

Sign Language Education and Development
SLED

ANNUAL REPORT

March 2009 - February 2010

'Despite a doctor's instruction, I forced myself back to school because I could not bear to lose the information that would be taught at SLED because I had already tasted the syrup of SLED's lessons!! ... SLED has been my eye-opener because I now realise that I can teach and my learners can understand me far better than before SLED because my signing is no longer Signed English but pure South African Sign Language. I wish that every teacher of the Deaf could be part of the SLED training.'

Ms Christina Novungwana, teacher at Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf, Gauteng

Outstanding education for Deaf learners through South African Sign Language

SLED's vision is to see all of South Africa's Deaf children achieving their full potential.

SLED's objective is to facilitate the Deaf child's equal and democratic right to literacy and learning through the promotion of South African Sign Language.

SLED's aims are to:

- Promote South African Sign Language (SASL) as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT)
- Ensure that SASL is recognised and respected as one of the Language Learning Areas in the curricula for basic and higher education.
- Provide accredited training to teachers of Deaf learners in SASL skills and appropriate teaching skills
- Facilitate the natural acquisition of South African Sign Language literacy in Deaf learners
- Encourage the development of written literacy skills by utilising SASL literacy skills in Deaf learners
- Produce high quality SASL/English learning and teaching materials
- Empower Deaf adults to work in educational settings as educators, specialists, mentors, facilitators, and teaching assistants
- Promote early intervention for young Deaf children, their families and their caregivers

While working towards achieving the above aims, the members of the organisation strive to:

- Make certain that empowered Deaf people play a continuous and integral part in all developments and policies regarding their education and language.
- Affirm that the education of Deaf people is recognised as being the concern and joint responsibility of the broader community, families of the Deaf and primarily Deaf people themselves.

SLED projects for the year under review (March 2009 to February 2010)

1. Opening the Doors to literature for the Deaf child

"In lessons I would sit there with a lesson plan but I didn't know how to go about it. Now with SLED and the materials there are a lot of ideas that you can come up with using the books and the DVDs. So it's easier. There are a lot of things you can integrate: Life Skills and English and Maths. It's in all those books."

Nonhlanhla Tshabalala, Grade R teacher, Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf

SLED places great emphasis on addressing the difficulty Deaf learners have experienced in acquiring adequate literacy skills while at school. SLED is producing a reading scheme which highlights the need for "mother-tongue" proficiency initially. For Deaf learners, "mother-tongue" means South African Sign Language (SASL). Once this is well established, learners can use these language skills (in their preferred, natural language) to proceed to written literacy in a second language, regardless of which language that is.

has already produced a series of SASL stories on DVD and in reading books which aim to develop SASL literacy to a proficient level, and then to introduce the second, written language in a culturally sensitive manner.

The next step in this vital project is to develop more material to follow the initial set. The process began with a "kick-off" meeting in Cape Town for the entire SLED development team which took place from the 17 –19th June, 2009. At this meeting, eight more SASL stories for DVD and four story books were prioritised for development. These were drafted with the following working titles:

- *Thandiwe learns road safety* (renamed *Watch out, Thandiwe*)
- *Thandiwe visits a museum* (renamed *Man on the Moon*)
- *Jan goes fishing*
- *The School garden*
- *The farm*
- *A soccer match*
- *Making and selling sweets*
- *The fire service visits our school*

To date, the first three stories have been storyboarded in depth by the development team. Preparation of the detailed illustrations and the rough takes of the SASL stories onto DVD was also begun. In February 2010, SLED filmed *Watch out, Thandiwe!* and *Man on the Moon*.

1.1 Evaluating the English text of the first editions of the Grade One books

The English text created for the Grade One books was evaluated and adapted, resulting in the Second Edition of *Phuti goes to school*, *Yasmin goes to school*, *Jan has chicken pox* and *Germs!*

Our initial research showed that we needed to make sure that the English used was not only age-appropriate and culturally sensitive but was also suited to the unique needs of the Deaf child. So, instead of concentrating on phonics we looked at written English as a visual language. We also focused on sentence patterning and repetition.

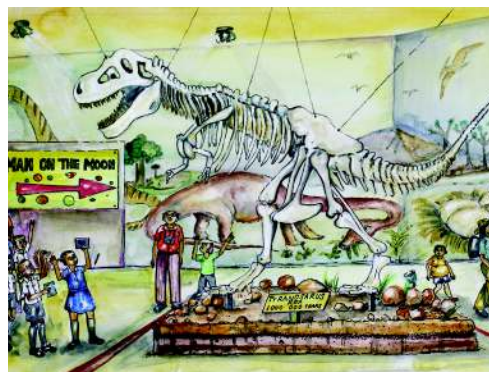
Using the *National Curriculum Statements for the Language Learning Area – English (Home Language and First Additional Language)*, we looked at the most commonly used sentence types, structures and vocabulary. Then we adapted this to the researched, identified needs of the Deaf learner. One of the problems many Deaf learners have in acquiring English literacy skills is linked to verbs and tense. SASL verbs rarely change to match the time that something happened.

During the workshops that we have run using these books in both the Western Cape and Gauteng Provinces, we realised that some of the text needed to be re-edited and adapted. In February 2010, after extensive research and revision, we finalised the text for the Second Edition.

1.2 Adding new SASL stories

In February 2010, after extensive pre-production work, we filmed two new SASL stories for Deaf learners in Grade One: *Watch out Thandiwe!* and *Man on the Moon*. Both these stories focus on four characters but the central figure is Thandiwe.

Thandiwe is an only child being brought up by her mother who runs her own hairdressing business. They live together in a house next to the business in an urban township, Alexandra. Because Thandiwe's mother had started to learn SASL as soon as Thandiwe was diagnosed as being deaf, her SASL skills are good. Thandiwe is a caring, quiet and determined loner. She is a good observer but inclined to be a dreamer. She travels to school daily in a school taxi.



Traffic and road safety for pedestrians are the main themes in *Watch out, Thandiwe!* However, the sub-themes of responsibility and creative imagination are also explored. As with all the Grade One books in the Opening Doors to Literacy for Deaf learners Reading Scheme it is based on the *National Curriculum Statements for SASL and English*.

Man on the Moon focuses on space exploration, heritage and culture and so broadens the learners' access to knowledge of the world outside their own, familiar and often circumscribed lives.

2. Preserving our Oral / Signed Heritage

"First I thought well I know Sign Language what is SLED going to teach me? Then once I got involved I realised I only know Sign Language from a very superficial point of view; I didn't know anything about classifiers or the rules of non-manual features. I was really amazed at how much I didn't know and I was really excited to learn it too. It's great because that's what I can implement with the children and the benefit they are getting from it is huge. Everything comes through SLED."

Thami Shabangu, Deaf Teaching Assistant

SASL has no written form so transmission of culture, literature, stories and traditions have historically been "oral" and face-to-face. The danger that this poses is the loss of rich cultural material (and thus an obvious threat) to the Deaf community. This is especially urgent as the older generations of the Deaf community, who hold huge repositories of Deaf cultural history, are ageing and dying. With the accessibility of modern film and video recording technology, it is now possible to gather and preserve this rich cultural literary heritage in electronic and visual formats that can be appreciated and enjoyed by many generations to come.

2.1 Storytelling workshop

SLED is committed to preserving the cultural heritage of the Deaf community and in October 2009 held a Storytelling workshop in Franschoek, Western Cape. The Deaf participants who were part of the workshop developed an understanding of storytelling, oral history and their cultural heritage. They then, using SASL, built their own capacity as storytellers and narrators of the oral history that holds the cultural heritage of the Deaf community.

The project was set up and administered by SLED aided by a consultant and expert storyteller, Dorian Harhoff. Potential Deaf SASL storytellers from across the country were identified in collaboration with Deaf organisations and schools that are affiliated to DeafSA, South Africa's national Deaf organisation. These storytellers, of a wide age range and diverse family backgrounds, also reflect the greater cultural diversity of South Africa, i.e. Xhosa, Zulu, Indian, Afrikaans, English and so forth.

A panel of SLED facilitators interviewed potential participants individually, finally selecting 15 Deaf storytellers. Selection criteria addressed both the SASL proficiency as well as natural storytelling skills of the interviewees.

An eight-day residential *Story Development and Filming Workshop* for the 15 SASL storytellers / poets was conducted. The first part



of the combined workshop focussed on developing the storytelling skills of the Deaf participants. This section of the workshop was aimed at “creating stories”, capturing on digital camera the rough records of the conceived stories and finally, choosing the best material to emerge from the training.

During the next part of the workshop, the stories were “crafted”; i.e. the recorded SASL material was presented to a larger group of participants and the facilitators (internal and external) who gave feedback about the material gathered. After detailed evaluation of the recorded material, the stories were rehearsed and prepared for final filming. The stories were professionally recorded with the technical support from Abacus Productions, on the final two days of the workshop.

The workshop was followed by the post-production phase of the project, which included the final editing of the SASL stories (28 – 30th November). The artwork for the DVD cover/s was designed by the SLED in-house professional Deaf artist. Once the master copy had been finalised, the duplication of the DVD’s could proceed.

Translation of the SASL stories into written English has begun and will continue into the near future. The marketing and sales of the final DVD product will be initiated to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the project.

There was a significant output from the filming section of the workshop. Various types of SASL literature was developed, crafted and filmed, including fables, stories, poems, autobiographies and conversations. These are important additions to the stock of Deaf cultural material available to the Deaf community.

2.2 Translation of SASL anthologies

During the period November 2009 to February 2010, Nyeleti Nkwinika worked on this anthology of work translating it into English so it can be used by Deaf learners from Grade 1 to ABET to attain English literacy. In the future, we hope to upload these translations and the original SASL literature to a Sign Language computer programme called Link-It. This allows the Deaf learner to view the signed text, try to write out the correct English translation and then click on it to see if it is correct. SLED would publish it as an illustrated book that would accompany the three SASL literature DVDs. This anthology package would be used by Deaf learners in schools as literature to support the *South African Sign Language and English National Curriculum Statements*.

2.3 Impact of these SASL anthologies on the education of Deaf learners

We are eagerly awaiting the long anticipated announcement from the National Department of Education that South African Sign Language (SASL) has officially become one of the *Language Learning Areas of the National Curriculum Statements*. This will mean that for the first time Deaf children will be able to study their own language, SASL, as a school subject. It will also have a tremendous impact on the English literacy skills of Deaf learners. These anthologies will become the essential reference material that will support this learning, both for literature and for literacy.



3. Improving the South African Sign Language Skills of Teachers of the Deaf

"I was resistant but as I attended the Sign Language classes things are becoming clear to me and whenever I have learnt something I come back and present it to the kids in the classroom. What encouraged me was that I realised that the learners understood me better than when I used Signed English. I think that's the thing that encouraged me because it's frustrating teaching a child and then expecting to get good results from the child just to find you are not getting good results. It's really frustrating. So going back to the classroom and presenting lessons the way I have been shown at the SLED lessons and realising the children understood better really encouraged me."

Caroline Ngunqu, Intermediate Phase English teacher

SLED has been working in Mpumalanga since 2007. However, in August 2009, 26 teachers and Department of Education officials from across this province attended a SASL revision workshop before doing their SASL Stage One assessment. 21 of these participants fully achieved both Unit Standards.

In June and October 2009, SLED ran an intensive Stage One course followed by a Summative Assessment for the teachers at St Martins School for the Deaf in Port Shepstone. 75% of the teachers fully achieved both the Unit Standards of the Stage One course.

In November 2009, ten teachers from the Foundation Phase at Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf in Gauteng Province were assessed against the SLED SASL Stage One: SAQA ID# 115074 and SAQA ID# 115079 (Level 4). All of them fully achieved both Unit Standards. In January 2010, these teachers started their Stage Two course.

Thirteen teachers from MC Kharbai School for the Deaf and three teachers from St Vincent School for the Deaf (both in Gauteng) started their SLED SASL Stage One in January 2010.

National recognition for SLED's SASL courses

- In January 2010, the SLED organisation achieved full **ETDP Seta** accreditation for SLED SASL Stage Two: SAQA ID# 115813, SAQA ID# 115814 and SAQA ID#115803 (Level 5).
- In February 2010, SLED received full re-accreditation from the ETDP Seta as a training and assessing organisation.
- After a verification visit from the ETDP Seta in February 2010, all of SLED's SASL Stage 1 and 2 results were verified.

4. Training in SASL – Public Classes

Stage One and Stage Two courses are run at the SLED offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town, facilitated by the four fulltime Deaf facilitators.

The classes have a positive impact on Deaf awareness with regards to Deaf culture and SASL. This is the first important step in creating an inclusive society.



The teaching of these courses has allowed **SLED** to employ an additional six Deaf people (Bibi Ayesha Tilly, Nyeleti Nkwinika, Lerato Maake kaNcube, Luthando Ngcenge, Andile Vellum and Zoliswa Flekisi) in the **SLED** team as part-time, casual facilitators for teaching the public. This contributes positively to the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the **SLED** training team.

The numbers who have enrolled and been assessed are as follows:

Johannesburg

STAGE 1

July 2009: 21 were assessed, 16 fully achieved Stage 1

December 2009: 17 were assessed, 16 fully achieved Stage 1

STAGE 2

January 2010: 10 people enrolled. This course will be completed in mid 2010.

Cape Town

STAGE 1

July 2009: 21 were assessed, 16 fully achieved Stage 1

December 2009: 10 were assessed, 9 fully achieved Stage 1

5. Development of Material

"All our lecturers are just number one. When we leave the school for classes we are tired, but when we get there we change, we are eager to learn. We don't even notice the time. And there is no voice there."

Nokuzola Mkhonza, HOD Foundation Phase, Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf

SASL Stage Two

The Stage Two course is based on the following *NQF Level 5 Unit Standards*:

SAQA ID Nr 115813: Hold conversations with Deaf individuals and groups of Deaf people, using South African Sign Language

SAQA ID Nr 115803: Explain complex processes to Deaf individuals and groups of Deaf people, using South African Sign Language

SAQA ID Nr 115814: Paraphrase and summarise signed monologues on familiar topics using South African Sign Language.

The development, production and duplication of the full set of material were completed by March 2009. The completion of the SASL Stage Two teaching material is a significant achievement for the **SLED** team. The printed material is substantial (the Learner and Facilitator manuals are 164 and 126 pages in length, respectively) and the SASL filmed material is of a very high standard. The artwork is original and innovative, reflecting the cultural diversity of Deaf and hearing South Africa. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only material of its kind in South Africa.



The Stage Two material was submitted to the *Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA)* for accreditation at the beginning of March 2009. However, as the SETA was not yet the Quality Assurance Agency responsible for these Level 5 Unit Standards, they could not award accreditation for them. **SLED** worked with staff at the ETDP SETA to apply to SAQA for the adoption of these Unit Standards under the ambit of the SETA. The application was heard at a SAQA meeting in July. The application was successful, so the Stage Two material was submitted for accreditation soon thereafter. **SLED** has since received full approval for the Stage Two course.



6. Internal capacity building

“Since SLED came here it is really exciting for me to put everything I learnt into practice. I wish you could be here as part of the school to monitor the systems. SLED’s curriculum is so important; I wish the department can really just take it as it is.”

Portia Mosomane, Grade 3 teacher

6.1 Facilitation skills training workshop (March 2009)

Six of **SLED’s** Deaf SASL trainers attended a facilitation skills workshop run by Project Literacy. They were then required to compile a portfolio of evidence (POE) to verify their achievement of the knowledge, skills and attitudes embodied in the following Unit Standards:

SAQA ID Nr US 10231 Plan a learning event

SAQA ID Nr US 7384 Facilitate an adult learning event

This POE includes biographical information, lesson plans, learning outcomes, Unit Standard information, descriptions of learning activities, resources and equipment to be used, reflective reports on the planning process as well as self-evaluation reports after facilitation and feedback from learners. These POE’s were compiled by the Deaf **SLED** trainers (with support from the qualified **SLED** staff) and were submitted to Project Literacy for assessment, moderation and verification by the ETDP SETA during the third grant period. All of the six participants were declared fully competent and are now qualified facilitators.



6.2 SASL Stage Two Facilitation Workshop (June 2009)

The SASL Stage Two facilitator’s training was the opportunity for the Deaf trainers to acquire the facilitation skills necessary for them to train on the forthcoming Stage Two classes that started at the beginning of 2010.

A new Stage Two SASL course was designed by the **SLED** ETD (Education Training and Development) Team. It is based on 3 NQF Level 5 Unit Standards namely:

SAQA ID Nr 115813: Hold conversations with Deaf individuals and groups of Deaf people, using South African Sign Language

SAQA ID Nr 115803: Explain complex processes to Deaf individuals and groups of Deaf people, using South African Sign Language

SAQA ID Nr 115814: Paraphrase and summarise signed monologues on familiar topics using South African Sign Language.

The focus of the previous workshop was to teach the Deaf **SLED** staff to use the new material. Thus they were the learners at the workshop, experiencing the new material from a learner's perspective. This facilitation method allowed the participants to engage fully with new lesson content, new activities and new outcomes without concerning themselves with the task of learning to teach the material. This meant that they had the opportunity to really familiarise themselves with the material. The training in facilitation using the material was then the focus of this workshop. The facilitator material for each of the 20 lessons in the Stage Two Course consists of a detailed Facilitator Guide (presented in English in print form as well as a set of DVDs with the content presented in SASL), a learner manual with illustrated worksheets, posters, games and other educational tools, as well as a large selection of DVD inserts of SASL material.

The SASL Stage Two Facilitation workshop was prepared and facilitated by a qualified ETD Specialist who is a member of the **SLED** staff. The workshop was held in the **SLED** Johannesburg office and included seven Deaf participants.

The facilitation training was conducted in an interactive mode as this is widely acknowledged as the most efficient training and learning technique. To this end, each lesson was assigned to one of the participants who prepared and then facilitated the lesson to the rest of the group until he/she was satisfied that everyone understood the material as well as the facilitation techniques and issues. This included the aims and outcomes of the activities, the type of grouping of learners to be used (e.g. working alone, in pairs, in small groups or as a large group), as well as the teaching techniques necessary for facilitating that activity, (such as how to facilitate learning of new material, how to correct errors, how to consolidate previously learnt material and how to reinforce and encourage learners).

The communication tasks required to be mastered by the learners in order to succeed in this course include conducting a conversation on an unfamiliar topic, paraphrasing and summarising, and explaining a complex process. These communicative practices have rules and conventions which were described by the participant presenting each lesson so that they could ensure that their prospective learners will succeed at these tasks.



Once each presentation was complete, a group discussion was held to provide feedback to the presenter and to clarify any further issues. The workshop was facilitated by the qualified SLED staff member. Ample opportunity for active participation was provided, as discussion and feedback were built into the structure of the course.

An added benefit of this workshop was that it provided another opportunity for a final check on the accuracy of the newly produced SASL Stage Two material. All errors that were identified, including content, typographical or formatting mistakes, were corrected by the DTP artist prior to printing of the material for the courses to be run at the beginning of 2010.



6.3 Know your language

One of SLED’s primary objectives is the empowerment of its Deaf employees, which in turn benefits the organisational structure through improved skills levels.

In January 2010, all of the Deaf members of the SLED team were assessed against SLED SASL Stage Two.

Each of the courses, offered to the “Train the Deaf trainer” participants, is presented in advance of the workshop to the SLED Deaf trainers. This provides a parallel capacity building occasion for the SLED staff members who, like most Deaf people, have had little, if any, opportunity for training and certification since leaving school. This severely impacts on work opportunities for the Deaf, compounded by high rates of unemployment and employers’ poor compliance with employment equity legislation.



The presentation of the course material prior to the official “Train the Deaf trainer” will also allow a preview of teaching methodologies and material, whereby any difficulties can be resolved before the actual training.



7. Capacity building for Deaf SASL users: Working with Deaf teaching assistants

“(Some of us have done degrees in Deaf Education) but it was not so practical. SLED is more practical than our previous experiences. I remember the first time SLED came they told us about the classifiers and I realised everything was wrong. What we had learnt at university we were not able to come back and implement. Too much research, not practical! The lecturers ask for research on the problems in the classroom but have no solutions. Their course was mostly theory but SLED is practical.”

*Portia Mosomane,
Grade 3 teacher at Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf*

SLED is focused on building the capacity of Deaf adult SASL users so that they can become proficient SASL trainers of hearing adults. These would be primarily teachers of Deaf children.

To date, only piecemeal training opportunities have been available to Deaf trainers of SASL. The aim of this project is to empower and capacitate a selected group of Deaf trainers from all over South Africa.

This comprehensive training endeavour – which we have entitled “Train the Deaf trainer” – will equip these Deaf adults with their own SASL qualification, an appreciation of Deaf culture, history and education and general facilitation skills.

In order to prepare for this “Train the Deaf trainer” (TOT) programme which will take place in April and August 2010 as a set of two, eight-day residential workshops, SLED has embarked on an organizational plan. There will be a three-point focus:

- i. material development and preparation;
- ii. internal capacity building for SLED Deaf staff members and
- iii. networking, selection and preparation of potential Deaf trainees.

To maximise the impact of the “Train the Deaf trainer” programme SLED is co-operating with stakeholders across the Deaf sector. To this end, SLED has engaged the Inclusive Education Directorate of the National Department of Education as well as the Education Officer at DeafSA National. This is to ensure buy-in for the programme from the sector and to begin a process of ensuring sustainability for this important capacity building endeavour.

Additionally, the Deaf trainees are to be drawn from the cohort of Deaf assistants who are currently employed at schools for Deaf learners across the nine provinces. This decision has been made after consultation with relevant stakeholders, as it is felt that these individuals are aptly placed to provide the necessary SASL training to both the staff and the learners of these schools.

SLED has begun a process of contacting and engaging with each of the 30 schools which may participate in this training. This involves either a face-to-face visit to the school by 2 SLED trainers – one Deaf and one hearing – to establish contact with the principal of the school, ensure buy-in and to discuss the logistic arrangements. Alternatively, all the Deaf assistants in a particular province are gathered together in one central meeting place with the permission of their principals. At either of these visits, the potential Deaf candidates are interviewed by the SLED team.

The “TOT” programme is an exciting challenge for SLED. The building blocks for the training are being put in place – in terms of human resources, materials resources and the support of a larger sector network. This strand is the central focus of the SLED workplan for 2010.

Preparing for the first TOT workshop

In preparation for the TOT workshop a ‘Know your language: South African Sign Language’ training workshop for the Deaf SLED team members was held at the Cape Town SLED offices in January 2010. This workshop was led by Deaf academic, Paul Simmons, from the University of Witwatersrand. This same workshop is to be presented at the TOT workshop scheduled for April 2010.

In February 2010, facilitation training for six of SLED’s Deaf facilitators took place in Johannesburg. This was based on facilitation skills needed to teach SLED SASL Stage Two.

Interviews for possible participants for the Train the Deaf Trainer course with the Deaf teaching assistants from the Western Cape took place in February 2010.

Awards

Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport honoured SLED for the role it has played in the promotion of marginalised and/or signed languages at the 2009 Annual Cultural Awards

Conclusion

As you may see from the teachers comments scattered throughout this report we have started to see great changes. Since SLED’s inception we have done everything we can to empower the teachers to really teach their young Deaf learners to the best of their ability. SLED-trained staff members at Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf are passionate about implementing what they have learnt. They want to ensure that, as a result of their changes, the learners are *really learning*. They feel especially privileged to be involved in what is happening at this school where we see our mission statement, “*Outstanding education for Deaf learners through South African Sign Language*”, in action!

"These are children that I am so proud of. The method and the presentation! I am very proud of the presentation you taught us. I have been inviting the district officials to come and observe, but they are refusing. But I am so proud – I use the DVDs, the books, the Sign Language structure. I thank your for what you did to us, because I was also stubborn and sticking to my Signed English for some time, slowly but surely I've changed. I also stuck to using the voice. I couldn't understand why it was necessary to switch off the voice. But now I am quiet and I enjoy it and it is all so beautiful."

Nokuzola Mkhonza, HOD Foundation Phase at Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf

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