australian Sign Language/English) P-12 educational setting, was made possible by:

- financial assistance provided by Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and the enthusiasm and encouragement of my fellow Churchill Fellowship recipients, both past and present
- support of staff and students at my school, Victorian College for the Deaf, Melbourne
- willingness of colleagues in the Deaf Field in Sweden, Denmark and United States of America to share ideas, information, strategies, concerns and resources
- encouragement of friends and extended family
- unconditional love and support of my family who encourage me to believe in myself and to follow my dreams, wherever they might take me

2. Executive Summary

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Fellowship Objective:

To promote and investigate strategies to further develop the literacy skills of deaf students within a bilingual (Auslan – Australian Sign Language/English) P-12 educational setting

Fellowship Highlights:

1. Travelling to Sweden, Denmark and United States of America to visit
 - Schools for the Deaf
 - Programs and Organisations providing resources and educational opportunities for Deaf students
2. Attending DeafWay II International Conference, Washington DC, USA

Findings:

Conference workshops I attended, and the schools that I visited in Sweden, Denmark and the eastern states of America continue to hail bilingual education for deaf students within the rich language environments of Schools for the Deaf as best and most effective practice. The acceptance of Sign Language as a language in its own right was an important initial step and foundational building stone, and improvement in student achievement was a direct consequence as schools implemented bilingual programs. However, the bilingual journey is not complete and there is still a road to be travelled to continue to raise the level of deaf students' literacy skills. Now the aim is to build on this ground-work and improve bilingual programs so that greater student prowess, particularly in reading and writing literacy skill development is achieved.

Recommendations:

Successful and progressive bilingual programs highlight the importance that needs to be placed on

- developing visual resources to support the bilingual programs – just as written English materials support and develop English literacy proficiency, so the development of visual resources support and develop Sign Language literacy and proficiency.
- offering intensive Sign Language training from the time the diagnosis of deafness is made for parents, siblings and extended family members.

Recommendations cont:

- continuing and extending this training to include other family members and friends, and implementing support programs for families including siblings and grandparents.
- ensuring deaf children have access to a first language from as early an age as possible through immersion in a visual sign language environment, as cognitive, social and emotional growth for all children is dependent on first language acquisition.
- developing language skills in the first language, that being sign language, that empower the child with communication skills, social skills, critical thinking skills and world knowledge.
- valuing sign language story-telling to extend and enhance deaf students access to and knowledge of the world around them and as such to develop a rich language and concepts base to foster ongoing educational learning.
- training teachers of the deaf, both hearing and deaf, to be proficient users of sign language and training them to understand the linguistic structure of sign language so that they can be more effective in their use of and teaching of the language.
- training teachers of the deaf in English as a Second Language methodology so that they can be more effective in their teaching of the strategies to develop reading and writing skills in a second language.
- employing deaf teachers and deaf language assistants as role models for students, with the deaf language assistants being trained for their specific role in nurturing and developing the sign language skills of the students, and providing the cultural insights into the Deaf community.
- keeping the two languages separate so that they provide a pure and clear language model both in the sign language and the spoken language thus students understand they are two different languages with different structures and learn to value both languages.
- teaching students about the structure of the sign language to develop their linguistic understandings, such as through handshape games from an early age, through to formal language studies with older students.
- providing sufficient numbers of deaf role models, both adults and peers to promote positive self-esteem, self-confidence and a positive Identity.
- continuing research into sign language, the development of Sign Language Curriculum, and into investigating strategies to develop best and most effective practice for bilingual education for deaf students.

Information Dissemination:

Workshop presentations to

- Victorian College for the Deaf,
Monday 12th August 2002, 3.45pm-4.30pm
- Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf Annual Conference
- Victorian Branch
Friday 16th August 200
Workshop A - 1.45pm-2.45pm
Workshop B – 2.55pm-3.55pm

Information Dissemination cont:

Workshop abstract submitted for consideration to

- 22nd Australian and New Zealand Conference for Educators of the Deaf to be held 15th-18th January 2003, Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle, Western Australia

Publications:

- Distribution of Churchill Report to

Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Churchill House 30 Balmain Crescent Acton ACT 2601	Department of Education and Training Southern Metropolitan Region Regional Director – Jan Lake PO Box 5 Dandenong 3175
Department of Education and Training Student Well Being Branch Assistant General Manager Sue Tate GPO Box 4367 Melbourne 3001	Department of Education and Training Southern Metropolitan Region Regional Principal Consultant Denise Ramus PO Box 5 Dandenong 3175
Victorian College for the Deaf Principal – Dr M Therese Pierce 597 St Kilda Rd Melbourne 3004	Victorian College for the Deaf Assistant Principal – Kay Stevens 597 St Kilda Rd Melbourne 3004
Committee of Principals of Schools and Heads of Services for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students President – Sue IZARD Furlong Park School and Pre-school for Deaf children Cnr Furlong Rd and Cooke Ave North Sunshine 3020	Deafness Studies Unit University of Melbourne Coordinator Professor Field Rickards University of Melbourne 3010
LaTrobe University Centre for Cultural Studies School of Education Bundoora 3083	VSDC Inc CEO – Damien Lacey PO Box 6466 Melbourne 3004

- Distribution of Workshop paper from presentations 12/8/02, 16/8/02 to fellow Teachers of the Deaf and interested persons

3. Program of visits

Schools for the Deaf, and Conferences, Programs and Organisations providing resources and educational opportunities for Deaf students:

1. Sweden

7th May – 17th May

- Manillaskolan, Stockholm
Primary and Secondary School programs for 7-16 year olds
Contact: Birgitta Sandberg



Manillaskolan, Stockholm

- Birgittaskolan, Orebro
Primary and Secondary School programs for 7-16 year olds
Contact: Karin Angerby
- Katturgen, Orebro
Nursery School programs for 2-6 year olds
Contact: Catrin Andersson
- Risbergskolan, Orebro
Upper Secondary programs for 17-21 year olds
Contact: Birgitta Korsback
- SIT, Orebro
Institute for technical support resources and educational materials
Contact: Goran Westholm
- Ostervangsskolan, Lund
Primary and Secondary School programs for 7-16 year olds
Contact: Lisbeth Henning



Program of visits to

Ostervangsskolan, Lund

2. Denmark

18th May – 25th May

- Nyborgskolen, Nyborg
Upper Secondary programs for 16-20 year olds
Contact: Keld Hansen
- Sonder Parkskolen, Ringsted
Primary and Secondary School programs for 6-16 year olds
Contact: Jette Kjeldsen
- KC, Copenhagen
Centre for Sign Language and Sign Language Supported Communication
Contact: Tove Ravn
- Doveskolen pa Kastelsvej, Copenhagen
Primary and Secondary School programs for 6-16 year olds
Contact: Jo Lundquist

3. United States of America

25th May – 18th July

- Lexington School for the Deaf, New York, New York
Educational programs from birth to 21 years
Contact: Adrienne Robins
- Scranton State School for the Deaf, Scranton, Pennsylvania
Educational programs from birth to 21 years
Contact: Gail O'Rourke
- The Learning Center, Framingham, Massachusetts
Educational programs from birth to 21 years
Contact: Tricia Ford
- American School for the Deaf, Hartford, Connecticut
Educational programs from birth to 21 years
Contact: Fern Reisinger



American School for the Deaf, Hartford,

- Maryland School for the Deaf – Frederick, Maryland
Educational programs from birth to 21 years

Contact: Melinda Padden

Program of visits cont:

- Gallaudet University, Washington DC
Undergraduate and Graduate Programs for Deaf students
Some Graduate Programs for Hearing students
Contact: Visitors Center



Gallaudet University, Washington DC

- Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center,
Gallaudet University, Washington DC:
Kendall Demonstration School for the Deaf,
Model Secondary School for the Deaf,
Educational programs from birth to 21 years
Contact: Patricia Dabney

Additional visits

- Willie Ross School for the Deaf, Longmeadow, Massachusetts
- Savannah Speech and Hearing Center, Savannah, Georgia
- SC School for the Deaf and Blind, Community Resources Center,
Charleston, South Carolina

International Conference and Arts Festival

- DeafWay II, Washington DC



4. Program Overview, including Findings and Recommendations

My workplace, Victorian College for the Deaf (VCD) Melbourne, Australia, is Australia's oldest School for the Deaf, with a wealth of experience in deaf education.

The school aims

To promote a bilingual approach to teaching and learning using Auslan (Australian Sign Language) as the visual language and English as the language for reading and writing.

As a teacher at VCD since 1976, I have been continually challenged to extend my teaching skills and to expand my understandings of educational pedagogy through professional development. The role of VCD Literacy Coordinator has given me the opportunity to focus specifically on the development of students' literacy skills in both English and Auslan, and the Churchill Fellowship gave me the opportunity to further explore bilingual methodology in countries known for their progressive approach in implementing bilingual programs.

With the Churchill Fellowship sponsoring me for a seven-week program altogether, it gave me the opportunity to fulfil a dream I had been nurturing for two years – to attend the DeafWay II International Conference, 8th-13th July, 2002, in Washington DC, as well as to visit numerous Schools for the Deaf, and Program and Resource Organisations.

My Fellowship objective was

to promote and investigate strategies to further develop the literacy skills of deaf students within a bilingual P-12 educational setting.

In order to achieve this objective, whilst attending DeafWay II I presented a paper outlining bilingual practice used to develop student literacy skills at Victorian College for the Deaf, and I chose to visit schools and programs for the deaf in Sweden, Denmark and the east coast of America, to gain first hand experience of their successful bilingual educational programs. I also distributed a copy of my paper to each of these schools and programs.

The complicating factor in organising my travelling program was that with DeafWay II being held in the middle of the northern hemisphere summer vacation period, my visits to schools had to be in the last weeks of their academic year. Despite this difficult timeframe, I was warmly welcomed and accommodated at all schools and organisations, and though some schools could only offer a tour of the school, others were able to offer me time with their Curriculum or Bilingual Coordinators in addition to classroom visits, and all were keen to share information and to show particular resources that enhanced their programs.

My school visits began in Sweden where in 1981 a law was passed recognising Swedish Sign Language as a language in its own right, and thus the first language of the deaf community. The goal of bilingual education for all deaf children was established and in 1983 a National Curriculum including syllabuses for Sign Language, Swedish and English was established and then updated in 1994. Curriculum in Schools for the Deaf has been aligned with the curriculum of regular schools, with Swedish Sign Language and the written and read forms of Swedish forming the bilingual partnership. Today

Swedish Schools for the Deaf are viewed in a positive light, holding a highly respected and valued place in the education field. For deaf children their first language is recognised as Swedish Sign Language and they attend Schools for the Deaf. Educational resources are then concentrated to these few Schools for the Deaf where, importantly, sufficient numbers of students come together in these educationally rich sign language environments. As bilingual programs need a strong language community to enable them to thrive having large numbers of students is critically important.

The Government support for these schools is of an extremely high standard and they are well resourced with technology, and with support staff skilled in various subject areas. Government support is also available for parents and families to attend sign language classes and as parents have the accepted right to send their child to a School for the Deaf, residential accommodation is also provided for those students who live a distance from the school.

Sweden offers 10 years of compulsory schooling for deaf students – 9 years for hearing students. Parents are involved in developing the Individual Educational Plans for their children, and the parent/school partnership is encouraged so that students realise education is important and valued in both the home and the school environments. English is introduced as a language between Grades 1 and 4, depending on the school, and other languages such as German, French and Spanish may be studied. Swedish Sign Language itself is also studied. Students who can benefit from auditory and speech development are able to access that support as well.

At the completion of their compulsory schooling deaf students then attend upper secondary school at Risbergskolan in Orebro. This school provides an additional four years of training (three years for hearing students) offering the strands of trade, agriculture, caring professions (nursing, childcare) and preparation for university.

In Denmark, a move away from mainstream programs for deaf students began in 1982 with the setting up at the request of parents, of a trial bilingual educational program at Kastelsvej, the Copenhagen School for the Deaf. This trial program followed the students through until 1992. Due to the success of this program, the bilingual educational approach was officially recommended from 1991, with Danish Sign Language as the language of instruction and also as a subject for study so that students develop an awareness and knowledge of their own language, and learn to value it. The first book on the grammar of Danish Sign Language was published in 1981 and updated in 1991.

In addition to the schools for the deaf, Denmark established some twin school models where a school for deaf children and a school for hearing children operate on the same campus, in the same buildings and share resources. Though the intention with this model was that the schools would have the opportunity to interact and all students would have the benefit of mixing with hearing and deaf students and staff, one such deaf school is now working quite independently from its twin hearing school and this has proved to be a more successful option.

Students attend 10 years of compulsory schooling, (9 for hearing students) and sign language is treated with a similar positive attitude as is held in Sweden. English is introduced around the Grade 4 level. As with Sweden, students who can benefit from auditory and speech development are able to access that support as well. At the

completion of their compulsory schooling, Danish deaf students then attend upper secondary school at Nyborgskolen, in Nyborg. This school provides an additional four years of training (three years for hearing students) with Nyborgskolen offering training for three streams, Vocational, Academic and Special Needs.

In America, I concentrated on visiting schools in the north eastern states only, because of their proximity to Washington DC. These schools follow a long and proud tradition of providing quality educational programs for deaf students. They offer the same educational curriculum as is followed by regular schools in their states, and it is impressive to note the number of support staff and support services available on campus to the school community from Technology support to Psychology, Counselling, Parent Education, Audiology, Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Vocational Guidance, and Medical Services. The availability of additional support from ASL (American Sign Language) Linguists and ASL Researchers is also of great benefit to the school community.

All the schools promote the acquisition and development of the two languages, American Sign Language (ASL) and English for reading and writing, through linguistically rich environments. As with Sweden and Denmark, students who can benefit from auditory and speech development are able to access that support as well. With parental involvement in all aspects of their child's education considered vital for developing appropriate challenging and engaging programs, support is also given to enhance and develop parents' ASL learning and proficiency. Deaf teachers and deaf teacher assistants and support staff also play a vital role in enhancing the bilingual environment as ASL language models and deaf role models and to provide access to Deaf culture.

DeafWay II International Conference and Arts Festival brought together 9652 registrants from all over the world, and gave those participants – deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind and hearing – the opportunity to share and celebrate the experiences of deaf people through a rich variety of forums:

The Conference Strands -

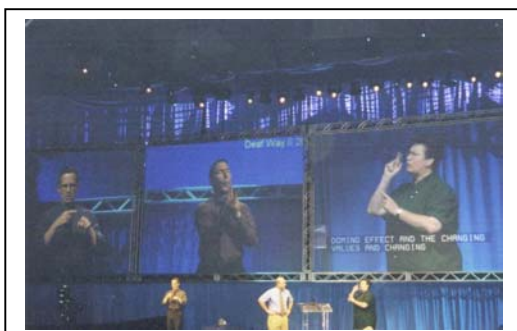
- Advocacy and Community Development
- Economics
- Education
- Family
- Health/Mental Health
- History
- Language and Culture
- Literature
- Recreation, Leisure and sports
- Sign Language and Interpretation
- Technology
- Youth

Arts Festival Strands -

- Literary Arts
- Performing Arts (including Story-telling)
- Visual Arts (including Film and Video Festival)

It was indeed a unique and inspiring feeling to arrive in the heart of Washington DC and find it to be a haven for deaf people. On every street corner, on the subway, in shopping complexes and at famous tourist attractions, the trademark of the deaf world was visible – hands, faces and bodies involved in animated conversations. The atmosphere for the week was charged with excitement and incredible friendliness abounded as people from different countries and cultures came together and found common levels of communication through a rich variety of Sign Languages, mime and gesture.

The official languages of the conference were American Sign Language (ASL), International Sign Language (ISL) and spoken English. In addition to ASL and ISL, other countries also provided their own sign language interpreters so, particularly at the plenary sessions there could have been another 40 or more sign languages operating. Real-time captioning was also a feature of every presentation.



Sign Languages depicted on screens: International (ISL), American (ASL) and British (BSL), and Real-time Captioning



In addition to ISL, ASL and BSL, many other Sign Languages were used throughout the Conference Hall

The Conference Strands offered an abundance of topics that typically caused decision-making difficulties and hours were spent perusing the schedule of presentations and establishing personal timetables of workshops to attend. With most presentations being of only 45 minutes duration, they certainly whet ones appetite to follow-up and investigate topics further.



Presenting my paper with the assistance of ASL and ISL Interpreters and Real-time captioning.

The Arts Festival was a gourmet feast celebrating the talents of deaf artists and performers with exhibitions and performances at Gallaudet University and other major venues around the city of Washington DC. Australia was represented in the Performing

Arts forum by Asphyxia with Blood Makes Noise, and Robert Farmer, whose performance at the Opening Ceremony really stole the show and captivated the entire audience to such a point that it ensured people were queuing early to attend his Story-telling performances throughout the week.

The overall DeafWay II experience was invaluable and certainly most memorable, and achieved its goal of building a stronger, global community, united in respect, understanding and knowledge, prepared to build on the best of the past in establishing the hope of a great future.

Conference workshops I attended, and the schools that I visited in Sweden, Denmark and the eastern states of America continue to hail bilingual education for deaf students within the rich language environments of Schools for the Deaf as best and most effective practice. The acceptance of Sign Language as a language in its own right was an important initial step and foundational building stone, and improvement in student achievement was a direct consequence as schools implemented bilingual programs. However, the bilingual journey is not complete and there is still a road to be travelled to continue to raise the level of deaf students' literacy skills. Now the aim is to build on this ground-work and improve bilingual programs so that greater student prowess, particularly in reading and writing literacy skill development is achieved.

In summary, successful and progressive bilingual programs highlight the importance that needs to be placed on

- developing visual resources to support the bilingual programs – just as written English materials support and develop English literacy proficiency, so the development of visual resources support and develop Sign Language literacy and proficiency.
- offering intensive Sign Language training from the time the diagnosis of deafness is made for parents, siblings and extended family members.
- continuing and extending this training to include other family members and friends, and implementing support programs for families including siblings and grandparents.
- ensuring deaf children have access to a first language from as early an age as possible through immersion in a visual sign language environment, as cognitive, social and emotional growth for all children is dependent on first language acquisition.
- developing language skills in the first language, that being sign language, that empower the child with communication skills, social skills, critical thinking skills and world knowledge.
- valuing sign language story-telling to extend and enhance deaf students access to and knowledge of the world around them and as such to develop a rich language and concepts base to foster ongoing educational learning.
- training teachers of the deaf, both hearing and deaf, to be proficient users of sign language and training them to understand the linguistic structure of sign language so that they can be more effective in their use of and teaching of the language.
- training teachers of the deaf in English as a Second Language methodology so that they can be more effective in their teaching of the strategies to develop reading and writing skills in a second language.

- employing deaf teachers and deaf language assistants as role models for students, with the deaf language assistants being trained for their specific role in nurturing and developing the sign language skills of the students, and providing the cultural insights into the Deaf community.
- keeping the two languages separate so that they provide a pure and clear language model both in the sign language and the spoken language thus students understand they are two different languages with different structures and learn to value both languages.
- teaching students about the structure of the sign language to develop their linguistic understandings, such as through handshape games from an early age, through to formal language studies with older students.
- providing sufficient numbers of deaf role models, both adults and peers to promote positive self-esteem, self-confidence and a positive Identity.
- continuing research into sign language, the development of Sign Language Curriculum, and into investigating strategies to develop best and most effective practice for bilingual education for deaf students.

Additional challenging points common to bilingual settings in Sweden, Denmark and America were:

- Catering for students with Cochlea Implants and convincing parents that giving CI students a visual language will only benefit them rather than distract from their ability to learn the spoken language.
- Catering for students from other cultures whose families have recently migrated who may or may not have an established first language in their mother tongue or native sign language.

My Churchill Fellowship certainly was an
Enlightening, Empowering, Enhancing
learning experience and I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it, from start to finish.
It was memorable and motivating.

Most of us have a dream, but I was fortunate enough
to have the opportunity to live my dream.