

American Sign Language (ASL) — Goals and Rationale

Rationale

Acquiring a new language opens the door to a world of new experiences. As students study a new language, they develop an understanding and appreciation of other people, cultures, beliefs, and ways of life, while also developing a deeper understanding of their own culture and personal identity. They learn new ways to think, learn, and communicate with others, and gain a new perspective on their experiences and the world around them. The study of American Sign Language (ASL) rewards learners with these and other benefits.

For many people who are deaf or experience hearing loss, ASL is the language of choice in North America. ASL is a complete and complex language with its own grammatical rules and syntax, which are neither based on nor derived from any spoken or written language. It is a visual language, and an integral part of North American Deaf culture and community.

Individuals who are deaf have traditionally been seen by non-deaf people as members of a disabled group. However, Deaf culture values deafness not as a disability but rather as a characteristic of a community's cohesive cultural identity. A key feature of this cohesive culture is its language, ASL. Since the work of the linguist William Stokoe in 1960, ASL has been recognized as a complex, rule-governed, visual language. Deaf culture, like all cultures, is based on a community of people who use the same language to communicate, and ASL reflects the values and norms for interaction within that cultural language group.

Because of British Columbia's cultural diversity and ever-changing societal landscape, students benefit from acquiring an understanding of, and positive attitude toward, cultures that are unfamiliar to them. In ASL Grades 5 to 12, students are provided with opportunities to learn about Deaf culture and community through exposure to the language, history, customs, and arts of Deaf people.

As globalization increases, it is important that learners become aware that they are part of a rich cultural and linguistic diversity. Developing linguistic and intercultural competencies increases students' ability to understand and communicate effectively with people from around the world. In addition, the study of ASL supports many careers and professions. In medicine, dentistry, the hospitality industry, education, and other career areas, the ability to communicate easily with Deaf adults and children is a great asset. It is becoming increasingly important for organizations that provide services to the Deaf community to have employees who are proficient in ASL.

The study of ASL not only develops the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to understand and communicate effectively in ASL, but also expands students' knowledge of language learning in general. In using ASL to create and convey meaning, students can discover new ways to express their individuality. Communicating in authentic situations in another language increases self-confidence in communication skills, enhances students' critical thinking, and promotes respect for others regardless of differences.

Goals

The BC American Sign Language (ASL) curriculum aims to support students' development as educated citizens through the achievement of the following goals. Students are expected to:

- use ASL as a form of self-expression
- communicate with purpose and confidence in ASL
- explore a variety of ASL creative expressions and Deaf arts from around North America
- appreciate the interconnectedness of language and culture
- expand their understanding and appreciation of other cultures
- deepen their understanding of their first language and of their own cultural identity
- understand the educational, travel, and career opportunities that learning an additional language offers
- develop a lifelong appreciation of learning languages