

Paper name: “ChinaSign” Developing Sign Bilingual provision for young deaf children in China

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Feedback and Development

Feedback

There has been a very positive start to both the sign bilingual programmes in Kunming and Hefei. The employment of a deaf teacher who works in partnership with the hearing teacher is the foundation of this new provision. There is good collaboration between these two teachers and it is clear that in just a few months the children have benefited from this new approach. Staff and parents report that the children’s communication in sign has made significant progress and that their emotional and social development has been enhanced. The children are beginning to be able to express themselves and interact meaningfully with each other and with adults. They are also developing a greater sense of positive identity as deaf children.

What is particularly impressive is the great enthusiasm and commitment from all those who have come into contact with these projects and were involved in our training or met us to discuss the work. Parents, children, members of the Deaf community and professionals are working together in a very new and dramatic way and there is enormous potential and desire to take this work much further. This sense of vision is included in the longer-term recommendations we have made.

It has also been very rewarding to see members of the Chinese Deaf community included in the training and to see the beginning of their empowerment. Deaf people have said to us (in sign language!) that they now feel included and that they now also feel part of an international Deaf community that is influencing the future of deaf education.

The Future

This is the beginning and further work is required if the programmes are to develop successfully. Having worked within both programmes with children, staff, parents and government officials we include some recommendations. Firstly we have focused on ways of developing the existing provision (below).

We then make suggestions for longer-term initiatives that we believe are essential if these small projects are to have wider impact in the achievements of deaf children in China.

It is also important to remember the work of the Nanjing sign bilingual project which has been running for a longer period and which I have supported since 1998. The linking of these three projects is also essential.

Developing Sign Bilingual Practice within the Kunming and Hefei Programmes – Practical Recommendations for Staff

Classroom Organisation

- Ensure children and staff are positioned where all can see/communicate with each other at all times. Communicate at the child's eye level (crouch or sit, seating in a semi-circle, always face the pupils when communicating, don't walk up and down, keep still when signing).
- Use both staff in most sessions. This means groups or individuals can be taught at the same time, focusing on individual needs or observations can be recorded (see later).
- In each session the communication to be used must be clearly defined and consistent in practice.
- The value of daily tongue/finger exercises is questionable. This is never used in sign bilingual schools in other countries.
- One teacher communicates at a time. If both are communicating at the same time the children cannot follow both.

Developing the use of sign language

- The activities could be shorter and more varied to retain the children's interest.
- Activities should focus on stimulating discussion/conversation (primary aim).
- Children should be given opportunities to link signs together in their expressive language, to use phrases rather than single signs.
- Children should develop dialogue skills through the use of open questions. Such questions encourage the child to reply with information rather than one sign or yes/no.
- Avoid children only copying teacher's signs, encourage them to use the signs naturally in their conversation or activities.
- Ensure that all the children are stretched and challenged. It is important that the children with higher levels of sign language do not "cruise" (repeat work they can already do easily) and the children with less developed sign language are not confused (see planning).
- Stories can be longer but delivered more quickly, as in natural storytelling to children. The stories could also include more pictures and interest. Children develop their memory skills if exposed to lots of varied stories that capture their imagination.
- Children should be encouraged to retell stories themselves or tell their own stories from real life or fiction.

- Allow children time to respond. Don't interrupt with the answer. If a child is having difficulty responding, use a different kind of question to help them. Try not to give them the answer yourself.

Oral language training

- In oral language training sessions staff need to clarify the aims, structure, communication use, role of teachers.
- Oral language sessions can still use sign language to explain to the children what they are doing.

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

- Develop planning format to include lesson aims, assessment, role of teachers, differentiation for individual needs, resources required. Planning can be for a term (broad outline of aims and what is to be covered) and for a week (detail of smaller aims and what will be taught in each lesson that week)
- Set language targets for individual pupils and monitor them (e.g. This pupil will be able to link 3 signs together in her expressive sign language by the end of term. Evidence: child used "book-blue-where?").
- If one of the teachers is not directly involved she could be used to make observations of the session (e.g. making a record of the kind of questions used, recording examples of a child's expressive language, use of video record). Observation/monitoring is very important to assess the quality of the teaching and learning.
- Working with an individual child (one-to-one) is important to assess each child's development and to set new targets.

Longer-term Development of Sign Bilingual Education for Deaf Children in China – extending the Kunming and Hefei Programmes*

1. Develop the expertise of Deaf and hearing teachers working in a sign bilingual provision.
 - (a) Chinese Deaf teachers visit UK provision and shadow/work with British Deaf teachers particularly with deaf children aged 0 to 5.
 - (b) Experienced Deaf teachers provide training and support to Chinese Deaf colleagues in China, within a programme. This to include giving information to parents at diagnosis, setting up parents' groups, sign language training, sign language assessments, developing a communication policy, story-telling.
 - (c) Chinese hearing teachers visit UK provision and shadow/work with British teachers particularly with deaf children aged 0 to 5.
2. Create policy and practice handbook/video in Chinese/Chinese sign language for developing a sign bilingual approach in Chinese deaf schools.

This will allow educators of deaf children in China to have a full understanding of sign bilingualism and practical ways of implementing aspects of this approach within existing resources.

3. Understanding the place of “oral training” and the development of speech within a sign bilingual approach.
UK training programme delivered to parents and professionals involved in a programme in China. This was raised as a clear priority by parents and professionals in both of the existing projects. There is still confusion about this area of work and it has not been fully covered in the training delivered so far.
4. Observation/feedback/training for deaf schools with older children.
The training and support has focused on rehabilitation centres but has not included schools with deaf children over the age of 7. Continuity of provision is essential if deaf children’s achievement is to be significantly raised.
5. Develop centre of sign language research in a Chinese University.
At present, natural sign language (the language of deaf people with its own grammar) is not recognised in China. Teachers working with deaf children do not have a linguistic understanding of sign language. A research centre using Chinese deaf and hearing researchers would tackle these barriers to the further development of a sign bilingual approach. Interest has been shown from the linguistics departments of Kunming and Nanjing Universities. Some training was given to researchers and professors at Nanjing University Linguistics department in 1999.
 - (a) Chinese researchers visit Centre for Deaf Studies, Bristol University, for training in research methods.
 - (b) Deaf and hearing researchers from Bristol University support the establishment of a research centre in a Linguistics department of a Chinese University.
6. Develop new sign bilingual programmes in other parts of China.
There is great interest from other schools within Yunnan, Anhui and Jiangsu to set up programmes based on the success of the existing ones. Amity are beginning to train deaf teachers working in rural areas of China to spread sign bilingual practice.
7. Establish interpreter training programme on a local level.
It is clear that there is a need for hearing people to be trained as sign language interpreters. There are hearing children of deaf parents and some hearing teachers who have good sign language skills but they require training in how to be effective interpreters. This could be provided by UK trainers in China.

**These aims are taken partly from a project proposal we created in 1999.*