

Empowering the Deaf  
Community  
~ into the Kingdom ~

Sign Language in the  
Christian  
School Experience

The background of the slide is a blurred image of many hands reaching upwards, creating a sense of collective effort or aspiration. The hands are in various shades of blue and white, and the overall image is out of focus.

Your expectations?

# My Expectations:

Transform your understanding of persons with a hearing loss.

Transform your thinking as it relates to sign language in the school.

Give you steps on empowering the deaf community so they too can participate in the kingdom.

# Categories of persons with hearing loss

## Latened deaf persons

- ▶ Acquired English as a native language.
- ▶ Interact with other hearing persons who primarily use English.
- ▶ Use assistive devices for communication access.
- ▶ May feel isolated from the hearing world due to limited communication access.

# Categories of persons with

## Hard of hearing persons (flexibility)

- ▶ May have English as a native language.
- ▶ May depend on assistive devices for speech comprehension or other sounds.
- ▶ May use a form of sign language that represents English manually.
- ▶ May speak for themselves depending on the situation or use an interpreter.
- ▶ May socially interact with both hearing and deaf individuals.
- ▶ May feel comfortable functioning in the hearing world or may feel isolated.
- ▶ May choose to become a member of the deaf

# Categories of persons with hearing loss

## Deaf persons (flexibility)

- ▶ Acquired American Sign Language (ASL) as a native language.
- ▶ May not be able to speak or have limited speech abilities.
- ▶ Interact primarily with other deaf people who use ASL or are proficient signers.
- ▶ Consider English their second language.
- ▶ May use assistive devices for basic sound access.
- ▶ Choose to be called DEAF

## Presuppositions:

- ▶ Deafness is the only disability that results in a legitimate language.
- ▶ These individuals are a linguistic minority.
- ▶ These individuals belong to a distinct cultural community.
- ▶ Deaf is the appropriate term. [not hearing-impaired]
- ▶ These individuals are a part of an oppressed minority.
- ▶ Deaf people do not consider themselves disabled but to counter the oppression in

Paternalistic Message:

## **Secular and the Church:**

Deaf individuals are dependents and have limited capabilities and can not contribute to society.

### **Example:**

Most employment positions place deaf people in non-communicative roles.

Roles in the church are limited to that of recipient. Deaf people are not encouraged or trained to realize their spiritual gifts of teaching, leadership roles in ministry committees, missionaries. Imagine a deaf pastor of a hearing church!

Paternalistic Message:

## **Secular and the Church:**

Deafness is a medical condition that results in a less than satisfactory existence.

### **Example:**

Current legal case: Lee Larsen, a deaf mother of two deaf children is being sued by Wyoming's state social service agency requiring her to make both boys receive cochlear implants.

Congregation members assume that deaf people want prayers for healing, that is hearing ability, and during altar calls will come up and pray that a deaf person can his/her hearing back.

Paternalistic Message:

**Secular and the Church:**

The provision of accessible communication is not a value, therefore, the deaf person is not valued.

**Example:**

Businesses do not want to pay for interpreters. My colleague's uncle was recently hospitalized because of injuries sustained when a tractor ran over him. The hospital would not provide an interpreter during his medical care.

Churches refuse to pay for interpreting services. Other situations are that churches use non-professional, untrained individuals to "sign" during a worship service.

## God's View:

### Ephesians 4:1

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

### Ephesians 4:11

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of

God's View:

Ephesians 2:19

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household....”

## How to empower the deaf community?

Start the renewing of your mind and then re-examine your curriculum.

1. Relocate or re-examine deafness beyond the lesson on the senses.
2. Invite deaf people affiliated with the culture to come speak to your students (with a qualified interpreter).
3. Expose students to successful role models of deaf people.
4. Focus on the communication aspect of ASL rather than the aesthetics.
5. Value attitudes that encourage accessibility (rather than burden/minimum requirements)

Start the renewing of your mind and then re-examine your curriculum.

1. Relocate or re-examine deafness beyond the lesson on the senses. Include it in such topics cultures, minorities, and languages.

Resources:

**For Hearing People Only** by Matthew Moore and Linda Levitan

Introduction to some of the more common questions about deafness and deaf people. Topics: What is ASL? Is there one sign language for all countries? Why don't some deaf people trust hearing people?

**A Place of Their Own** (200 pgs) by John Vickrey Van Cleve and Barry Crouch

A summary of the deaf community and their history in

Resources:

***Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*** by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries

Small book and an easy read. Great introduction to an unknown world.

2. Invite deaf people affiliated with the culture to come speak to your students (with a qualified interpreter).

Resource: Locate your closest sign language interpreting agency. Most of these agencies know the members of the deaf community and would have a good idea of a good fit for this type of situation.

3. Expose students to successful role models of deaf people.

Resources:

**Movers and Shakers** by Cathryn Carroll

Twenty-six tales of deaf people whose lives were met by challenges that they overcame.

4. Focus on the communication aspect of ASL rather than the aesthetics.

Resources:

**Sign Language and the Deaf Community: Essays in honor of William Stokoe**, edited by Charlotte Baker and Robbin Battison. General introduction to the structure of ASL, uses of sign language in society and sign language in other countries.

**Academic Acceptance of American Sign Language** by Sherman Wilcox, Ph. D  
(Teacher resource) A monograph related to legitimizing ASL.

5. Value attitudes that encourage accessibility (rather than burden/minimum requirements).

Resource: (controversial)

- Provide professional interpreting services when needed.
- **Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle, & Rhetoric** by Katherine A. Jankowski. A meticulous study, using traditional methods of study for social movements, examines rhetorical foundation that motivated Deaf people to work for social change.
- **The Mask of Benevolence** by Harlan Lane deals with oppression.
- **A Journey into the Deaf-World** by H. Lane, R.



Questions??



**Thank you for your  
time!**

**Contact information:**

**Angela Myers  
574.257.2577  
myersa@bethelcollege  
.edu**