

American Sign Language as a Second Language

by Maxine McLellan, Joy Center of Learning

Sign Language for the deaf has been considered by the Board of Education as an official second language study. This was the case about eight years ago. I did not have time when writing this article to check the current status.

When my daughter Andrea was 12 years old she started taking weekly sign language instruction at a church for the deaf. She did this one evening a week for a couple of years. She then took Level 1 with the Hearing Society in Peterborough. As Andrea was quite quick at picking it up, she went on for further training through the Hearing Society at Sir Sandford Flemming College in Peterborough. Since she was not yet 16 years of age, she was allowed to take the courses with the approval of the rest of the class (all of whom were adults). Her training earned her Hearing Society certificates of accomplishment at various recognized levels.

If you choose study in this area, it is most beneficial if there is a deaf person to practice with. Progress is much quicker. Make sure you learn American Sign Language (ASL), as it is the most widely used and is recognized in Canada and the U.S. There are many other dialects used but they tend to be more localized. ASL is somewhat universal.

Andrea has had opportunities to use her skills in interpreting for people in some unusual settings, one being an ATARI computer users group! She has also taught Sunday School children some songs in sign language. Currently we have a young deaf girl in our church so Andrea's skills come in handy.

For more information, contact your local hearing society.

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