

May 2010



***Deaf Literacy
Initiative***



**Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum
ASL Feasibility Study Report**





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American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool

Feasibility Study

Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream

Deaf Literacy Initiative

May 31, 2010

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Executive Summary

Deaf Literacy Initiative commenced a Feasibility Study under the 2009-2010 Literacy and Basic Skills Research and Development Project under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in April of 2009. This Ministry funded project umbrella was designed to administer fiscal support towards research and development projects aimed at strengthening literacy numeracy training within the province of Ontario.

The American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool Feasibility Study project was aimed at determining whether or not an American Sign Language (*ASL*) linguistics assessment tool was in place within Ontario's Deaf and Deaf-Blind Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream. If an ASL assessment tool was located within the Deaf and Deaf-Blind stream, then this project would undertake an in-depth research study to conclude whether or not the existing tool could be applied and/or modified to contain standardized measurement techniques and methodologies towards the entire Deaf and Deaf-Blind stream. If an ASL assessment tool could not be identified within this stream, then the project would undertake a different research focus, determining which approach would be best utilized in developing a standardized assessment tool.

The findings of this project revealed a valid, practical and reliable American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool was not in place among the 13 Literacy and Basic Skills programs who participated in the project. Within the 13 programs, the 28 Instructors interviewed identified insufficient resources and training pertaining to the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream curriculum, as well as assessment methodologies and practices. Moreover, these interviews revealed the existing assessment tools and strategies in place within these programs to be invalid, unreliable and impractical towards measuring the Deaf and Deaf-Blind Learner's linguistic competency and proficiency within the LBS classroom and/or learning center, therefore demonstrating a need for the development and implementation of a standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool within all Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream programs.

Report Objectives

Included within this report is the project findings, summary, and 18 recommendations reflective of such findings. The report will outline qualitatively and quantitatively supportive data from which the findings and recommendations stem.

Scope and Methodology

The scope of this project included data collection from 13 of Ontario's Deaf and Deaf-Blind Literacy and Basic Skills organizations, henceforth referred to as *LBS Programs*, as well as the research and culmination of supportive literature and documentation of linguistic assessment tools utilized in North America's Deaf and Deaf-Blind community. Contained within an appendix at the end of this report is the extensive list of referenced resources (works cited), outlining the vast expanse of the data collection process.

The research design for this project was a mixed methods approach, utilizing qualitative techniques of data collection followed by the use of quantitative methods of data analysis. The reasoning for using a mixed methods approach was due to the complementary nature of inductive and deductive project proponents. The qualitative approach was concerned with research questions of an inductive nature, such as: "What are Instructors using to measure the American Sign Language linguistic proficiency of the learners?", and: "How is the assessment performed?". Conversely, the quantitative approach was concerned with research questions of a deductive nature, such as: "How many students have command of American Sign Language upon entering the Literacy Basic Skills program?", and: "How many students are able to perform an American Sign Language linguistic proficiency assessment?". The combination of both approaches allowed for a synergistic research design, successfully yielding research findings and relevant recommendations.

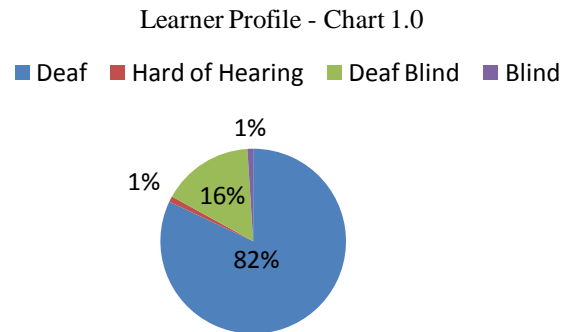
This mixed methods approach allowed for the combination of in-depth interviews, rigorous literature reviews, and statistical analysis of the data to reveal project findings. The sample population for such qualitative interviews was identified using the cluster sampling technique, that is selecting groups of cases (clusters) based on geographic location and selectively sampling units within each case. 16 Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream programs, 37 Instructors, were contacted via email to participate in the project. A total of 28 Instructors, representing 13 programs, volunteered to participate in the project. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted within a one month timeframe, with two interviewers, one whose first language was American Sign Language and one whose first language was English, and the respondent(s).

The interviews were conducted in either one of three fashions: 1) the interviews were conducted in American Sign Language, with one researcher posing the questions in ASL while the other researcher utilized an ASL to English Interpreter to auditorily transcribe the respondents answers, 2) the interview was conducted in spoken English, while one researcher voiced the questions to a Hearing respondent and the other researcher received the respondents answers via the Interpreter and acted as note taker, and 3) both researchers utilized ASL throughout the interview process and took notes as a result of lack of Interpreter availability. On two occasions the Instructors were unable to have an in person interview due to time constraints and opted to respond to the interview questions via email. In total, 13 programs and 28 Instructors participated in the interview process, yielding a mixture of qualitatively and quantitatively representative data.

1. Project Results – Program Findings

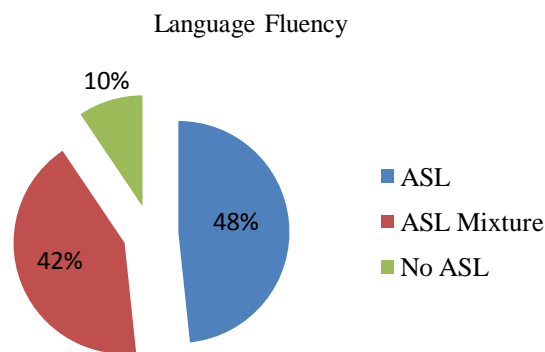
1.1 Learner Profile

In conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, statistical data was revealed pertaining to Learners within the Deaf and Deaf-Blind stream. Among the 13 programs, a total of 210 students were represented. Among the 210 students, 82% identified as Deaf, 1% identified as Hard of Hearing, 16% identified as Deaf-Blind, and 1% identified as Blind.



1.2 Language Profile

Throughout the interview process Instructors indicated that upon entering the LBS programs Learners communicated in a variety of modalities, including and in some cases excluding American Sign Language. Instructors revealed that upon entering the program 48%, 87 of 180¹ Learners, signed with a proficient level of Native-like fluency in ASL. The chart below describes the fluency levels among Learners.



¹ Although the total number of Learners represented in this study is 210, the statistical mean could not be achieved using this total number because of an inconsistency among Instructors. Therefore, those Instructors have been excluded from the statistic and the number reduced. This inconsistency will be discussed in detail in *Section 1.3*.

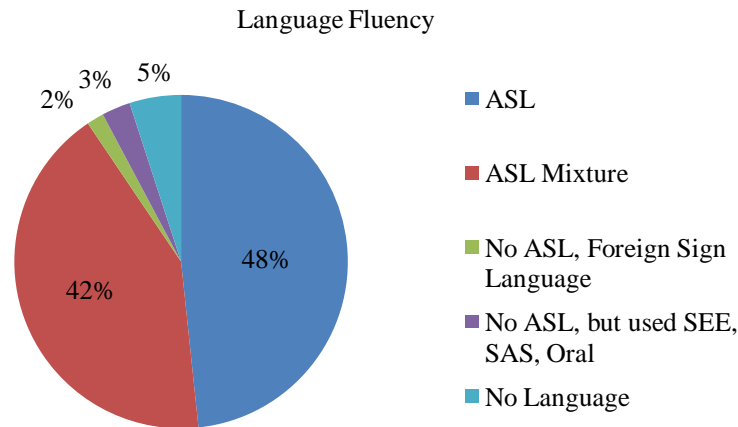
Of those students who did not use ASL at the level of Native-like fluency, Instructors indicated that 42% communicated using a mixture of ASL with various forms of Signed Exact English (SEE), Sign Assisted Speech (SAS), also known as Sign Supported Speech, and Oral English (the use of spoken/voiced English). The table below explains the diversity among the 13 programs.

LBS Program	American Sign Language Communication Mixtures		
	SEE	SAS	Oral
#1	X	---	---
#2	---	X	---
#3	X	X	X
#4	X	---	X
#5	X	---	X
#6	X	---	---
#7	---	---	---
#8	X	---	---
#9	---	---	---
#10	X	---	---
#11	X	---	X
#12	X	---	---
#13	X	---	X

For the purpose of describing the remaining statistics, it is worth noting that the prerequisite to enrolling within Level 2 LBS programs is such that the Learner must demonstrate a beginner's level of ASL linguistic competency. That is, the Learner must already have basic linguistic command of the language in order to join the classroom. If the Learner is unable to perform at such a level upon intake assessment², they are then referred to a Level 1 classroom and/or Learning Center, such as the Bob Rumball Center for the Deaf in Toronto, Ontario. However, this is not the case for the remainder of LBS programs across Ontario, who for various reasons do not have access to referral agencies and programs, and must accept these Learners who demonstrate a low to zero level of ASL linguistic competency.

Lastly, 10% of Learners, that is 17 Learners, did not use ASL as a method of communication upon entering the program. Among these students who did not use ASL to communicate, Instructors were able to identify that 3 Learners communicated with a Foreign Signed Language as their first language, of which 2 used Langue des Signes de Quebecois as a first language. The following chart represents this figure.

² Intake Assessments are discussed in length in *Section 2.2* of this report.



As represented above, a total of 5% of Learners did not have a language upon entering a Literacy and Basic Skills program. Of these learners, 2 were Newcomers to Canada and 7 were Canadian born.

1.3 Findings – Instructor Inconsistency

The 28 Instructors interviewed represented 13 programs across Ontario and therefore several Instructors within the same program were often interviewed depending on their willingness to participate in the project. Rather than rating Learner's level of linguistic competence consistently, Instructors within the same LBS program were most often inconsistent with one another when rating their Learners' level of linguistic competency and proficiency. IT became evident that those Instructors with less of an ASL linguistics background would rate students higher in ASL fluency than their 'Culturally Deaf' and linguistically superior colleagues. For example, Instructors with less of a linguistic background and/or formal training would rate the Learner highly, while their counterparts would rate the Learner linguistically inept.

The ability to recognize ASL linguistic errors went unnoticed for those Instructors who were not 'Culturally Deaf' and those who did not have linguistics training. Therefore interview findings indicate that linguistic command of American Sign Language among Instructors is paramount in identifying and measuring Learners' level of linguistic competency and proficiency upon entering and during their stay within the LBS program. Without a grasp of the discourse, grammatical functions, syntactical structure, and morphological rules of the language, the Instructor is unable to accurately rate the learner's language skills.

Recommendation #1

Linguistic command of American Sign Language among Instructors is of the utmost importance and must themselves be mandated to demonstrate linguistic competency and proficiency in order to validly and accurately measure their Learner's ability to linguistically perform.

Instructors within the same program often relied on one another for support during the initial intake assessment process with new Learners. However, due to the inconsistency among Instructors and their inability to cohesively identify linguistic competency among Learner's within a small margin of error, Learners would often times be incorrectly placed into an LBS program which was not suitable for that Learner and his/her ability.

Recommendation #2

Instructors undergo formal training on linguistic measurement tools, practices, and methodologies in order to identify Learner's skill level pertaining to Literacy and Basic Skills classroom and/or Level placement and avoid inconsistency among measurement outcomes.

It was often indicated that Instructors were unsure and self-doubting when placing students into different levels or referring them to different programs. This was due to the anxiety and lack of assurance pertaining to the Literacy and Basic Skills level and program requirements.

Recommendation #3

All Instructors, Coordinators and Managers within the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream undergo training pertaining to the linguistic proficiency and stipulations of entry-level requirements in order to avoid inconsistency among Instructors interpretations of requirements.

A large percent of Instructors were very willing to admit they misunderstood, were not properly trained, or have not used the curriculum guide for Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream LBS programs. Many instructors indicated the curriculum was hard to follow, did not come with enough resources, and was not "Deaf Friendly"³. This is also exemplified in the inconsistency among Instructors to rate their students linguistic competency as it pertains to "climbing up the ladder" within the LBS program. Instructors were unsure when to refer a student, as they were unable to accurately assess their level of linguistic competency.

Inconsistency was also prevalent among programs, where reliable referral services and practices were vital in Learner placement. Therefore, it is evident that a standardized linguistic assessment be implemented in order to ensure inconsistency in referrals among Instructors and programs is eliminated.

Recommendation #4

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented into the LBS Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream that compliments the curriculum level requirements and alleviates pressure and confusion among Instructors who are linguistically ill-equipped to measure Learner's linguistic proficiency and accurately allow for student placement and referral.

As a result of varying methods of communication among students entering the LBS programs, Instructors are uncertain, insecure, and inconsistent when evaluating language among these Learners. Therefore, it is important that these Learners are accommodated when entering

³ The term "Deaf Friendly" refers to providing a bridge of cultural understanding and creating a linguistic and cultural environment in which Deaf people are recognized for their own language.

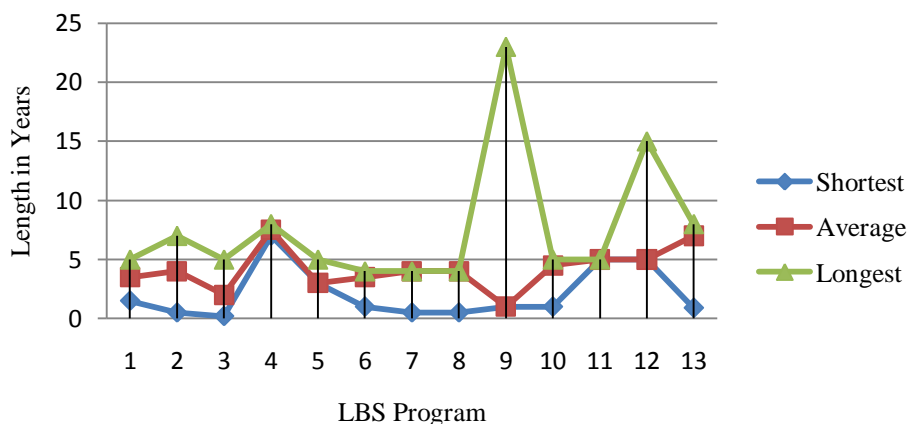
the program and at the initial intake assessment. As demonstrated in section 1.2 *Language Profile*, Learners often enter LBS programs with little to no American Sign Language, and most often than not that American Sign Language is mixed with a communication method such as SEE, SAS, and Oral English.

Recommendation #5

A standardized American Sign Language Assessment Tool be implemented into the LBS Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream that compliments the curriculum level requirements and reflects varying communication styles and methods among Learners in order to accurately assess their language proficiency and accurately place/refer students into program levels.

1.4 Findings – Length of Stay in Program

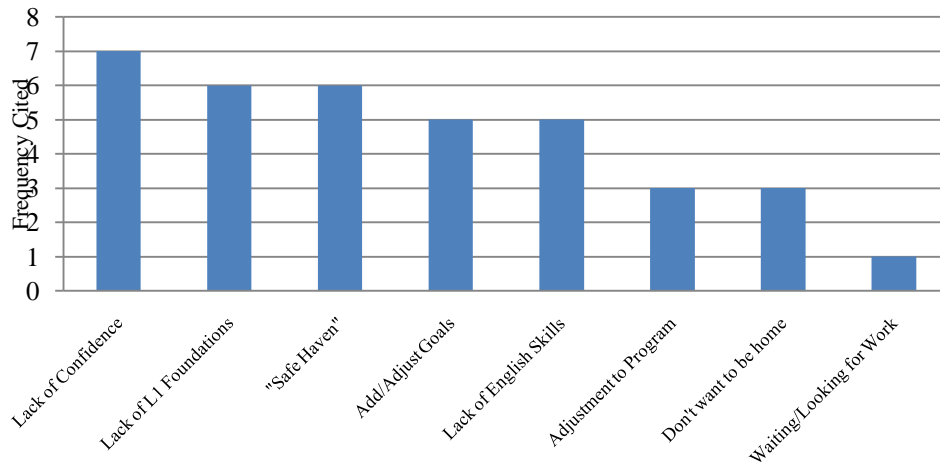
The following graph illustrates the average, shortest, and longest length of time Learner’s stay in the LBS program for each of the 13 participating programs.



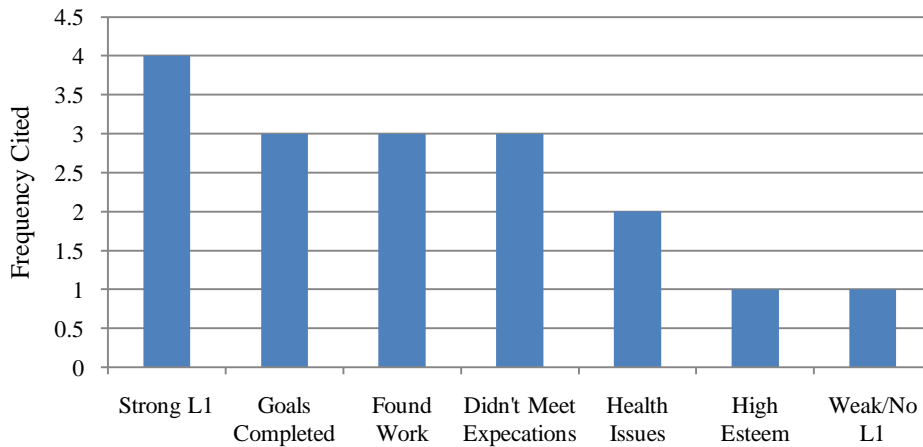
Among the 13 participating programs, the most cited amount of time Learner’s stayed within the program, the *mode*⁴, was 4 years. Throughout the interviews Instructors were also asked for the most common reasons Learners A) lingered within the program, and B) exited the program early. The following two graphs represent this data.

⁴ The *mode* refers to the most frequently cited value among Instructors, in this case 4 years was the most frequently given response.

A) Reasons For Lingering Within Program



B) Reasons For Exiting Program Early



As demonstrated above in *Graph A) Reasons for Lingering Within Program*, the most cited explanation by Instructors was lack of Learner confidence. Learners within Ontario’s LBS Programs are mandated to be over the age of 18, making all Learners within the these 13 programs adults. Adult Learners join programs such as Literacy and Basic Skills most likely because they have exhausted other resources and have come to the realization that assistance is necessary. Because Learners often times feel their own resourcefulness is inadequate, they join LBS programs feeling vulnerable, emphasizing the need for skilled Instructors who will recognize their feelings and support them accordingly (Poonwassie, 2001). Lack of self confidence is indicated to be the primary reason Learners linger within Ontario’s LBS programs, some as long as 23 years.

Recommendation #6

Ontario Deaf and Deaf-Blind Literacy and Basic Skills Instructors undergo professional development training on adult education theory, principles, and practices in order to

successfully support students who enter LBS programs with low self esteem, the highest sited reason why Learners linger in such programs.

The financial implications for Learners lingering in such programs as long as 23 years are obvious: strain on the program's financial budget, strain on the Instructor's resources and time commitment, including overtime and stress leave, and strain on the Learner's time commitment and attitude towards the program and system as a whole, including program drop out and re-entry. Such financial losses could be mitigated with appropriate professional development provided to Instructors; Learners and Instructors would greatly benefit from professional development opportunities in *Androgogy*, the practice of educating adults. For example, Androgogical principles emphasize the importance of self-direction among adult Learners, as opposed to Pedagogical principles that refer to children's dependency on others for direction (Selman, 2001).

Recommendation #7

Ontario Deaf and Deaf-Blind Literacy and Basic Skills Instructors undergo professional development training on Androgogical principles of educating adults in order to provide substantial support to Learners in all areas of LBS programming, including instruction, lesson planning and preparation, evaluation, and assessment.

When Instructors were asked to explain the reasoning and rationale behind students length of time within their LBS programming, many Instructors indicated that Deaf Adult Learners require a different approach than Hearing Adult Learners. This is evident upon examining *Graph A*) and *Graph B*). The second most cited reason for Learners lingering within LBS programming is due to a lack of foundations in a first language. Conversely, the primary reason for Learners exiting the program early was due to having strong foundations in a first language. This was attributed to the pace in which these Learners acquired the target language within the program, English, as opposed to their peers.⁵ It is also worth noting that another cited reason why students exit programs early is also due to lack of L1 foundations, which Instructors attributed to the frustration among Learners in acquiring both ASL and English as new languages.

The reason why Deaf and Deaf-Blind Adult Learners are different from Hearing Adult Learners is language access, which should go without saying. The language of instruction inside the Deaf and Deaf-Blind Literacy and Basic Skills programs is American Sign Language, however, it has already been discussed that less than half of Learners entering LBS programs have command of ASL at the fluency of a native first language user. Moreover, the remaining Learners either have *some* American Sign Language knowledge or none at all. Deaf and Deaf-Blind Adult Learners are exceptional indeed, which further demonstrates a need for Literacy Instructors to undergo professional development training on Androgogical principles as they apply to such Learners.

⁵ For further information on the *Interdependence Hypothesis*, please refer to Jim Cummins' article: *The Relationship between ASL Proficiency and English Academic Development: A Review of the Research*, referenced in full in Appendix A of this report.

2. Project Results – Assessment Tool Findings

2.1 Language Testing Principles

For the purpose of analyzing and comparing linguistic measurement tools among the 13 LBS programs, it is important to clarify the principles and methodologies on which language ‘tests’, ‘measurements’, and ‘assessment tools’ were weighted.

Linguistic assessment tools must adhere to the following criteria⁶ in order to be considered an accurate measuring tool:

- 1) *Practicality*: A test ought to be within the means of financial limitations, time constraints, ease of administration, scoring and interpretation.
- 2) *Reliability*: A test must be consistent and dependable.
- 3) *Validity*: The degree to which the test actually measures what it is intended to measure.

The following findings are based on these three criterion.

2.2 Findings – Current Intake Assessment Procedures

The purpose of an Intake Assessment, also known as an Entrance and/or Initial Assessment, is to identify the Learners level of linguistic proficiency in order to appropriately place the Learner in the classroom and/or learning center environment conducive to efficiently and successfully acquiring the target language, English. Upon interviewing the 28 Instructors throughout the 13 LBS programs, it became evident that the term *assessment* did not apply to all procedures and practices in place within the programs.

Although all 13 programs conducted an Intake Assessment, inconsistency was once again evident among Instructors within the same program. Instructors, Managers and Coordinators’ explanation of the purpose of the Intake Assessment often contradicted each other, as well as the explanation of the process, procedure, length of time required and time limitations of said assessment. Moreover, Instructors and Managers/Coordinators alike disagreed as to who performed the assessment, as well as who scored the Learners results.

Explanation for such inconsistencies can be attributed to lack of communication within the program, but more importantly these inconsistencies result in a variation of assessments within the same program, resulting in biased, impractical, unreliable and invalid intake

⁶ For additional information pertaining to language tool assessment criteria, please refer to Yen-Fen Liao’s article: *Issues of Validity and Reliability in Second Language Performance Assessment*, as well as Hossein Farhady’s article: *Fundamental Concepts in Language Testing (4): Characteristics of Language Tests*. Both articles are referenced in full in Appendix A of this report.

assessments. Moreover, the current intake assessment procedures among the 13 LBS programs demonstrated conflicting tools, resources, practices, methodologies and objectives. No two programs shared the same resource material, intake assessment, or assessment purpose. Lack of consistency among intake assessments inevitably resulted in confusion throughout the referral process and the incorrect placement of Learners.

Recommendation #8

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented within all Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Literacy and Basic Skills programs to ensure consistency, practicality, and reliability in assessment procedures, objectives and methodologies, reducing the confusion and risk within the referral process.

Not only were Instructors' explanations of intake assessments contradictory, but the tools themselves were inconsistent, irrelevant, inaccurate, impractical, invalid, and unreliable when measuring Learner's linguistic proficiency upon entry into the program. Among the 13 programs, 8 programs utilized an assessment tool to identify the Learner's level of English proficiency, while the remaining 5 programs utilized an intake assessment tool that combined both ASL and English components to assess the Learner's ASL as well as their English competency. However, not one program demonstrated an assessment tool effective at identifying the Learner's linguistic competency in American Sign Language as it pertains to linguistic benchmarks⁷ among adults.

The 5 programs which utilized an assessment tool to both evaluate English and ASL did not actually *measure* the level Learner's linguistic ability in American Sign Language at all. The majority of these programs admitted to "*measuring by gut*", that is to say the Instructors felt their linguistic competency was superior to the point where they were able to identify linguistic proficiency by instinct, rather than using a solid assessment tool. It goes without saying that this technique is invalid in that it does not measure what it is intended to measure, nor is it reliable in that there is no 'guttural consistency scale'.

Only one program was able to demonstrate some form of ASL linguistic measurement, however the measurement tool relied on the *translation* skills of the Learner. This technique is unfortunately one of the most commonly used yet most fallible and consequently invalid technique in that it is actually testing the Learner's translation skills, rather than their communicative competency, that is, their grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence in American Sign Language (CARLA, 2010). What this approach measures is the limited list of signs the Learner possesses that accompany or can be translated into English written words. (Cokely, 1980)

Recommendation #9

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented within all Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Literacy and Basic Skills programs to ensure validity and consistency in assessment tools where linguistic competency is measured appropriately and reliably among all programs.

⁷ The Canadian language benchmarks set the national standard to describe the language that individuals must possess pertaining to a common language of understanding within employment and academic related content and language competencies. (CCLB, 2000)

When ASL and English components were included in the intake assessment, Instructors indicated the importance of ‘interviewing’ the Learners. This interview consisted of asking Learners about their background, family and geographical history, their educational experiences, and their motivations for entering the program. This interview acted as a measurement tool; Learners would be asked questions in ASL and they would be expected to answer in ASL, thereby allowing the Instructor to ‘measure by gut’ the linguistic proficiency of the Learner.

Although it has already been discussed that a guttural consistency scale among Instructors is invalid, this interview technique also fails to follow second language theory in that expressive skills must be measured *after* receptive skills have been tested. The rationale is that second language learners possess a much higher competency in receptively understand language than their ability to expressively produce the language. Therefore, interviewing a Learner whose first/native language is not American Sign Language prior to testing their receptive skills is an unreliable and invalid approach. As discussed in section 1.2 *Language Profile*, less than half of Learners within Ontario LBS programs possess command of ASL as a first language, and 10% do not have any knowledge or use of ASL at all.

Recommendation #10

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented within all Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Literacy and Basic Skills programs that includes a receptive skills based test ahead of the expressive skills based test in order to ensure second language learners are validly and reliably measured.

This interview technique assessment style also neglects the holistic assessment of communicative competency: the grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competency of second language users, deeming it an invalid approach. What this technique does assess is the Learner’s strategic competency, that is, their ability to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables, such as stress and time management, or insufficient language competence (Canale, 1980).

Recommendation #11

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented within all Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Literacy and Basic Skills programs that accurately measures the second language user’s Communicative Competency as a whole.

Most instructors who utilized this interview technique indicated that they in fact *wanted* to assess the Learner’s ability to cope under pressure and ‘time manage’. However, the Learner’s ability to time manage during an initial intake assessment is undoubtedly incredibly stressful and awkward considering the language barriers and potential cultural barriers that exist between the Learner and Instructor. Moreover, the ability to ‘hold it together’ under pressure is *not* a prerequisite to joining a Literacy and Basic Skills Program, rather, it is a prejudiced, insensitive, and unfair discriminatory process that ostracizes the Learner from the Instructor. As a result of insufficient training amongst LBS Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Instructors, this inappropriate method is not only in practice, but supported.

Recommendation #12

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented within all Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Literacy and Basic Skills programs that follows unbiased, unprejudiced, and neutral Androgogical behavior towards the Learner in all fields, including the ability to feel safe in a new and undoubtedly intimidating environment.

Lastly, the Learner's ability to 'time manage' was especially stressed among programs which enforced strict time limits on the intake assessments. Learners were given a set amount of time to complete, most often times than not, seemingly impossible assignments and tests. For example, many programs required Learners complete a multi-paged English assessment with varying levels of difficulty and asked to complete 'as much as they could' within a set period of time. Not only does this reflect the unfair and insensitive process discussed above, but Learners strategic competence is again assessed, deeming it once again an invalid and unreliable approach. Furthermore, when asked about time restrictions, Instructors within the same program contradicted one another with different time limits and procedures. On the whole, the intake assessment ranged from a 1 hour process to a 3 week on-going assessment procedure, making it a very impractical tool as well.

Recommendation #13

A standardized American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool be implemented within all Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Literacy and Basic Skills programs that follows a structured procedure and does not allow for inconsistency within or among programs.

2.3 Findings – Current Formative Assessment Procedures

Formative assessments use information derived from Learners in order to shape and improve Learners achievement inside the classroom (Sadler, 2009). This information will go towards the Instructors lesson planning, evaluations, and classroom preparatory work in order to better meet the Learners needs and provide for efficient execution of instruction. Formative assessments are also helpful in determining the Learner's pace and lesson retention.

Throughout the 28 interviews conducted, Instructors were asked whether or not they performed formative assessments in the classroom. 26 Instructors indicated that yes, they do conduct formative assessments inside the classroom and/or during one on one time with their students. This type of assessment is informal, in that it that data is not given nominal value. Due to the informal nature of formative assessments, providing Instructors with a standardized assessment tool is not applicable. Instructors themselves must 'check in' with Learners and do so at their own pace. However, what became evident throughout the interviews was that Instructors were unaware that these 'check ins' were in fact *assessments*. Moreover, 75% of Instructors interviewed were unfamiliar with the term "formative assessment".

Less than half of the Instructors interviewed possessed a background or had formal training (professional development courses, workshops, etc.) in assessment methods within the

past five years. The majority of Instructors indicated that within the past ten to fifteen years they had attended training, but it did not include assessment tools. Rather, this training pertained to a specific tool, or did not relate to assessments at all.

In order for Instructors to benefit from formative assessments, a vital and highly advantageous assessment method, Instructors must be aware of different assessment approaches and methodologies. For example, formative assessments are well known for their ability to provide Instructors with valuable information and feedback concerning Learner's learning strategies, objectives and material retention. If an Instructor is unaware this information is available to them, they will not profit from an assessment tool.

Recommendation #14

All Instructors within the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream be provided with professional development opportunities pertaining to assessment methodologies and approaches in order to fully benefit from informal and formal assessment tool outcomes.

2.4 Findings – Current Summative Assessment Procedures

Summative Assessments are a tool for Instructors to summarize the achievement of a Learner at a given time in the curriculum (Sadler, 2009). This type of assessment is most applicable in credit-style learning environments, such as Continuing Education courses in which the learning environment is term structured. However, this is also applicable to LBS programs which educate Learners on a specific goal, such as driving courses, citizenship preparatory courses, etc. Therefore, Instructors and Learners alike benefit from a summative assessment tool, identifying whether or not the Learner's material retention is sufficient or insufficient.

Summative assessments also allow for Learner performance comparisons. A standard is established to which the Instructors deem 'sufficient' and 'insufficient', and the Learner is then measured in comparison to this standard. These tools allow the Learner to demonstrate they have indeed met the objective and performed to the required standard. 19 Instructors indicated that summative assessment tools were present in the classroom and/or learning centre. Often times Instructors would hold formal meetings with the Learner, in which they would compare their achievement to the standard and assess their progress. Other times Instructors would meet informally with one another to discuss student progress, therefore acting as a summative assessment in that Learners progress was measured in comparison to the standard of sufficiency.

Of those 9 Instructors who indicated they did not perform summative assessments, these Instructors felt the curriculum and lesson plans did not call for such a formal measurement of student progress. Rather, Learners were self-directed and thus independently evaluated their progress. However, in comparing Learner's length of stay within LBS programs, there is an obvious correlation between the lack of formal assessments and extended length of stay within such programs. If Learner progress is not monitored in such a way that it encourages student performance adjustments, Learner's tend to linger within programs undecided and unsure of their

own progress. This ‘hands off’ approach is not successful in guiding the Learner along the appropriate learning path.

Recommendation #15

All Learners within the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream undergo some form of summative assessments in order to guide the Learner along a learning path that is conducive to achieving and meeting individual goals, thus reducing the amount of time spent within the program.

The financial implications of Learners lingering within such programs were previously discussed within section *1.4 Findings – Length of Stay in Program*. Based on these findings it can be assumed that Learners require feedback in order to successfully and efficiently self-direct their learning. In order for Learner’s to take ownership of their goals, they must guide themselves on a goal-oriented learning path, thus reducing the amount of time spent within the program. This is not possible without feedback provided by summative assessment tools.

3. Project Results – North American Assessment Tool Literature Review and Research Findings

Throughout the interview process, it became evident that among the 13 programs Instructors had utilized linguistic assessment tools that they themselves had developed. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind utilized an intake assessment tool that became standardized among all organizations earlier this year. Most Instructors within the CNIB programs interviewed indicated that this tool (E.V.R.R) was successful in identifying the Learner's level of English literacy. However, this tool was unsatisfactory in identifying the linguistic *performance* of Learners. Thus, within all 13 programs interviewed, all participants indicated that they were not satisfied with their current American Sign Language Linguistics Assessment Tool(s). Furthermore, although all 28 Instructors identified they did develop their own assessment tools, whether intake, formative, or summative, they were not satisfied with the outcome and wished to see improvement.

What was also identified throughout the interview process was the lack of resources available within the programs. Throughout the Deaf and Deaf-Blind community in North America, standardized assessment tools are available to measure linguistic proficiency of ASL users. An in-depth literature review was conducted post-interview to determine whether or not these tools could be applied towards the LBS programs. If these tools could not be directly applied, this review also determined whether or not the tools could be modified to suit the LBS Instructor and Learners needs. For a summary of findings, please consult the chart on the following page.

As a result of the literature review and in-depth analysis of existing ASL linguistic assessment tools, research findings indicate that these tools are not applicable to the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream classrooms. Not only are the tools heavily focused on children's first language acquisition, but they are not practical in that they require a trained rater and/or coder administer the assessment. Given there are over 16 Literacy and Basic Skills programs for the Deaf and Deaf-Blind across Ontario, this is not at all financially feasible or realistic.

	Assessment Tool	Purpose	LBS Limitations
First/Native Language Assessment Tool	American Sign Language Assessment Instrument (ASLAI) Source(s): • Hoffmeister, R. J. (1998). • Wall, L. (2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test is a collection of tasks developed to measure ASL knowledge, as well as conversational knowledge and the components of language learning; • Applicable to children between 6 and 14 years old. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - requires 20 hours of assessment and must be administered by a trained Linguist or Coder; • Not Reliable - applicable to students ages 6 to 14 whose first language is ASL; • Not Valid - must already have an ASL language base in order to qualify for the assessment.
	American Sign Language Proficiency Assessment (ASL-PA) Source(s): • Maller, S. J., et al. (1999). • Wall, L. (2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify level of ASL acquisition based on syntactical features in 8 target areas (linguistic structures); • A half-hour video sample is collected on from a child (ages 6 to 12) and is later analyzed, scored and assigned an ASL proficiency rating Level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - must be administered by a trained Linguist or Coder; • Not Reliable - applicable to students ages 6 to 12 whose first language is ASL; • Not Valid - must already have an ASL language base in order to qualify for the assessment.
	MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory (ASL-CDI) Source(s): • Anderson, D., & Reilly, J. • Wall, L. (2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment is used for babies and toddlers (8-36 months); • Using a recognition format, the rater checks off signs that the child produces or comprehends and assesses the early vocabularies and sentence productions of ASL-signing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - must be administered by a very highly trained Linguist or Coder with extensive knowledge of ASL linguistic milestones; • Not Reliable - applicable to babies and toddlers whose first language of exposure/input is ASL; • Not Valid - must already have a growing and established ASL language base.
	Signed Language Development Checklist (STCC) Source(s): • Mountry, J. (1993). • Wall, L. (2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool aged children (ages 2-5) are videotaped and then assessed based on a checklist to measuring ASL language development; • Intended to be used in conjunction with other measurement and assessment tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - must be administered by a very highly trained Linguist or Coder with extensive knowledge of ASL linguistic milestones; • Costly and time consuming for expert consultants to administer test, score and interpret and must be administered in a preschool environment; • Not Reliable - applicable to pre-school aged children whose first language of exposure/input is ASL; • Not Valid - must already have a growing and established ASL language base • Must be used in conjunction with other assessment tools.
	Test Battery for ASL Morphology and Syntax Source(s): • Maller, S. J., Singleton, J. L., Supalla, S. J., & Wix, T. (1999).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This test battery allows for a thorough analysis of an individual's knowledge (ages 3-75) and use of specific morphological and syntactic structures in ASL; • Takes 2 hours to administer, and 15 hours for trained coders to analyze each response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - must be administered by a trained Linguist or Coder; • Costly and time consuming for expert consultants to administer test, score and interpret; • Not Valid - must already have a growing and established ASL language base.
	Test of ASL (TASL) Source(s): • Wall, L. (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This test is designed for assessing children's (ages 8-15) relationship between ASL and English literacy skills, while measuring the production and comprehension of ASL syntactical structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - must be administered, scored and interpreted by a trained Linguist or Coder; • Not Reliable - applicable to students ages 8 to 15 whose first language is ASL; • Not Valid - must already have an ASL language base.
Second Language Assessment Tool	American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASL-PI) Source(s): • Carter, M.S. JR. (Year Unknown). • Wall, L. (2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured 20 minute conversation that gives that examines the candidates level of proficiency; • The interview is cored according to ASL Proficiency Levels 0-5; • Tool is appropriate for measuring functional language proficiency for second language users working within the Deaf Community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Practical - must be administered, scored and interpreted by a trained Interviewer and Assessor; • Not Reliable - applicable to Hearing individuals who wish to rate their linguistic proficiency, and not intended for first/native language users; • Not Valid - must already have an ASL language base in order to qualify for the assessment, and must demonstrate an effort to sign accurately and extensively during the interview.

3.1 Findings – Establishment of an American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool Committee

The question that remains is whether or not these tools can be modified and adapted to fit the Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream classrooms. It is to this question that several recommendations are brought forth.

Recommendation #16

An American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool Committee be established under the guidance of Deaf Literacy Initiative to research, develop, and pilot a standardized assessment tool that can be put in place within the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream programs.

Recommendation #17

An American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool Committee be established under the guidance of Deaf Literacy Initiative and with extensive involvement of the Deaf and Deaf-Blind Literacy community to provide resource support and training to the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream Instructors, Program Managers and Coordinators to appropriately and effectively administer the pilot assessment tool for Deaf and Deaf-Blind Learners.

An American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool Committee must be established in order to ascertain the correct approach in developing a standardized linguistic assessment tool among Ontario's LBS programs. Without the involvement of the Deaf and Deaf-Blind community a linguistic assessment tool would not represent the Learners needs, moreover, without the support of the Deaf and Deaf-Blind community the necessary professional input could and would not be attained.

In terms of modifying an existing ASL linguistic assessment tool to meet the needs of the Deaf and Deaf-Blind stream classrooms, experts in the field of Deaf and Deaf-Blind literacy are the most knowledgeable, experienced, and qualified to determine this feasibility. The scope of this project could not undertake such an endeavor, and it is thus best decided amongst a Committee of experts. However, the knowledge, experience, and qualifications among the Deaf and Deaf-Blind community represents a vast myriad of individuals. Therefore, it is imperative that an unbiased selection process be put into effect in order to establish such a Committee.

Recommendation #18

An American Sign Language Linguistic Assessment Tool Committee be established through a democratic, objective, and unbiased method under the guidance and supervision of Deaf Literacy Initiative, allowing for the equal participation of qualified individuals who possess extensive expertise in the field of Deaf and Deaf-Blind literacy.

Throughout the interview process it became evident that no two Instructors were alike in teaching experience, educational background, and Literacy and Basic Skills knowledge; a common thread among Instructors is impossible to define. For example, the most linguistically capable and proficient Instructors often had no background in ASL linguistics. Also, the most curriculum-sound and knowledgeable often had no post-graduate education, and the most Ministry aware and politically conscious Instructors often had no experience within the classroom. Therefore, this Committee must be established in an unbiased manner, asking all Instructors to democratically demonstrate their potential contributions to the assessment tool process.

Project Implications

The summative findings of the 28 interviews conducted for the purpose of this feasibility study can be broken down into two fundamental areas of importance: 1) Instructor Training, and 2) Standardized Assessment Tool.

1) Instructor Training

- 1.1 Lack of Instructor training and resources pertaining to Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream curriculum, outcomes, expectations and procedures;
 - *Please refer to corresponding recommendations #'s: 3, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, and 17*
- 1.2 Lack of Instructor training and emphasis placed on linguistic proficiency among Instructors;
 - *Please refer to corresponding recommendations #'s: 1, 2, 4, 10, 11, and 17*
- 1.3 Lack of educational resources and training among programs relating to assessment methodology, outcomes, and techniques;
 - *Please refer to corresponding recommendations #'s: 2, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17*
- 1.4 The importance of standardized resources as they pertain to providing Instructors with the tools required to support their Learner's goals, learning paths and outcomes as according to Androgogical principles of teaching;
 - *Please refer to corresponding recommendations #'s: 6, 7, 12, 15, and 17*

2) Standardized Assessment Tool

- 2.1 The imperative need for the development, training, and implementation of a standardized assessment tool that will measure the Learner's linguistic competency and proficiency upon intake into all Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind Stream programs that will compliment the curriculum referral process and level requirements in order to efficiently place the Learner according to their language needs;
 - *Please refer to corresponding recommendations #'s: 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, and 17*
- 2.2 The imperative need for the implementation of a standardized assessment tool that is consistent among Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Deaf and Deaf-Blind programs that accurately, validly, reliably, and practically measures the Learner's linguistic competency and proficiency;
 - *Please refer to corresponding recommendations #'s: 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, and 17*

Conclusion

The Instructors who participated in this project did so with the intention of *improving* education access within their programs and that of their respective peers. The Deaf and Deaf-Blind literacy community is a network of support, trust, and responsibility. Experts in this field demonstrate commitment to Deaf and Deaf-Blind adult Learners' education that is difficult to explain within the confines of this report. All 28 Instructors exhibited a need to improve, better, and enhance the learning experience for every individual Learner, not as a means to encourage funding but as a means to an end.

For every Deaf and Deaf-Blind adult who succeeds in a Literacy and Basic Skills program, there are countless others awaiting in classrooms or too intimidated to join a program because of embarrassment, shame, and often times confinement. Confinement from the world, from the 'Hearing others' that criticize the inability of the 'Disabled' to acquire English spoken and written fluency. This community is ostracized as a result of language barriers; a language which has been in existence for centuries, used by millions, but is still unable to become recognized by the very government to which hundreds of Deaf and Deaf-Blind newcomers have made their own. American Sign Language is not a recognized language in Canada, yet as this study demonstrates we have over 210 Deaf and Deaf-Blind adults in over 13 Literacy and Basic Skills Programs across Ontario alone. Moreover, as this report is read there are 9 Deaf and Deaf-Blind adults within these programs who have no language at all, 7 of which are Canadian born raised in an Ontario Ministry approved curriculum. The implications to this number are astounding.

Although the parameters of this study and report do not include language rights or accessibility issues, the need to recognize American Sign Language as an official language does not go unnoticed in the classroom, in the learning centers, among the Instructors, among the Learners, among the researchers, and among Ontario's Deaf and Deaf-Blind community as a whole.

Glossary

American Sign Language (ASL): ASL is a visual-gestural language with a recognized grammatical, morphological, syntactical, phonological and discourse structure, and is the official language members of the Deaf communities in North America (Ladd, 2003).

Androgogy: The practice of educating adults in an extended learning environment, such as Literacy and Basic Skills programming, Continuing Education courses, and so on (Selman, 2001).

Canadian Language Benchmarks: The national standard to describe the language that individuals must possess pertaining to a common language of understanding within employment and academic related content and language competencies (CCLB, 2000).

Cluster Sampling: A method of sampling in which geographical units are selected and all cases (clusters) within each selected unit are tested (Healey, 2005).

Communicative Competency: A Learner's holistic communicative competence in a language, based on grammar, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competency (CARLA, 2010).

Deaf: A person who is either born Deaf or deafened late in early childhood, whom utilizes American Sign Language as their first language and is heavily immersed within the Deaf community, culture and history within their daily life experiences (Ladd, 2003).

Deaf Friendly: Providing a bridge of cultural understanding and creating a linguistic and cultural environment in which Deaf people are recognized for their own language.

Discourse Competence: The ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse that form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances (Canale, 1980).

Formative Assessments: Use information derived from Learners in order to shape and improve Learners achievement inside the classroom. The Instructor makes definitive judgments about the quality of Learner responses, performances and participation, and uses this information to mold and shape the desired outcome (Sadler, 2009).

Grammatical Competence: Knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology (Canale, 1980).

Hard of Hearing: A person whom has hearing loss from a range of mild to profound, whose modalities of communication can vary from speech to sign language (Canadian Association of the Deaf, Date Unknown).

Hearing: Non-Deaf individuals whose first language is verbal, rather than signed.

Language Competence or Linguistic Competency: What you already *know* in the language (Fromkin, 2006).

Language Performance or Linguistic Proficiency: How you *use* the language (Fromkin, 2006).

Mean: The typical score among data results, most commonly referred to as the average (Healey, 2005).

Mode: The *mode* refers to the most frequently cited value among Instructors, in this case 4 years was the most frequently given response (Healey, 2005).

Oral Deaf: A deaf person who prefers to primarily communicate using speech and lip-reading (Canadian Association of the Deaf, Date Unknown).

Representative: The quality a sample is said to have if it reproduces the major characteristics of the population from which it was drawn (Healey, 2005).

Signed Exact English (SEE): A system of manual communication that follows the exact representation of English structure (Canadian Association of the Deaf, Date Unknown).

Sign Supported Speech: A system of manual communication that engages signing and full voiced grammatical English simultaneously (Canadian Association of the Deaf, Date Unknown).

Sociolinguistic Competence: Involving knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language and of discourse (Canale, 1980).

Strategic Competence: The communication strategies that are employed to compensate for communication breakdowns due to performance variables or insufficient competence (Canale, 1980).

Summative Assessments: Summarizing the achievement of a Learner for finality purposes (Sadler, 2009).

Synergistic: The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods can create a project whereby one method enables the other to be more effective, and together they provide a fuller understanding of the research problem (Hesse-Biber, 2006).

Appendix A – Works Cited, Categorized by Topic/Relevancy

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Appendix B – Instructor Interview**LBS Instructor Interview****Apr-10**

Instructor(s) Name: _____

Position(s): _____

Organization: _____

Survey Information: Number of
Students: _____Number of
Instructors: _____Contact Information: _____
_____**Section 1: Program Information**#1. How many students are in your program?
_____#2. How many students used *ASL as L1* before enrolling in the
LBS program?
_____#3. How many students used *some ASL* before enrolling in the
LBS program?
_____#4. How long on average do students stay within the LBS program?
_____#5. If long, why do students stay a long period of time?
_____#6. If short, why do students stay for only a short period of time?
_____#7. Do students whose L1 is not ASL have command of a signed language
before entering the program?
_____#8. If students have an L1 other than ASL, do they continue to use it in the
classroom?

Section 2: Assessment Tools

Survey Information:

Used G.O.L.D

Assessment Tool:

Developed own A.T's:

- #1. What is your current intake assessment procedure?
-
- #2. Why is this procedure used?
-
- #3. Who administers the intake assessment?
-
- #4. What is the purpose of the assessment?
-
- #5. What language or form of communication is used for the initial intake assessment?
-
- #6. How often is this assessment used?
-
- #7. How long is the intake assessment?
-
- #8. Do you use formative assessments? If yes, what do they look like?
-
- #9. How often are they performed?
-
- #10. Who performs the formative assessments?
-
- #11. Do you use summative assessments? If yes, what do they look like?
-

#12. How often are they performed?

#13. Who performs the summative assessments?

#14. If no type of formative or summative assessment is used, what kind of assessments are used?

#15. Do you utilize DLI's "G.O.L.D" assessment?

#16. Do any Instructors in your LBS program have formal training with assessments?

#17. Of the assessments used in your program, which were successful? Why or why not?

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