

**CURRICULA FOR
SIGN LANGUAGE
AS A MOTHER TONGUE**

**WRITTEN LANGUAGE
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
FOR THE DEAF**

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TEACHER'S GUIDE





Sign languages and European written languages
in virtual vocational education for the deaf



Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci

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1

INTRODUCTION

This publication has been produced as part of the international DEAFVOC Leonardo da Vinci language competence project funded by the European Union.

The booklet is divided into three sections:

- Sign Language as a Mother Tongue curriculum
- Written Language as a Second Language for the Deaf curriculum
- Teacher's Guide

The main objective of the DEAFVOC project is to promote equal educational opportunities for deaf people through development of language teaching for sign language and teaching of written language for deaf students in vocational education and training: "Towards a Society for All". A bilingual approach was adopted to promote better education and self-esteem among deaf people who not only need good a command of sign language but also need to be able to communicate in the written language of their country in order to access education and employment.

It is particularly important that sign language is used as the primary language of instruction. Successful learning of a new language is only possible when you have a fully developed language system to rely on. Systematic bilingual education at all levels would improve the situation for deaf people and therefore the DEAFVOC project has adopted a bilingual approach to advance the linguistic rights of the deaf in Europe.

The curricula and all other project outcomes will be produced in Czech, English, Finnish, German and Greek. Project outcomes and demonstrations of teaching materials are available on the project website at www.deafvoc.fi. In addition, recommended reading about sign language and teaching of sign language is available on the website in the native languages of the project partner countries.

The project was coordinated by the Finnish Association of the Deaf and partner organizations included the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, The Aura Institute and the Finnish National Board of Education as well as the

University of Jyväskylä representing Finland, the HRDC – the Hellenic Regional Development Center from Greece and the Czech Moravian University of the Deaf on behalf of the Czech Republic.

Curricular development was divided between two of the project partners: the Finnish National Board of Education was responsible for development of the “Sign Language as a Mother Tongue” curriculum and the University of Klagenfurt was responsible for the “Written Language as a Second Language for the Deaf” curriculum. To ensure corresponding contents, objectives and methods, the two project partners cooperated closely in the development process. Both curricula share a structure consisting of general objectives, objectives for the study modules and core contents of the study modules.

The initiative for developing these two curricula was first expressed by the Finnish project partners. Final drafts of both curricula were piloted in classes taught by experienced teachers of deaf students during the autumn and winter of 2005/06 at four institutions of vocational education and training in Finland, one in Greece and a primary school for the deaf in the Czech Republic. A suitable educational institution to pilot the curricula in Austria could not be found.

Both curricula were introduced at a two-day training event in Brno in April 2006 for a group of teachers from the four partner countries. The objective of the event was to discuss the two curricula and share experiences of both deaf and hearing teachers from the different countries and to encourage participants to adopt the curricula in their countries.

The curricula were finalised drawing from experiences gathered through piloting and feedback from the teacher training event in the Czech Republic. The curricula and all other project outcomes are available on the project website free of charge. All EU member states are encouraged to translate the curricula into their national languages and to modify the contents to meet their specific needs.



2

CURRICULUM FOR SIGN LANGUAGE AS A MOTHER TONGUE

The purpose of this curriculum is to develop language teaching in vocational education and training (VET) for deaf students. The starting point and the focus groups comprise students who have not previously studied sign language as their mother tongue at school.

The curriculum aims to express the basic values of the education and guarantee educational rights for every student irrespective of area or vocational institution. The key function of the curriculum is to ensure sufficient consistency and quality of education. The curriculum provides uniformity for vocational skills at a national/European level and confirms the objectives and criteria. The core curriculum is the basis for local implementation, while also increasing educational cohesion.

The guidelines for teaching set out in the curriculum should be as normative as possible, considering the education system in each country. Every VET provider and vocational institution should prepare their own local implementation on the basis of this model. The weekly hours allocated to sign language teaching vary between different countries. This model has been prepared for 4 credits (160 hours) as part of a three-year vocational programme.

The following aspects are also important in instruction:

- To find a testing method to define the starting level of sign language, such that plans can be made for instruction.
- To provide instruction in written language alongside the study of sign language as the mother tongue (bilingualism).

The curriculum starts by setting out the main tasks of the studies, followed by a list of key objectives for each main section. Each section ends with the criteria for student assessment on 3 levels (satisfactory, good and excellent).

2.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

This curriculum is intended for students who use sign language as their mother tongue. The starting point and the basis comprise students who have not studied sign language before.

The main purpose of teaching sign language as the mother tongue is to strengthen the identity of students as users of sign language in spoken and written language environments. The general objective is to provide good competence in sign language, functioning as a basis on which users can then build up proficiency in written language and other skills in the context of vocational studies.

2.2 OBJECTIVES AND CORE CONTENTS

The following objectives in each section (Identity, Sign Language Structure and Vocabulary, Sign Language Usage and Functionality, Study Skills and Aids) are expressed on the level of excellent student performance (the highest mark).

2.2.1 Identity

The core contents are the awareness and study of differences and similarities between sign language culture and spoken language culture and the development of students' own social, occupational and cultural identity.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students know about the background and history of sign language and related cultural heritage in national terms. They are familiar with general sign language development in other countries.
- Students are aware that they have different identities related to the spoken language and hearing culture as well as to sign language and deaf culture. They are able to reflect on both cultures and compare them.



- Students know how to analyse their own language use in relationship to other people, so as to be capable of strengthening/developing their own linguistic identity. Students know how to establish contacts with sign language communities in their own country and they also know how to create international contacts as required.
- Students recognise characteristics of their relationships between non-signing hearing people and know how to act in environments with sign language users or hearing people.
- Students know how to adapt the occupational identity of the field that they are studying to the identity of sign language users.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students know the key characteristics of sign language culture.

Good: Students know the key characteristics of sign language culture and can compare communication between spoken and signing cultures.

Excellent: Students know the features that are characteristic of deaf culture and can compare these with general culture behaviour, recognising the characteristics of deaf culture in their own behaviour.

2.2.2 Sign Language Structure and Vocabulary

The core contents are knowledge of sign language structure and vocabulary, also from an occupational viewpoint.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students know the structure, grammar and phrases used in sign language.
- Students are aware of the differences between sign language and the signed national language.
- Students are able to plan ways of constructing signing and expressing contents related to their own field of study.
- Students master the professional language of their field in sign language and know how to develop their sign language in relationship to their occupation. Students know the similarities and differences between sign language and written language.
- Students are aware of differences between national languages and know how to communicate in international deaf communities.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students produce and understand sign language, know the use of space, simultaneity and iconicity in sign language.

Good: Students know the building blocks of the sign and the structure and usage of multi-directional verbals and they know how to modify a verbal's temporal duration. They are familiar with the functions of sentences and text structures, sign formation and the key features of signs, while also recognising the above-mentioned structures in sign language text.

Excellent: Students know the structural parts of signs, the structures and usage of poly-synthetic and multidirectional verbals and they know how to modify a verbal's temporal duration. They are familiar with the functions of sentences and text structures, sign formation and the key features of signs, while also being able to apply the above-mentioned devices to structures in sign language text and to making their own signs.

2.2.3 Sign Language Usage and Functionality

The core contents are good sign language expression in a variety of situations.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students know how to use sign language properly in a variety of communication situations and know how to justify their opinions.
- Students can reflect and retell stories using sign language.
- Students know how and when to use an interpreter and can use such services if necessary.
- Students know how to use professional literature and work instructions and other kinds of material in sign language.
- Students are able to consolidate their knowledge about their occupational field in their own language.
- Students know how to present a summary or report related to their field and to argue on behalf of a certain opinion.
- Students are able to communicate/explain occupational topics in sign language.
- Students know how to explain things related to their occupation in a presentation or instructions directed at others.



- Students know how to prepare a report, instructions, or a process description in their own field.
- Students are able to obtain experiences and judge things in sign language and know how to express their own thoughts.
- Students know and use sign language literature and other art forms (theatre, poetry).

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students use sign language in different situations, such as in everyday discussions, in their studies, at parties, at work and in their occupation.

Good: Students use sign language diversely in different spontaneous situations and express their opinions clearly.

Excellent: Students use sign language fluently in different communication situations, both spontaneous and planned, by listening, asking and reacting to the other person's signs and also express and argue their own opinions.

2.2.4 Study Skills and Aids

The core contents are developing learning skills and using aids designed for the deaf and communications technology by means of sign language.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students know how to plan and use a variety of working methods, such as team and project work.
- Students know how to look for information in a variety of sources and to use aids such as dictionaries, possible reference works and sign language communications technology, including multimedia and mobile services.
- Students are familiar with information retrieval via the Internet and know how to use it.
- Students learn to adopt a critical attitude towards information and to select, assess and interpret information from different angles and they know how to pass it on using signing.
- Students know how to use interpreting services.
- Students know how to develop learning skills and strategies.
- Students know how to use mnemonics in tasks related to their own line of work.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students understand the core content of specific material and are capable of co-operating with other people.

Good: Students are able to seek information independently from various sources.

Excellent: Students are able to use and exploit information provided in printed or electronic format in their work.

2.3 METHODS OR IMPLEMENTATION – GENERAL DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES

In order to reach the overall educational objective, it is important to start from students' previous education and experiences. The national sign language must be used as the language of instruction. The practical content should be selected according to the requirements of the field of study and the number of hours available should be taken into account. In order to consolidate the content, it is important to establish interrelations within a subject.

Independent provision of information should also be promoted by using modern information and communications technologies. Information from different media should be selected specifically so as to make comparisons between different presentation forms and it should contribute to their careful treatment.

In order to attain a certain level in the national written language, students may complete written assignments, present book reviews, work together with hearing students of the same age, take study trips and visits, engage in mimic games and role-plays and present pantomimes. Students should also have a chance to receive individual remedial instruction in subjects in which they need it. In addition, they should be given information about various occupations and vocational orientation in sign language; they should adopt vocational skills and ethico-social behaviour and be given opportunities for practical training in a variety of jobs (on-the-job learning).



In order to improve the sign language communication videos of the students' signing can be analysed and well known deaf persons could be invited at school. The students shall be motivated to get in contact with the deaf community.

If possible, subjects should be linked with each other. Students should be given exercises that promote their personal development. Attention should be paid to students' different learning aptitudes and to strengthening their self-esteem. At the end of their studies, students should be able to function in study and work communities. Teaching methods should support students in evaluation of their own work, in taking responsibility for their own learning and, where necessary, in modifying their behaviour on the basis of feedback received from others.

Work, interaction and instruction should be diversified. Diverse ways of repetition should be used to establish students' understanding of relations and to reinforce newly acquired knowledge. Methods should support students to come up with their own solutions to problems.

Both of the curricula and teaching can be planned and used together even if they are prepared separately. Sign Language as a Mother Tongue and Written Language should be taught in parallel to enable them to support each other. Subjects could be combined in one form or another.

Teaching and core contents should be adapted to specific vocational sectors and working life. Linking language and vocational practice is useful, as it increases motivation and subsequently helps students to find employment.

CURRICULUM FOR WRITTEN LANGUAGE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE FOR THE DEAF

The purpose of this curriculum is to develop language teaching in vocational education and training (VET) for deaf students.

The curriculum aims to express the basic values of the education and guarantee educational rights for every student irrespective of area or vocational institution. The key function of the curriculum is to ensure sufficient consistency and quality of education. The curriculum provides uniformity for vocational skills at a national/European level and confirms the objectives and criteria. The core curriculum is the basis for local implementation, while also increasing educational cohesion.

The guidelines for teaching set out in the curriculum should be as normative as possible, considering the education system in each country. Every VET provider and vocational institution should prepare their own local implementation on the basis of this model. The weekly hours allocated to sign language teaching vary between different countries. This model has been prepared for 4 credits (160 hours) as part of a three-year vocational programme.

The following aspects are also important in instruction:

- To find a testing method to define the starting level of sign language and written language, such that plans can be made for instruction.
- To provide instruction in written language alongside the study of sign language as the mother tongue (bilingualism).

The curriculum starts by setting out the main tasks of the studies, followed by a list of key objectives for each main part. Each section ends with the criteria for student assessment on 3 levels (satisfactory, good and excellent).

3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The objective of written language education for deaf students is to enhance their ability to function and communicate. A general objective is to achieve a high degree of bilingualism (Sign Language and Written Language) in order to enable students to play an active role in the sign language and spoken language communities. Students will be taught to compare expression and grammar between sign language and spoken/written language. References to the requirements of working life as well as to the deaf culture and history should be considered in the texts. Taking into account their individual circumstances, students should acquire the skills to obtain and pass on information. This enables them to extend competences that support their personal and professional development as well as their integration. An additional objective is to support students in their self-determination and in becoming active members of our society and working communities. They should also be coached to take a creative and active role at their workplaces.

3.2 OBJECTIVES AND CORE CONTENTS

The following objectives in each section (Bilingual Communication, Written Language, Language Awareness, and Professional and Social Environments) are expressed on the level of excellent student performance (the highest mark).

3.2.1 Bilingual Communication

The aim of the Bilingual Communication unit is for students to have a strong feeling of bilingualism and to perceive themselves as being bilingual. Students are able to empower themselves by integrating into the hearing community.

Students become used to making comparisons between sign and spoken language grammar and they can use both media to obtain information. Students are able to select and use appropriate forms of communication

with superiors, colleagues and business partners and they are used to studying similarities and differences between deaf and hearing culture. Students can manage communication situations in their occupational field and personal lives and they are able to develop independence, social competence and a positive attitude towards work.

The core contents are the key characteristics of and the differences and similarities between sign and spoken language grammar, acquisition of information by different means and communication in different situations in the occupational field.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students are able to master communication in their personal and professional lives and to develop successful communication abilities.
- Students are ready to participate in different forms of communication and discussions.
- Students know the appropriate forms of communication in different work-related situations.
- Students have a stable vocabulary and the ability to expand it.
- Students are able to use work-specific vocabulary.
- Students are able to obtain information independently.
- Students are able to react in an appropriate way to messages and to ask for more information, to pass on orders and messages and to point out inadequate or incomprehensible communications in order to obtain additional personal and professional information. They are aware of ways of drawing attention to their own needs and wishes.
- Students gain practice using lexicons (including ones in digital format, if possible).
- Students are familiar with the Internet as a source of information and as a means of communication.
- Students are familiar with employing interpreters.



GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students apply the key ways of communication used in the national written language and participate understandably in written communication at the workplace.

Good: Students apply the national culture's characteristic and polite ways of communication and participate in written communication at the workplace.

Excellent: Students adopt an unprejudiced attitude towards a bilingual environment. They participate fluently in written communication at the workplace, being able to observe styles required in different situations. They carry out their work assignments bilingually.

3.2.2 Written Language

The aim of the Written Language unit is for students to be able to understand the meaning of written texts, to produce written texts for different purposes and to improve and develop their text comprehension.

The core contents are studying comprehension of written texts and producing texts for different purposes.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students are familiar with grammar in the written language.
- Students know how to use practice-oriented spelling and punctuation rules.
- Students are able to detect and correct spelling mistakes.
- Students gain practice in writing grammatically correct sentences/texts and in using expressions and styles that are appropriate for each individual situation and addressee.
- Students gain practice in writing summaries of what they have experienced or read.
- Students are able to understand the meaning of texts.
- Students are able to retell and explain written texts in sign language.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students comprehend the key content of a written text dealing with common topics with the help of facilities such as lexicons or digital databases. They write about customary topics using understandable written language.

Good: Students comprehend the content of a text dealing with common topics and can create a short written summary of that content. They are able to write standard language such that they can manage familiar communication situations and present thoughts as a coherent whole.

Excellent: Students comprehend written texts without difficulty and perceive the connections between things that are mentioned in a text, while also being able to draw conclusions and write summaries. They write intelligible, clear and detailed standard language with ease.

3.2.3 Language Awareness

The aim of Language Awareness is to compare the special features of communication in hearing/speaking or signing environments and to provide the ability to communicate appropriately in different situations.

The core contents are developing students' critical thinking, increasing awareness of language use and reading different kinds of texts.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students are able to compare the structure, vocabulary and other features of sign and spoken language. They know the principle or the form of the national language as a spoken language.
- Students are able to comment on texts and different sources of information in a critical manner.
- Students are familiar with text samples from their professional, cultural and personal lives.
- Students know how to use mnemonics in tasks related to their own line of work.
- Students perceive reading as a pastime and an educational tool.
- Students are able to express criticism in an appropriate manner.



GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students are aware of the main differences between written and sign languages.

Good: Students can compare the key structures that are characteristic of spoken languages with the equivalent structures of sign language.

Excellent: Students can compare the structures of spoken languages with the equivalent structures of sign language.

3.2.4 Professional and Social Environments

The aim of the Professional and Social Environments unit is for students to develop their communication in different situations relating to work assignments and colleagues.

The core contents are becoming familiar with the deaf community and other communities and learning to function in different kinds of environments in order to be able to overcome potential barriers in life.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students are able to co-operate and communicate.
- Students possess the personal and professional capacity to act.
- Students are able to overcome communication barriers.
- Students can deal appropriately with hearing as well as deaf people.
- Students are familiar with the deaf community.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA ON 3 LEVELS:

Satisfactory: Students work in a co-operative manner in working relationships.

Good: Students work as team members and can convey messages.

Excellent: Students work in teams in a professional and responsible manner.

3.3 METHODS OR IMPLEMENTATION – GENERAL DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES

In order to reach the overall educational objective, it is important to start from students' previous education and experiences. The national sign language must be used as the language of instruction. The practical content should be selected according to the requirements of the field of study and the number of hours available should be taken into account. In order to consolidate the content, it is important to establish interrelations within a subject.

Independent provision of information should also be promoted by using modern information and communications technologies. Information from different media should be specifically selected so as to make comparisons between different presentation forms and it should contribute to their careful treatment.

In order to attain a certain level in the national written language, students may complete written assignments, present book reviews, work together with hearing students of the same age, take study trips and visits, engage in mimic games and role-plays and present pantomimes. Students should also have a chance to receive individual remedial instruction in subjects in which they need it. In addition, they should be given information about various occupations and vocational orientation in sign language; they should adopt vocational skills and ethico-social behaviour and be given opportunities for practical training in a variety of jobs (on-the-job learning).

In order to improve written communication, texts and books providing examples of good practice are useful. Experiences should be gathered and communication style and spelling should be improved through active use of various forms of communication.

If possible, subjects should be linked with each other. Students should be given exercises that promote their personal development. Attention should be paid to students' different learning aptitudes and to strengthening their self-esteem. At the end of their studies, students should be able to function in study and work communities. Teaching methods should support students in evaluation of their own work, in taking responsibility for their own learning and, where necessary, in modifying their behaviour on the basis of feedback received from others.



Work, interaction and instruction should be diversified. Diverse ways of repetition should be used to establish students' understanding of relations and to reinforce newly acquired knowledge. The methods should support students to come up with their own solutions to problems.

Both of the curricula and teaching can be planned and used together even if they are written separately. Sign Language as a Mother Tongue and Written Language should be taught in parallel to enable them to support each other. The subjects could be combined in one form or another.

Teaching and core contents should be adapted to specific vocational sectors and working life. Linking language and vocational practice is useful, as it increases motivation and helps students to find employment afterwards.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

4.1 THE NEED FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Deaf people need the national written language in various situations: for communication with hearing people, relating to education, for reading different written sources of information (newspapers and electronic communications such as SMS messages or e-mails for example), in contacts with hearing and/or deaf parents, relatives, friends and colleagues and in everyday life.

With respect to their mother tongue, sign language, deaf people do not have as much information available to them as hearing people. Hearing people acquire language in their social environment where it is in daily use. Later on, attending classes at school supports acquisition of language.

Instruction in sign language is particularly significant for deaf people to help them obtain good competence in their mother tongue. Sign language teaching increases competence for everyday communication, differentiated sign language communication as well as knowledge of the language in general. For deaf people, sign language plays an important role in their social development. Comprehensive teaching of sign language needs to be advanced in all fields of education as well as in early intervention.

Proficiency in sign language is an essential condition for bilingual education for deaf people. Teachers should be bilingual and positively inclined towards bilingual teaching for deaf people and students should also be capable of high-level communication in sign language in everyday situations.

In bilingual education for deaf people, grammatical terms that can at times be complicated should first be explained in sign language and subsequently applied to written language. This would enable students to develop a consciously bilingual approach and facilitate identification of and naming – according to age – differences between the two languages and boost both active and passive skills in both languages (c.f. Fig.1). Sign language should be treated as being equal to national written and spoken languages.

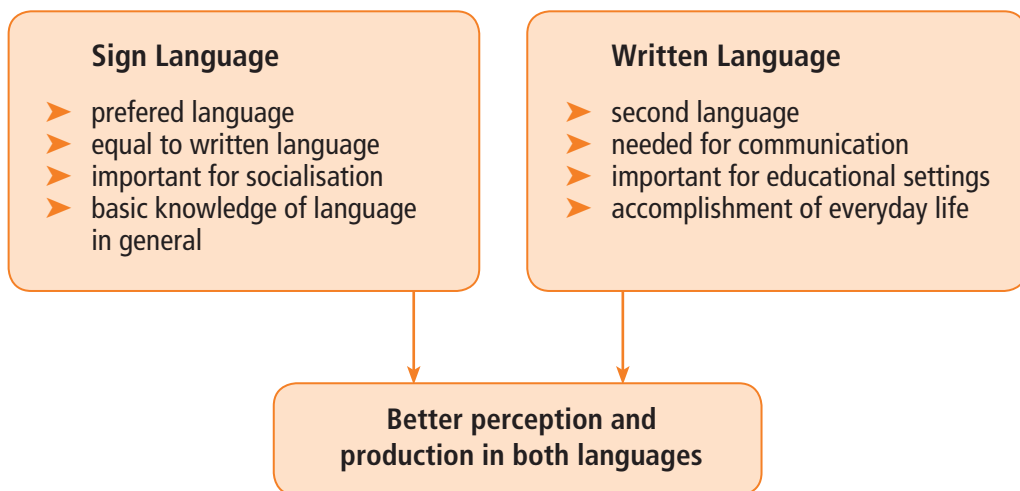


FIGURE 1 Bilingual education

In bilingual contrastive language, teaching of grammatical concepts is compared in the two languages: a grammar theme which is common to both languages is chosen and similarities and differences between the two languages are then discussed using the same grammatical terms.

4.2 INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULA

Teaching for deaf or hard of hearing students needs to be planned particularly carefully because students come from contrasting backgrounds and their initial skills levels and motivation may vary. The following section presents a few general guidelines that need to be taken into consideration:

- Teachers should initially assess students' skills in sign language and written language with suitable tests or through other methods. Actual tests or assistance in finding suitable ones can be obtained from various national and international organisations for the deaf.
- Teachers should find out about students' interests and overall skills level in order to find motivation for learning.

- Teachers should select the most suitable educational objectives, tools and means for achieving the objectives that they have been set.
- Teachers should evaluate implementation of the curriculum and put the acquired linguistic competences to effective use.

4.3 PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING

The following section presents a few general principles for using curricula, which can be useful for their practical implementation in teaching:

- Curricula are developed for international use and need to be adapted to national use in terms of the order of studies, their contents, assignments and assessment. The curricula do not specify a duration for sign language teaching; they include core contents that are considered to be the most internationally significant, in addition to which you may want to include certain national aspects. Student assessment is described using three marks – Satisfactory, Good and Excellent – which can be modified according to your national system.
- Curricula and teaching can be planned and implemented together although they may be documented separately. Sign language as a mother tongue and written language (for example, Finnish as a second language) should be taught in parallel so that they support each other. The subjects could be combined when possible and where it is beneficial to do so.
- Teachers should have (very) good skills in sign language and they should understand the structure of the language to teach bilingually. It would also be helpful for teachers to be familiar with the deaf community.
- Teachers should use versatile teaching methods, such as electronic and traditional dictionaries, television programmes, videos, discussions etc. According to the methodological framework, the following methods and strategies can be used to attain a certain level in the national sign language: use of various posters and videos to expand vocabulary, daily organised class discussions on a theme given



by the teacher, daily presentation of newspapers and books so that students can comment on news using sign language, presentation of assigned tasks to the class in sign language as well as miming games and role play.

In order to attain a certain level in the national written language, students may complete written assignments, present book reviews, work together with hearing students of the same age, take study trips and visits, play miming games and role play, and put on pantomimes. Students should also have the possibility to receive individual remedial instruction in subjects where they need it. In addition, they should receive information and career counselling on various occupations in sign language, learn occupational skills and ethical/social behaviour and be presented with opportunities for practical training (on-the-job learning) in different jobs.

- Teaching and instruction should be based on students' initial level of skills, education and experiences and should consist of individual assignments.
- Teaching and core curricular contents should be adapted to the vocational and working life sectors involved. The link between language skills and practical vocational aspects is useful as it increases motivation and later advances students' potential for gaining employment.

4.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULA

4.4.1 Curriculum for Sign Language as a Mother Tongue

This curriculum is developed for students who have not previously studied sign language as their mother tongue at school, which is the case for almost all DeafVoc project countries. In a few years, Finland will finally see a generation of students who have had the opportunity to study sign language as their mother tongue at the comprehensive school. There are also very few qualified teachers who are trained to teach sign language. Therefore, this curriculum is based on a ground-breaking approach and it lays a foundation for further development.

Identity

The main objectives of this study module are: to strengthen the identity of students as sign-language-speaking individuals and to identify themselves as members of the deaf community and culture. Awareness of the hearing culture and society is a prerequisite for being a representative of a minority language in a culture where spoken language is dominant. Therefore, these studies should include the main differences between the two cultures and the use of spoken and written language for communication.

Sign language structure and vocabulary

Students have already used sign language at home or at comprehensive school even if they have not studied it. The purpose of these studies is to comprehend and gain profound knowledge of sign language and to study its dialects, structures, grammar, vocabulary and phrases from a linguistic point of view.

The curriculum is developed for secondary vocational education and training and should therefore include vocabulary and contents dealing with the fields and occupations that students are studying.

Sign language usage and functionality

Sign language is not a commonly used or acknowledged language. By using it actively in different situations and for different purposes including discussions, instruction, reporting, presentations, demonstrations, singing, poetry or acting, it is possible to make sign language more familiar both to deaf and hearing people. This will also develop and enrich the language and its functionality. Expansion of the range of expressions and vocabulary of a language can only be achieved through use. In vocational education and training, occupational contents should be emphasised.

Deaf people may sometimes need to use interpreters. Awareness of the possibility and the availability of services are important.

Study skills and aids

At secondary level, deaf students like any other students should assume responsibility for their studies and learn about study skills and opportunities for developing them. Independence in terms of information retrieval, the use of dictionaries, reference material or the Internet needs to be accepted and learned in vocational education and training before entering working life. Life-long learning is a reality in our world and adoption of



the approach at school will facilitate continuing studies and assist in working life.

There are many aids, special learning materials and communication methods for deaf people. Learning to use them, acquiring them or finding resources for obtaining them are important skills to learn.

4.4.2 Curriculum for Written Language as a Second Language for the Deaf

Bilingual communication

Acquisition of a profound competence in sign language (cf. also the "Curriculum for Sign Language as a Mother Tongue") and the objectives for teaching bilingual communication and/or written language basically concern two areas:

Firstly, working with texts, where teaching grammar, correct spelling and punctuation, terminology and learning to use dictionaries as well as adequate occupational language/terminology play an important role.

Secondly, working with texts at a metalinguistic level. Here the key elements include various ways of obtaining information, together with the use of modern communication technologies, critical reflection of texts, various possibilities for recounting texts in sign language as well as adequate responses to texts to facilitate participation in private and professional communication.

Employing the services of sign language interpreters is standard procedure for sign language users. However, to use the services confidently, it is essential to obtain information on the professional image, the code of conduct, the tasks, the roles and the performance of sign language interpreters and about formalities such as assigning and financing an interpreter.

Language awareness

Objectives for teaching language awareness are primarily intended to bridge the gap between the deaf and the hearing as well as between professional and private lives. Language awareness is based on information about written language and sign language. It is important to be aware of the fact that written language is an essential part of professional life, but can also be used to benefit an individual level in terms of education and private life.

To quote a Finnish proverb: Learning is not about succeeding at school or professionally, but about succeeding in life.

Professional and social environments

Teaching objectives concerning professional and social environments are in place to help deaf people to gain self-confidence in their professional and private lives. This involves gaining knowledge of their own culture and learning in order to describe their own needs in order to find adequate ways to communicate and behave in professional and private situations.

4.5 EXAMPLES OF USING CURRICULA IN PRACTICAL TEACHING

Below are some examples of the thematic contents of pilot subjects that have been used in different countries and schools.

4.5.1 An example from Finland

Type of school: The Aura Institute – a state-owned special vocational education institution for disabled and deaf students

Pilot subject: Sign Language as a Mother Tongue and Written Language as a Second Language, 2 weekly lessons

Students: 19 students (18 male, 1 female) some from immigrant backgrounds, divided into three groups. Aged from 17 to 51 years. For 10 of the students, sign language is the mother tongue.

The main focus of the “Sign Language as a Mother Tongue” curriculum was on the first and the second chapters, “Identity” and “The structure of sign language and vocabulary”. A wide variety of subjects was covered: subjects were chosen according to the competence level of the group and, for example, videos published monthly by the Finnish Association of the Deaf either on topics actually for deaf people or features, the electronic dictionary of the Finnish Sign Language (<http://suvi.viittomat.net>), special



videos and CDs about various subjects, books and TV news broadcasts in sign language were used as teaching materials.

Themes of lessons:

- Birth of Finnish sign language
- History of the deaf culture
- Linguistic usage – observing varieties in sign language
- Comparing deaf youth culture with hearing youth culture
- Signs regarding professions
- Special signs
- Non-verbal communication: facial expressions, gestures and body language
- Printed and electronic newspapers
- Structure of sign language (finger spelling, pointing etc.)

The structure of lessons varied depending on the subjects. Lessons could start with brief conversations: greetings, progress of studies, issues, etc. Video-recordings were frequently used: for example, conversations between students could be recorded and analysed later. Students would compare their own usage with that of others. As the Aura Institute has students from all over Finland and even from neighbouring countries, dialects in sign language are particularly prominent.

Examples:

- The subject of a lesson can be "Meetings", where the group comes up with different kind of meeting situations:
 - A teacher meets a student's parents for the first time
 - A student is late for class
 - A patient comes to a doctor's appointment, for example.
- Work on televised material - the teacher and students watch the TV news in sign language followed by discussion and analysis of the news. Afterwards, students sign the news in their own words and compare the signing with the original version.
- Work on newspaper articles – students first sign the text according to written Finnish, then translate it into Finnish sign language and finally analyse the exercise together with the teacher.
- Structural elements – students select a sign and divide it into its structural components and use the elements to build as many signs as possible after which sentences are compiled from the signs.

- Body parts – the group selects a body part, for example, the head, the forehead, a hand, then students find signs for it (for example, an eye/cry, look, blink etc.).
- A video on technical signs was made at the Aura Institute. Many of the signs were developed at the school because Finnish sign language lacks technical vocabulary.

4.5.2 An example from the Czech Republic

Type of school: Special Primary School for the Hearing Impaired, 6th and 7th grades

Pilot subject: Sign language as a Mother Tongue, 1 weekly lesson

The objective of the lessons was to give students information on both cultures, i.e., deaf culture and hearing culture. Most children need help with such matters, because most live among hearing people.

Contents of thematic units:

- School, housework, choice of profession
- Body movement and coordination exercises
- Exercises involving facial gestures, using gestures to express ideas, exercises involving bodily movements and postures
- Reading – fairytales, short stories, etc.
- Sign language alphabet – signed with both hands or just one hand
- Expressions – using facial gestures to express basic emotional states as well as gestures to show quantity and quality
- Touching – where you can touch and where not
- Comparatives and superlatives of adjectives
- Recounting experiences, conversation and dialogue
- Humour in sign language
- Expressing time: past, present, future
- Summarising a book
- Conjugation of words
- Grammar in sign language
- Translations from Czech into sign language and vice versa
- Basic phrases (excusing, wishes, agreeing and disapproving in various situations)



- Personal pronouns, possessive pronouns and adjectives
- Imperative and questions
- Quantifiers and qualifiers
- Questions and answers
- Determination of time
- Compensatory aids
- Hearing and non-hearing
- Famous deaf people
- History of the deaf
- History of sign language
- Acknowledging sign language (It is my language)
- Attitude of society towards sign language
- A brief history of education for the deaf
- Various types of communication (oral, total, bilingual, manual)
- Interpreting services
- Respect for variety of usage (different signs in various towns, for example)
- The global deaf community (WFD)
- Associations for the deaf (athletes, etc.)

Monthly themes:

September

- School address
- School curriculum
- Riddles
- Proverbs

October

- Telling a story from a picture
- School aids
- Autumn

November

- Describing school friends
- Code of conduct
- Parents' education and occupations

December

- What an employee needs
- Occupations and their characteristics
- History of the deaf
- Christmas, cleaning and baking

January

- Winter sports
- Newspaper advertisements

- Interviews
- Department stores

February

- Time
- What I can do and what I enjoy doing
- Deaf culture

March

- Descriptions
- State services
- Interpreting services
- Traffic, the way to school

April

- What job do I want to do?
- Media (TV, radio, the Internet, newspapers, etc.)
- Filling in forms (application forms, money orders, advertisements)

May

- Industry in the Czech Republic
- Building, construction companies
- Personal dates
- Types of films (documentaries, educational films, cartoons, action films, etc.)

June

- Competitions (athletics)
- Magazines and books for the deaf
- Summer, holidays

4.5.2 Second example from the Czech Republic

Type of school: Special Primary School for the Hearing Impaired, 5th class

Pilot subject: Sign language as a Mother Tongue, 1 weekly lesson

Monthly themes:

September

- Repetition – finger alphabet using one and two hands
- Vocabulary: signing the continents and the names of European states
- Geometrical shapes
- Translation from text into sign language



October

- Vocabulary: signing mountains
- Telling a story from a picture
- Translation from text into sign language

November

- Numbers up to a milliard
- Deaf culture
- Space

December

- Comparing adverbs and pronouns
- Flora and fauna
- Describing people and things

January

- Definitions – directional and simple verbs
- Inanimate nature
- Expressions of feelings

February

- Use of prepositions. Differences between Czech sign language and signed Czech
- Jokes (humour for the deaf)
- Towns in the Czech Republic