



香港中文大學

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages

## Supporting HK's Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education

([http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/cslds/jcslco/events\\_en.html](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/cslds/jcslco/events_en.html))

### Letter of Appeal

The Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies (CSLDS) is currently soliciting support from the Hong Kong government to make sign bilingualism and co-enrolment in deaf education an additional option for educating deaf students, alongside the current modes of deaf school and mainstream education that do not provide sign language support. This option allows deaf students to learn bilingually through Hong Kong Sign Language (HKSL) and spoken languages in the mainstream setting. In addition, the HK Government should ensure that HKSL is available for learning and communication in deaf school and mainstream settings.

We sincerely appeal to your support to sign bilingualism in deaf education in HK, in both mainstream and deaf school settings, by sending the reply slip (attached) to us the latest by May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014. We hope with your support, our government, especially the Education Bureau, will incorporate this option into their funding policy. The Legislative Counselors of the Subcommittee on Special Education, highly inspired by the sign bilingual program after a visit to the primary school, decided to initiate a meeting with the officers of the Education Bureau on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, urging the Bureau to take on the responsibility of developing this model of deaf education in HK.



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If funding eventually comes from the Education Bureau, we can continue to develop sign bilingual education in HK on a long-term basis. We will be able to ensure that deaf children in HK will continue to receive education without barriers. There are two attachments to this email: (a) a document about the history of developing sign bilingual education in HK; and (b) a reply slip.

To indicate your support, please fill in the reply slip (attached) and send it back to us. You can send us the reply via email, fax, or regular mails to our centre (Email: [cslds@arts.cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:cslds@arts.cuhk.edu.hk); Fax: +852 3943 4179; Mailing Address: Rm. 104, Academic Building 2, The Chinese University of Hong Kong) on or before May 26. Do contact us if you want to know more about the program (telephone: +852 3943 4178; email: [cslds@arts.cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:cslds@arts.cuhk.edu.hk)).

Thank you very much in advance for your support.

Best Regards,  
Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



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## History of Sign Bilingual Education in HK

The HK Government has never been keen on supporting sign language in the history of local deaf education. The closing down of the sign bilingual deaf learning centers since the late 60s has made thousands of deaf students undergo a form of education which is purely oralist, leading to detrimental effects in language and education attainment, as well as mental health for quite a significant proportion of the deaf student population. Even in deaf schools, the number of which has been reduced from 4 to 1 since the mid-1970s, sign language is discouraged if not banned. CSLDS had indeed helped to develop sign bilingualism in the remaining deaf school between 2003-2006. However, when the funding expired and regardless of its effectiveness in supporting the deaf students' development, the deaf school decided not to continue to support this option.

The call for sign language in deaf education by the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has not cast any significant impact on HK yet. The HK Government still lacks a blueprint for implementing sign language support in deaf education and fails to utilize available resources including sign linguists and special education specialists to help reassess deaf education in HK. Signs of government intervention were only seen in 2011 when the Education Bureau “encouraged” the deaf school to “develop sign language” to support “some students” who needed it in learning. This school project was claimed to develop “pedagogical signs” to support learning. CSLDS had tried to support this project initially, but decided to withdraw their involvement as one vote just could not counteract the majority misconceptions about the “signs” they passed. These “signs” begged a lot of explanations regarding to what extent they conform to principles of sign linguistic analysis. It was a school project after all, not led by professionals, but strongly supported by the Education Bureau because of their intention to relegate sign language to the deaf school context only.

Obviously, one motivation for the Education Bureau to launch this school-based project in 2011 was to respond, officially, to the CRPD's call for global development of the promotion of sign language. Another reason is that the Education Bureau has been facing increasing pressure from the mounting popularity of the concept of sign bilingualism in mainstream education embodied in a





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privately funded educational program launched by CSLDS since August 2006, *The Hong Kong Jockey Club Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education Programme*.

To this date, CSLDS has established a series of programs adopting this “SLCO approach” at various educational levels, including HKSL baby signing for young infants and their parents, and sign bilingual literacy training for pre-KG deaf children, SLCO-classes at a kindergarten, a primary school, and, since 2013, a secondary school. It is our dream that talented deaf sign bilinguals will enter tertiary education with their sign bilingual hearing peers in 2018. With this approach, we emphasize the adoption of natural sign language as the language of instruction and communication, as well as co-teaching practices between a Deaf teacher and a hearing teacher who also need to know HKSL.

After seven years of experimentation, CSLDS has gained abundant insight and confirmed once again the efficacy of sign bilingual education. In the mainstream context, this approach benefits both Deaf and hearing students’ language, education and whole person development, as well as the professional development of Deaf and hearing teachers. Indeed, parents of both deaf and hearing children are queuing to place their child in these SLCO-classes. More and more academics in Speech and Language Therapy and Audiology have changed their attitudes towards sign language in supporting deaf students’ language and cognitive development. More importantly, the SLCO Program has been included in the Database of Good Practices for Inclusive Education by UNESCO International Bureau of Education.

In July 2014, the private funding to run the SLCO programs for the pre-secondary levels will expire. Lacking the necessary funding, the SLCO programs will have to cease their operation, and deaf children of HK will lose their only opportunity of receiving education within a sign bilingual framework. Sad to say, HK will revert to a history of oralist education in mainstream without sign language support. For those few students entering the deaf school, they will be exposed to a form of signing which may not support optimal learning. Note also that even Deaf families resent sending their children to this deaf school, due to its extremely low Deaf awareness and academic expectations

CRPD-Article 24 highlights that deaf people have the right to receive education. This includes the right to receive education in a mainstream setting, the right to have sign language support when needed, as well as the right to have teachers who are competent in sign language, whether hearing or Deaf. The HK government signed the CRPD in 2008. Unfortunately, except for this deaf school



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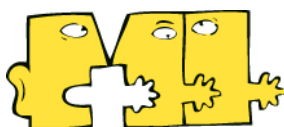


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project plus some HKSL promotional activities, little has been done to substantially improve the conditions for sign language in deaf education. There are no specific long-term goals to develop sign language support systems for the society, sign bilingual education, or to provide any educational support system to facilitate the learning of deaf students.

So far, the SLCO Programs have gained local support from a great majority of Deaf organizations, parents associations, some professional services and research centers that have been collaborating with CSLDS in the implementation of SLCO Programs, the Social & Welfare Bureau – Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, Child Assessment Services of the Department of Health, as well as many Legislative Counselors of the HK government. Some Legislative Counselors have visited the program at the primary school. Highly inspired, they pledge to conduct a meeting with the Education Bureau on May 28, 2014 to urge the Bureau to adopt this additional option in educating deaf students.



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Fax: 3943 4179; email: cslds@arts.cuhk.edu.hk

### Supporting HK's Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education Reply Slip

I/We strongly support the following propositions:

1. That the HK government implement the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by developing explicit, long-term plans for providing deaf students with sign language support in the classroom, in both mainstream and deaf schools;
2. That the HK government establish professional deaf education and HKSL training to people dealing with deaf children/students;
3. That the HK government take up the responsibility of supporting the training of professionals, including teachers and speech therapists, who support deaf children/students in developing speech, literacy and sign language skills;
4. That the HK government develop professional training programs for deaf people in order for them to acquire the knowledge of becoming teachers for the deaf and role models for the next generation of deaf students; and
5. That the HK government fund the future development of sign bilingualism and co-enrolment in deaf education in HK.

Name:

Elena V. Koulidobrova

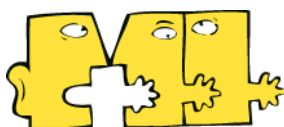
Signature:

Institution/Organization:

Central Connecticut State  
University, USA

Date:

May 23, 2014



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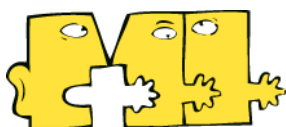
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