



Co-funded by
the European Union



Dear colleagues,

On the first day of our Distance Education Activity, we will give you information about the following topics.

- What is the deaf culture?
- Common Misconceptions About Sign Language
- Pointing by Hands / Eye Contact / Naming the Deaf

What is the deaf culture?

Deaf Culture is the heart of the Deaf community everywhere in the world. Language and culture are inseparable. They are intertwined and passed down through generations of Deaf people. The Deaf community is not based on geographic proximity like Chinatown or the Italian District for example. The Deaf community is comprised of culturally Deaf people in the core of the community who use a sign language (e.g. American Sign Language or Langue des Signes Quebecois) and appreciate their heritage, history, literature, and culture. The Deaf community is also comprised of other individuals who use the language and have an attitude that makes them an accepted part of the community though they may not be in the core of the community. It exists because of the need to get together, the need to relax and enjoy everything while being together. Deaf culture exists because Deaf people who are educated at residential Deaf schools develop their own Deaf network once they graduate, to keep in touch with everyone. Most of them go on to take on leadership positions in the Deaf community, organize Deaf sports, community events, etc. and become the core of the Deaf community. They ensure that their language and heritage are passed to other peers and to the next generation. They also form links with parents and siblings of Deaf children to strengthen and enlarge the community circle for Deaf children.

Language and culture are interrelated. Sign language (1) is central to any Deaf person, child or adult for their intellectual, social, linguistic and emotional growth but to truly internalize the language, they must have the culture that is embedded in the language. Every linguistic and cultural group has its own way of seeing and expressing how they see and interpret the world and interact in it.

Culture consists of language, values, traditions, norms and identity (Padden, 1980). Deaf culture meets all five sociological criteria for defining a culture. Language refers to the native visual cultural language of Deaf people, with its own syntax (grammar or form), semantics (vocabulary or content) and pragmatics (social rules of use). It is highly valued by the Deaf community because it's visually accessible. Values in the Deaf community include the



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



**UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA**



Co-funded by
the European Union



importance of clear communication for all both in terms of expression and comprehension. Deaf residential schools and Deaf clubs are important because of the natural social interaction they offer. Preserving American Sign Language (ASL) literature, heritage, Deaf literature and art are other examples of what we value. (ASL and LSQ [Langue Des Signes Quebecois] are both valued by Deaf Canadians). Only until recently has there been research about Deaf Art (2). In 1989 a group of American Deaf artists created the term De'VIA meaning 'art with a Deaf view'. It is to entertain, share and educate in ways that express Deaf experience through their eyes. If we study Deaf art, we would notice emphasis on the hands and face, contrasting textures and strong intense colours (Small, 2000). Traditions include the stories kept alive through Deaf generations, Deaf experiences and expected participation in Deaf cultural events. Norms refer to rules of behaviour in the deaf community. All cultures have their own set of behaviours that are deemed acceptable. For Deaf people, it includes getting someone's attention appropriately, using direct eye contact and correct use of shoulder tapping. Norms of behavior often cause cross-cultural conflicts between Deaf and hearing people when the individuals are unaware of how their norms may be affecting their interactions and perceptions of each other's intents. Identity is one of the key components of the whole person. Accepting that one is Deaf and is proud of his/her culture and heritage and a contributing member of that society is key to being a member of the cultural group.

Communication is not a barrier for Deaf people when interacting in the Deaf community because they do not have to depend on an interpreter. This permits great opportunities for social skills, leadership and self-worth to flourish. It is all about Deaf children mingling together, playing sports and studying and learning together. When interacting in the Deaf community where Deaf culture is the norm, Deaf people are truly in an inclusive environment. At times people believe they can foster culture if they place Deaf children in a mainstream setting by including several Deaf children or periodically taking them to Deaf events like Mayfest (the annual gathering of Deaf people in Ontario). While it is good to make these experiences part of the child's life it is not possible to truly immerse the child in Deaf culture if one is mainstreamed. This is because Deaf culture is not taught either explicitly or implicitly through periodic experiences. Deaf culture is lived on a daily basis – like breathing.

Deaf culture exists in residential Deaf schools. Many view it as THE vehicle for community development. Deaf children in residential schools are naturally enculturated. This is not to say that all children must live in the dorm, but rather they must have access to the Deaf environment it provides e.g. after school activities. There may be hearing people who do not know or follow the customs, traditions and norms of the Deaf community. There may be Deaf or hard of hearing people who were not previously in a situation to be enculturated –



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA



Co-funded by
the European Union



those who have not experienced a Deaf environment. They may use hearing aids, they may have cochlear implants, they may choose to speak in certain situations, they may be able and choose to respond to hearing people who speak to them, etc. In the residential schools people establish “shared meanings”. When trying to communicate from different cultural perspectives, shared meanings can be difficult to achieve. So, in some ways, it might be safer to stay within one’s own known cultural boundaries – that is, it might be easier and feel safer NOT to assimilate or be mainstreamed (3).

Deaf students who are mainstreamed miss out on the feeling of belonging that individuals from the Deaf culture associate with their residential schools and their experience is very different from those who attend residential school. Mainstreamed students often are singled out in many respects. Although they have access to interpreters, notetakers and other special assistive devices, they still may be loners, especially in a mainstream environment where there are few other students with hearing losses (Gilliam and Easterbrooks, 1997).

Some of them may feel they are patronized by those who assume they have a negative experience or are not really part of Deaf Culture. Lack of proper supports in the classroom and the opportunity to interact with other Deaf children and adults can result in extreme isolation and segregation of the Deaf child. People from very different backgrounds are able to find common ground (4). That is what being Deaf means. Some places do not have residential schools. Without the exposure of the Deaf community, culture will not exist.

The question most often asked is where mainstreamed students who are now adults fit in Deaf Culture? While residential schools are at the root of the Deaf community, Deaf people who were mainstreamed can still be part of the Deaf community and share in its culture. This is not to say that the transition from a mainstreamed upbringing to an adult life in the Deaf community is always easy. Many people who were mainstreamed say that they feel caught between the hearing and Deaf worlds while fully belonging to neither. It is important for Deaf adults from diverse backgrounds to recognize and accept their differences, while maintaining respect for Deaf language and culture. This way the Deaf community can be a welcoming place for many people, where there is room for growth and identity development.

Residential Deaf schools are at the root of the Deaf community. They are at the root of maintaining and expanding cultural development when Deaf students finish school. Mainstreamed adults can enjoy the same opportunity. They are part of the Deaf community and so share in its culture.



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA



Co-funded by
the European Union



Deaf Culture more than makes up the difference, for lack of the Deaf school in adult life. It is just a way of life, an independent life, including the ability to make decisions, to be free to go where we want to go, free to visit friends who share common ground. It is really a very comfortable life. It is not a lonely or isolated life. When active in the Deaf community, we become contributing members of both Deaf and hearing society. It makes life full and meaningful.

From our heart, this is what Deaf Culture is. It needs to be taken care of, so it can take care of us all!

1. Sign Language refers to the language that the Deaf community uses, e.g. Deaf people in Japan would use Japanese Sign Language; other sign languages include Swedish Sign Language, Langue des Signes Quebecois, etc.)
2. Email correspondence, Angela Stratiy, June 2002
3. Interview with Dr. Richard Dart, Milton, Ontario – To Be Enculturated or Not to Be Enculturated, September 2001
4. Correspondence with Kristin Snoddon, Toronto, Ontario – Mainstreaming can result in the extreme isolation and segregation of the Deaf child, February 11, 2002

References:

- Carbin (1996), Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse and Enduring Culture, McGraw Hill Ryerson Ltd, Ontario.
- Carroll and Mather (1997), Movers & Shakers: Deaf People Who Changed the World, DawnSign Press, California.
- Cripps (2000), Quiet Journey: Understanding the Rights of Deaf Children, Ginger Press, Ontario.
- Small, (2000). Freckles and Popper: A Guide for Parents and Teachers to Accompany the American Sign Language and English Literature Videotape Series, CCSD, Ontario.
- Gilliam and Easterbrooks (1997), Educating Children Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Residential Life, ASL and Deaf Culture, ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Virginia.
- Gibson, Small and Mason (1997), Encyclopedia of Language and Education in Cummins and Carsons (eds), Volume 5, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands.
- Ladd Paddy (1990), Second Stage in the Development of that process, paper presentation at the British Deaf Association's Centenary Congress, A Deaf American Monograph.
- Lane (1992), The Mask of Benevolence, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York.



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA



Co-funded by
the European Union



- Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan (1996), Journey Into the Deaf World, Dawn Sign Press, CA
- Padden and Humphries (1988), Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture, Harvard University Press, MA
- Pizzacalla and Cripps (1995), Conflict Resolution Program for the Culturally Deaf , Conflict Resolution Symposium: 1995, The Mediation Centre at Carleton University, Ontario.
- Roots (1999), The Politics of Visual Language, Carleton University Press, Ontario.
- Van Cleve and Crouch (1989), A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America, Gallaudet University Press, Washington D.C.
- Van Cleve, John Vickrey (1993), Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship, Gallaudet University Press, Washington D.C.

Common Misconceptions About Sign Language

1. Sign languages are the same all over the world.

This is wrong! Each country has a unique sign language with its own vocabulary and grammar. It is not so easy for the deaf people from different countries to understand one other's sign languages. If a hearer learns sign language in a specific country, they cannot easily understand the sign language in another country and they must learn the other sign language of that country as well. Even within a country, sign language can vary from region to region (Dikyuva & Zeshan 2008).

2. Sign language is not a complete and fully operational language. It's just a combination of pantomime or gestures, and it has no idiosyncratic grammar.

This is also wrong! Sign languages are complete languages. Anything expressed in the spoken language can also be expressed in sign language. You can talk about abstract thoughts, the past, what might happen when you do something, and you can even come up with words for new things you want to talk about. It is true that Turkish Sign Language does not have a word for everything, but this is true for every language, voice or sign as well. No language has a word for everything that can be thought. What matters is that a language can generate or derive new words for things when necessary. Sign languages can do this just as vocal languages can. In addition, just as there are no words for some Turkish expressions in



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA



Co-funded by
the European Union



Turkish Sign Language, some Turkish Sign Language signs do not have words in Turkish either. In both cases, the meaning of the word is expressed in a sentence, or people create a new word for the general concept.

Apart from that, it is not true that sign languages have no set of grammar rules. All sign languages have detailed and difficult grammar and one of the objectives of this course is that you learn Turkish Sign Language grammar. Hand gestures, head movement, and facial expressions used by the hearing people are also used in Sign Language. However they are used in a very different way and are only a very small part of a sign language. Sign language is much more than a combination of pantomime and gestures. There are many publications explaining the grammatical structure of Turkish Sign Language. Remember that sign language grammar should be learned in the same way as the grammar of another language is learned (Dikyuva & Zeshan 2008).

3. Sign language depends upon the spoken language. It is the demonstration of the spoken language by the hands.

This is also wrong! Every sign language in every country has its own unique structure. This structure is quite different from the structure of the vocal language spoken in the same country. Sign Language is in no way dependent upon the spoken language and is not the display of the spoken language by hands. Many of the Turkish Sign Language structures that you will learn in this course are different from Turkish language and during the course we will explain what these differences are. When you pay special attention to these differences, you will also find out some of the reasons why deaf people in Turkey have difficulty learning Turkish, because the Turkish Sign Language they use for communication is structurally quite different from Turkish (Dikyuva & Zeshan 2008).

4. Sign language is just the language of the hands.

This is wrong! It is true that hands are significant in any of the sign languages, but there are other things much more important than just hands in signing. You also make sense with your face and your whole body, and these are also important elements in sign language. If you cannot learn to use your eyes, face, head, and body, you will not be able to sign and express yourself properly. This is very important not only for the meaning but also for the grammar. For example, if you are signing a negative sentence, you will need to lift your head back most of the time. If you are signing a question, sometimes you have to nod and frown. If your face always stays the same, your sentences are not complete (Dikyuva&Zeshan 2008).



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA



Co-funded by
the European Union



5. Sign language was invented by other people so as to help the deaf people.

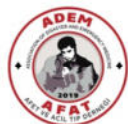
This is also wrong! Sign languages have naturally developed wherever deaf people meet. No one has invented it for the deaf people, but deaf people have created sign languages themselves. After schools and federations for the deaf were established in many countries, deaf people began to meet regularly. After that, sign languages started to develop spontaneously, because deaf people were communicating with each other. We don't know much about the early history of sign language because sign language was not written or recorded in a way. This is just like vocal languages without a writing system. Some sign languages have a history of hundreds or even thousands of years. In Turkey, deaf and hearing people used sign language 500 years ago in the Ottoman palaces in the 1500s. These were written down by people who travelled to Turkey during those times. But sign language may have a much longer history than that, we just do not know the whole history. What we do know is that deaf people created their own language, not others (Dikyuva & Zeshan 2008).

Pointing by Hands / Eye Contact / Naming the Deaf

Gesturing is quite common in Deaf culture. Although it is perceived as a rude gesture for hearing individuals to point to someone during a conversation, deaf individuals frequently use this method in the use of pronouns. Therefore, a deaf person's gesturing has a grammatical function. In the society among hearing individuals, pointing is perceived as a rude behaviour. However, it is important for deaf individuals to point with their hands in terms of grammatical function. It should not be perceived as a rude behaviour for hearing individuals. This is the culture of deaf individuals.

Maintaining eye contact is very important for effective communication to continue. Sign language includes not only manual signs but also non-hand signs such as eyebrows, mouth and head movements. Therefore, facial movements should be monitored during the communication process for the accuracy of the message. When you analyse the conversations of deaf individuals with each other, you can see that they always look at each other's faces rather than their hands.

Deaf people are labelled in many ways, both publicly and socially. The most common are as follows: Deaf, deaf, deaf-mute, mute, mute, deaf-mute, deaf-dumb, deaf-stupid, etc. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there was a great social misconception that deaf people could not



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA



Co-funded by
the European Union



speak because they had no tongue (organ). For this reason, deaf people were labelled with words such as dumb. The labelling of deaf people as stupid dates back to the Greek philosopher Aristotle. According to Aristotle, thinking is connected with sound and therefore deaf individuals cannot think and learn. As can be seen, in ancient times, deaf individuals were given different names due to incorrect determinations. The Deaf Community states that they have a tongue as an organ and that they have problems in speaking because they cannot hear. However, they absolutely do not accept pejorative labels such as 'dumb' and 'stupid'.



MAVİ PENCERE
Special Education Association



UNIVERSIDADE
CATOLICA
PORTUGUESA