

The Traffic Light in Deaf Education: Where Do We Stop, Prepare to Stop, and Go?

By E. Lynn Jacobowitz, Ph.D. and Adonia K. Smith, Ed.D.
ASL Rose

ASL Rose and parents of deaf children have the same belief in Deaf education: quality in education. Let's use a traffic light as an example. The red light, of course, means to stop or that there may be a high level of danger, amber means to prepare to stop and to be cautious, and green indicates to go forward with care. Naturally, we all want to have the green light for driving in the right direction for quality Deaf education.

Parents generally believe they choose the best direction for their Deaf children's formal education. Yet, more often than not, they end up going in the wrong direction, realizing this only when it is too late or when their children are much older. This commonly results in dead-ends, especially when so-called experts and "helpful" professionals share the medical view of being Deaf and/or "think" they are experts in Deaf people's cultural views and linguistic skills. Those professionals (i.e. speech-language pathologists, audiologists, doctors, and certified teachers of Deaf/Hard of Hearing children) generally have been trained in audist or hearing-

centric practices: the use of hearing and speaking abilities to determine success and superiority. They frequently point parents and deaf children in the wrong directions without caution. This leads to a high level of danger and must be stopped immediately.

Ever since the infamous 1880 International Congress on Education of the Deaf conference in Milan, Italy, when sign language was banned from Deaf education, the long-term effects have been devastating. We need to be cautious and recognize that the removal of exposure to signed language and Deaf culture in Deaf education – especially at early ages – is more likely to cause delays in many skills (academic, cognitive, linguistic, meta-linguistic and social). The loss of these skills then delay Deaf children's learning. We need to pay attention as we drive and immediately stop ourselves from going into the wrong direction.

ASL Rose wants every part of the Deaf community to work together to save signed languages, communication, linguistic knowledge, metalinguistic skills, socialization and cognitive skills among Deaf children. This can be accomplished by creating a road map (on page 31) showing the right directions to the highest quality in Deaf education.

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A Suggested Road Map to Deaf Education



As created by ASL Rose (see related story on previous page)

Stop valuing audiogram results for the determination of young Deaf children's educational plans.	Stop obsessing over the importance of hearing sound among young Deaf children.
Prepare to stop schools from not providing signed language assessors, signed language specialists, signed language teachers, signed language therapists and signed language pathologists.	Prepare to stop and ask that schools provide signed language media.
Go on valuing sign language assessments for the determination of young Deaf children's educational plans.	Go promote the importance of visual access for young Deaf children.
Stop using deafened children (children older than five years old who already had hearing and speaking skills) as examples of successful Deaf education.	Stop schools from drilling spoken languages into young Deaf children. Instead, have schools emphasize the value of signed languages.
Prepare to stop and ensure that schools show pride and preservation for all Deaf children of diverse backgrounds.	Prepare to stop and ask schools to provide equal time for both signed and written languages in all classes.
Go have Deaf children (who became Deaf before five years old) as examples of successful Deaf education.	Go emphasize bilingual methods of teaching both signed languages and written languages for young Deaf children, and know the benefits.
Stop espousing oralism as the first and best choice for young Deaf children's education.	Stop assuming that spoken language is fully accessible to young Deaf children.
Prepare to stop and request that schools establish signed language as the official language of instruction.	Prepare to stop and request that schools have fully accessible signed language for young Deaf children.
Go advocate for signed language as the first choice for young Deaf children's education.	Go assure families, professionals and educators that signed languages are fully accessible to young Deaf children.
Stop imposing Manually Coded English and artificial sign/cue systems upon young Deaf children.	Stop depending on the promise of auditory technology for young Deaf children's first-language acquisition.
Prepare to stop schools from including MCE and artificial sign/cue systems, and have them implement ASL.	Prepare to stop and request that schools provide signed languages in early intervention programs.
Go on nurturing signed language in young Deaf children.	Go ensure the promise of signed language for young Deaf children's first- language acquisition.
Stop idealizing Deaf children's ability to function "like" hearing children.	Stop devaluing signed languages among young Deaf children.
Prepare to stop and ask that schools provide signed language through adult Deaf role models.	Prepare to stop and implore schools to promote signed language arts and heritage language.
Go idealize young Deaf children's ability to function like normal Deaf children.	Go advocate the value of signed languages for young Deaf children.