A proposal:
Project “ASL for My Family and Me:” Serving Diverse Families with Deaf/HH Children

Summary:
Families of Deaf and hard of hearing children (Deaf/HH) are in critical need for early access to American Sign Language (ASL) to counteract language deprivation, social isolation, and cognitive delays. Data shows that Deaf/hh children of color and other diverse backgrounds are most at risk for language deprivation as they seldom learn to adequately communicate with their hearing families nor do not perform well academically due to a lack of access to language during early years. Language deprivation or linguistic neglect is defined as a lack of access to a natural language during the critical period of language acquisition (Humphries et al., 2014a, b; 2016 a, b). Thus, this proposal, entitled “ASL for My Family and Me” (Project ASL), addresses a great need for Language Planning for diverse families with Deaf/HH children within the ages of 0-5, especially those children of color. While the number of diverse families has been on the rise with 90% comprise hearing families, many are typically unaware of ASL as the visual language that is most accessible and easy to acquire. Further they may be unaware that emerging vocabulary ASL skills can be used to piggyback the learning of spoken English for those children who benefit from hearing technology (i.e., hearing aids, cochlear implants) (Yoshinago-Itano, 2006). To address this critical need, our organization, National American Sign Language and English Bilingual Consortium for Early Childhood Education (NASL-ECE), aims to promote effective communication and cultural sharing among all family members. NASL-ECE encourages meaningful and practical language planning with a multicultural lens that would give a huge cognitive, emotional, economical and educational benefit to young children and their families, promoting conceptual and language knowledge and personal empowerment in their homes, communities, and schools.

NASL-ECE is seeking to fund the employment of a Project Manager whose job would be to create a digital ASL program. This program would be user friendly for cultural minority families such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latino/Mexican Americans, and so forth. The fact that each of these cultures contains a distinct set of terminology and traits dictates that ASL models should demonstrate signs that reflect one’s particular culture. For instance, in one of the categories, namely food, an African American model demonstrates signs related to soul food: collared greens, black-eyed peas, ox tails, and so forth. Mexican American: taco, burritos, enchilada, etc. Asian American, specifically Japanese: sushi, rice, stir-fry, etc. Native American, specifically a Pacific Northwestern tribe: salmon, whale, back-tailed deer, etc. Jewish American: kosher, lox, matzo, and so on. ASL models would not be limited to just the above cultures, but also other cultures such as Chinese or Pacific Islander. The project can also collect even more multicultural words and phrases beyond food in order to be closer linguistically to the diverse communities. And by being knowledgeable about the language and dialect, as well as being sensitive to multicultural
families’ home culture, service-providers can build trust and cooperation with families of Deaf/hh children thus better serve their socio-emotional and academic needs.

**Problem Statement:**

Project ASL is important because of these three major issues:

1. **Systemic Obstacles**

   Figure 1 below, entitled “Stuck in the Bottleneck” illustrates how diverse deaf students and their families get “stuck in the bottleneck” and experience many barriers along the timeline of their cognitive, social, linguistic, and academic development (Simms et al., 2007). The image uses a bottle metaphor that shows that early in life with a medical hearing screening and diagnosis, the child often gets further and further behind developmentally because of lack of communication and language access. Optimistically, trends toward implementing and improving early hearing detection and intervention programs can overcome these barriers. With the acceleration of screenings and early identification, the 1998–1999 American Academy of Pediatrics committee has recommended that all infants be screened for hearing levels, and that intervention begin as early as possible when hearing levels have been detected (Joint Committee on Infant Hearing, 2007). Despite these advances, Deaf/hh children of color get “stuck in the bottleneck” of underachievement due to lack of early intervention and follow-up. While there is little information on the demographic data on deaf children of color, it has been documented that there are weaknesses in tracking protocols for families of color (Scholl, 2007). Consequently, many children of color have fallen into the group of newborns with unidentified hearing levels, and this has had the detrimental effect of postponing intervention until delays in language acquisition are detected during the early school years. Moreover, misdiagnosis has often led to children being put into classrooms for students with cognitive disabilities or who are classified (or inappropriately classified) with disorders such as attention deficit disorder. Ultimately, these students tend to fall through the cracks due to miseducation and impoverished services throughout their school years. Families and deaf children suffer the emotional toll of underdevelopment with society too paying the price for uneducated groups who may become financially dependent on the welfare system. These consequences could be reversed or even drastically reduced if early effective interventions are set up as this project aims to do.

   This project also takes a realistic appraisal and proactive stance regarding the challenges multicultural families face related to time and transportation in seeking services for their Deaf/hh offspring. Many families of color work long hours, are supported by two full time jobs held at different times, and have little flexibility to attend the ASL classes typically offered on evenings or weekends. Also, many have limited financial resources and mobility options with most depending on dedicating finances to public transportation for their employment. If they are able to attend ASL classes, most are run by White professionals, many of whom do not have multicultural and multilingual sensitivities and training hence the impetus for this project.
2. What is Currently Available: Curriculum & Products

Currently, caregivers and families can access ASL programs at a variety of universities, community colleges and high schools. These institutions show increased enrollment, but primarily for economically advantaged Caucasian participants. While the data may not be the most current, the trends show a clear increase in the number of white hearing families taking ASL, outpacing the number of under-represented and underserved diverse families who face many hardships in accessing services.

Schools for Deaf students have failed to keep up with the trend for increased offerings of ASL classes. Rather than teaching ASL as a bilingual “additive” feature of the curriculum, at deaf schools ASL is taught and used as a remedial effort. A better approach would be to offer ASL as an academic subject in K through 12th grade is a similar way as English is offered as a second language to hearing children as part of their overall language arts program. Ironically, while hearing students are flocking to ASL classes at the high school and university levels creating a “cash cow” for schools, few Deaf students have access to strong academic teaching of ASL at the K-12 and university levels. In other words, Deaf students who would benefit from ASL instruction and who need it for their language growth have fewer opportunities to access ASL classes. This is a gross injustice and this project aims to reverse this detrimental trend.

Another challenge is the lack of ASL teaching professionals who have multilingualistic and multicultural sensitivity and training. Indeed, the majority of models, and service providers are primarily Caucasian-centered and Caucasian-led, and have been so for several decades. This affects not only the curriculum content of ASL programs
such as websites, apps and key texts but also its delivery as these have been developed mostly by Caucasian authors and signers. See the samples below in Figure 2. This is not to say that only persons of color can develop and teach ASL curriculum. Our project intends to create materials that include information for both White and multicultural ASL professionals who can collaborate with each other to provide a more balanced approach to language teaching and language learning to benefit all deaf children from any background. Our aim is to hire a Project Manager who can create materials that infuse multilingualistic and multicultural expertise throughout the ASL curriculum.

Figure 2: ASL Curriculum Materials that Overlook and Neglect Multicultural Emphasis

3. Multi-Cultural Competence

In fact, as aforementioned in Systemic Obstacles portion, most of the professionals who work with diverse children do not possess multi-cultural competence due to lack of knowledge about multiculturalism. Our project goes beyond identity politics but aims to be proactive and productive by forming of team of professionals who are knowledgable about multi cultural issues related to culture and language differences. Specifically, this project aims to hire a Project Manager who will develop a more inclusive approach to teaching Deaf children of all colors, races, ethnicities and nationalities. The materials will emphasize the Deaf culture as well as other cultural backgrounds of the Deaf/hh students (i.e., African-American, Asian-American, Latino-American, Multiethnic). This project will emphasize the multicultural context of the family and their use of language at home in order to benefit the families. Culture has been defined as beliefs, traditions, activities, and practices that may be hared by memers of community (Rogoff, 2003). Hence, it is critical that such the professionals demonstrate cultural responsiveness when working with families to provide effective ASL services. Many ASL professionals would benefit from increased opportunities to become sensitive to cultural differences. This multicultural awareness and sensitivity can be incorporated into the ASL training curriculum by infusing multicultural familial follore, religious and spiritual beliefs as this cultural heritage impacts a family’s reaction and approach to a child born with speical needs.

Our project also will bring to the attention of service providers and professionals the risks of language deprivation when early intervention, and/or school readiness are
delayed because of lack of communication access (Humphries et al., 2014a, b). The project will also highlight to professionals that they can empower their multicultural family consumers if they understand the various histories, customs, beliefs about food, dress, and ways of communicating that differ from culture to culture. Ethnocentrism is a common behavior and professionals but learning about multicultural practices can empower professionals in providing more effective services. Our project holds that cultural competence is an important practice for providing effective family-centered services in the user-friendly and natural environment.

**Justification:**

- The Project ASL and family language planning including digital accessible materials are necessary in order to:
  - Promote early language acquisition and literacy development
  - Meet the needs of multicultural diverse families and their children
  - Assure the availability of a continuum of support services for all students
  - Offer a variety of delivery methods
  - Better address the needs of non-traditional students
  - Ensure effective communication among family, school and professionals
  - Preserve family’s rich cultural heritage and promote the study and appreciation of Deaf Culture and Deaf Multicultural, Deaf history and American Sign Language

**Proposed Project Description:**

In the first step, we will arrange a Request for Proposal for the purpose of recruiting a pool of qualified Project Managers. The top criteria of the qualification for the position is that one has knowledge of multiculturalism, ASL and English bilingualism, technology, family language planning and language acquisition and development. The role of a Project Manager considering as a change of agent is to as follows:

1. Organize new challenges and multiple related projects;
2. Shift between the “big picture” and the small-but-crucial details;
3. Cultivate people skills needed to develop trust and communication among all of the project’s stakeholders: its sponsors, those who will make use of the project’s results, those who command the resources needed, and the project team members.

Suggested initial parameters of the “ASL for My Family & Me project include categories of ASL sign reflecting families’ cultures. See the figure 3 below as an example. However, it does not mean that the design is determined as the Project Manager may propose her/his ideas and design and share with a pool of prospective stakeholders for feedback and input.
The below chart describes further suggested details for the Project Manager in three phrases: First Phrase: The Initial Plan; Second Phrase: The Developing Plan; and Last Phrase: Distribution and Marketing as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Phrase: The Initial Plan</th>
<th>Second Phrase: In-action plan</th>
<th>Third Phrase: Distribution and Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do research on existing ASL programs and materials that are designed for families as to whether they contain a lens of multiculturalism and diversity.</td>
<td>Set up times and dates for ASL signers &amp; models working with families (i.e., in kitchen, in living, bath time, bedtime, storytelling time, holidays, celebrations, cultural traditions, reunions, gathering, etc.</td>
<td>Demonstrate the ASL product to stakeholders, community and families who participate in the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send out a survey of needs assessments to diverse families about use of ASL.</td>
<td>Edit and prepare a pilot ASL with a family at one time including captions, voice over and transcripts)</td>
<td>Send out a survey and research on families’ input (ongoing process).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a recruitment plan for selecting diverse models who sign in ASL with diverse families (i.e., African American Deaf signer with African American family plus locations.</td>
<td>Share the pilot ASL with stakeholders for feedback and input (ongoing process).</td>
<td>Ongoing process on video revisions &amp; editing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design a preliminary plan based on the aforementioned data and share with stakeholders for their feedback and input.</td>
<td>Continue doing the pilot ASL with other families; continue sharing with the stakeholders for feedback and input.</td>
<td>Implement Public Relations plans including distribution and marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a script including ASL signs; language planning that diverse families use in routines</td>
<td>Reviewing the budget plan as to whether we need more financial support</td>
<td>Arrange “Show and Tell” presentations at summits, conferences, workshops, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a projected budget plan and possible fund raising projects including hiring, travel and digital materials needed</td>
<td>Finalize the product and use it as a trial. Develop and prepare the Public Relations including distribution and marketing.</td>
<td>Collaborate with ASL professionals, researchers, and early childhood education professionals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommended & interested Project Manager doing a side work: Leila Hananmi at Leila@convorelay.com, Brandon Williams at brandonleewill@gmail.com & Joi Holsapple at joiholsapple@gmail.com. However, a screening committee will review
their applications, video of interest, letters of recommendations, and vitas as well as other interested individuals before they may recommend to the Board of NASL-ECE.

**Organization description:**

The National ASL and English Bilingual Consortium for Early Childhood Education is a non-profit organization of professionals who are dedicated to the development, management, and coordination of ASL and English bilingual early childhood programs for children who are deaf and hard of hearing and their families. For further information, visit our website: http://www.bilingualece.org/

**Financial Support:**

The AMFM is set about to remedy this disparity by financial support for the development of the plan done by hiring a Project Manager. We see this as a win-win for the families and their children as well as the service agencies and schools. Well-prepared children become diligent and responsible individuals who eventually become productive and caring members of our diverse Deaf communities specifically and society in general.

In order to recruit more diverse families to help facilitate the language and communication between them and their children, we may need to provide them with a rich ASL and family planning. For this, we need your help. We are requesting your generous sponsorship to assist with the Project Manager with **$5,000.00**. We will start with our NASL-ECE organization.

In lieu of your sponsorship, you as a stakeholder are invited to share your input and feedback on the Project and also, a logo and name of your organization will be displayed on our public relations materials, for instance, websites, Apps, brochures, etc.

We hope you will support our endeavor, whether it be financial and/or with in-kind items/services. Please inform us if you need our organization, National American Sign Language and English Bilingual Consortium for Early Childhood Education (NASL-ECE) copy of non-profit, 501@3 statuses and a current IRS Tax Identification Number. The Federal Identification Number is **27-4853037** in case you may need the information.

Thank you for considering our request for sponsorship. We hope you will support our endeavor, whether it be financial and/or with in-kind items/services.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at **NASLECE@gmail.com**.
References


Scholl, 2007
