



WASLI

World Association of
Sign Language Interpreters

WASLI Interpreter Education Guidelines August 2017

Introduction to the Document

The following document is intended as a set of guidelines for countries wishing to offer interpreter education in their country where none exists or where it has been done in an ad hoc fashion. The document is not meant to be prescriptive but rather it is offered in response to the many questions that WASLI receives from countries asking for help in setting up interpreter education opportunities.

In 2009 a WASLI subcommittee was convened to explore ways to support countries making inquiries about interpreter education. The committee had participants who were interpreters and/or interpreter educators from a range of countries – Australia, Belgium, Canada, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Singapore South Africa, Sweden, United States, and Zimbabwe.

The following guidelines were developed by the international working group and approved by WASLI in 2011. They were reviewed in 2017, with minor updates made.

Description of Current Situation

At the current time, there are many countries that either have no formal ways of training sign language interpreters in their country or they have infrequent training made available on an ad hoc basis with no particular plan for the content and sequence of the courses. Occasionally, interpreter trainers from other countries who have longer histories and experiences with interpreter education will travel and offer training in countries where they are invited. While this approach can be helpful, it also can be problematic if the training is not offered in

a way that is linguistically and culturally sensitive, does not support local sign language recognition, and/or does not help to develop locally based trainers who can continue the work.

What WASLI has learned from its committee members and others who provide international consulting is that there are a range of training opportunities that exist in some countries. For example, some countries will hold weekend or week-long seminars while others will offer both sign language workshops and interpreting workshops on a range of topics – structure and grammar of sign languages, team interpreting, ethics and professional practices, language proficiency, interpreting in medical or educational settings, to name but a few. Other countries report having mentorship programs, both structured and informal, as a way of increasing the skills and knowledge of sign language interpreters.

For countries with resources and longer histories we see interpreter education formalized at the post-secondary level, with diploma and degree based programs in existence. Increasingly, we see such countries using blended educational formats, including distance education, on-line learning blended with traditional face-to-face classes, and in some situations, fully on-line programs. Programs can range from vocational qualification programs, to two-year diplomas, to three- and four-year Bachelor or Masters degree options, and some offer a 5-year Postgraduate cycle. Programs can be taken part-time, or full-time and may have a pre-requisite of knowing sign language and graduating from a Sign Language Studies type of program (often 1-2 years in length); other programs accept people with no knowledge of sign language.

WASLI recognizes that for countries of emerging economic means, it is not always possible to begin with creating interpreter education programs in post-secondary institutions, such as a university. So what is the best approach to starting interpreter education in countries with limited resources (financial, human, technological, knowledge, etc.)? Is there an approach that can support effective learning for countries in the early stages of interpreter education?

Based on this current situation, the WASLI Task Group chose to begin by drafting a philosophical statement that emphasizes WASLI's commitment and desire that educators who travel to offer training and educational opportunities work with the Deaf community and respect local and/or national sign languages. This is our first guideline for countries and interpreter trainers as they begin discussions about how best to facilitate interpreter education in their country.

WASLI Philosophical Statement

The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) is committed to the advancement of the profession of signed language interpreting worldwide. Interpreter educators from countries with established interpreter

education will collaborate with educators from countries where interpreter training is not available or is newly developing. Educators will work together to design effective practices and deliver quality education. They will incorporate local expertise in the cultural, linguistic, social and political conditions that affect teaching and practising signed language interpreting in that country. The goal of collaboration is to achieve accessible, relevant and effective training in diverse contexts while maintaining the integrity of national signed languages, customs and norms.

Experienced international educators will collaborate with relevant stakeholders including, but not limited to, Deaf and hearing community members, Deaf and hearing interpreters, national Deaf and Deaf-Blind organisation representatives, spoken language community and translation/interpreting organisation representatives, government representatives, and educational-institution representatives. The aim of these collaborative efforts is the development of expertise and empowerment of local personnel to lead the establishment of interpreter education in their respective countries and to support existing and developing national associations of signed language interpreters. WASLI believes that respect for and incorporation of linguistic and cultural values throughout the process are imperative to the success of all activities.

International Interpreter Education Examples

WASLI explored both published and anecdotal reports of models for developing interpreter education. After reviewing the various models we have chosen to highlight five examples that reflect the principles in the WASLI philosophical statement, and also demonstrate different pathways to achieving interpreter education. There are other models that exist worldwide, however for the purposes of this document we have limited our focus to the following examples;

Kosovo

In this model, consultants from the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and from Australia worked with local interpreter trainers and Deaf clubs to begin identifying people with sign language skills who might be interested in completing some basic interpreter education. The training was offered in stages and the international consultant(s) worked with the local trainer to ensure that he developed the capacity to continue working with the students long after the international consultant returned home. The formation of an Interpreter Working Group also ensured that the steps were taken to document and gain official government recognition of the national sign language.

REFERENCE: Emerson, S. & Hoti, Selman. (2007) *The beginnings of Kosovo Interpreter Training and the Impact of International Advisors*. (pp. 115-122). In Cynthia Roy (Ed). Diversity and Community in the Worldwide Sign Language

Interpreting Professional – Proceedings of the second WASLI conference held in Segovia, Spain, 2007.

Colombia

Like Kosovo, interpreters and Deaf community organizations have partnered with various non-governmental organizations to bring interpreter education opportunities to their country. One specific example of collaboration follows: in 2010, a Canadian interpreter educator was invited to work with interpreters who work in educational settings for a five-day intensive training. Building on a model the educator used in Malaysia, the group identified five interpreters and five Deaf people who could act as language models and interpreter and language mentors during all of the practical activities. This team worked with the outside consultant learning the techniques and approaches, and then leading the skill development portions of the training. In this way the training event benefited the interpreters in educational settings, and expanded the pool of Deaf and interpreter mentors and broadened their skill and knowledge sets for the work. The work continues and universities are also examining ways to offer training in the near future.

REFERENCE: Personal Communication Jose Luis Brevia, June 2017.

Kenya

Collaboration between the Kenyan Deaf Association, the Swedish Deaf Association, and researchers at the University of Nairobi led to projects designed to document and teach Kenyan Sign Language that began in 1991.

Subsequently a curriculum for basic interpreter training has been developed and delivered at this university and elsewhere. The part-time course has three levels that last between six- to twelve-months each, depending on funding. The course certifies interpreters who work in community and international contexts, although sign language interpreting is still emerging as a recognised service and professional occupation. Interpreter education has been complicated by the dissemination of ASL and other signed languages through international aid initiatives, particularly in deaf education, leading to variation in language use and sign language teaching. The Kenyan Association of Sign Language Interpreters was registered in 2000.

REFERENCE: Okombo, O., J. G. Mweri, & W. Akaranga (2009). Sign Language Interpreter Training in Kenya. In J. Napier (Ed) *International Perspectives on Sign Language Interpreter Education. Interpreter Education Series, V.4.* Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 295-300.

Viet Nam

The *Certificate in Interpreting Vietnamese Sign Languages* was established in Viet Nam in 2010, at the Center for Studying and Promoting Deaf Culture at Dong Nai University, which also runs a bilingual junior high school (2000), senior high school (2003), and university programs for Vietnamese deaf students (since 2010). The interpreting program was developed in collaboration with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester. The Center accepts prospective sign language interpreters who use any of the three major sign languages in Viet Nam (Ho Chi Minh City Sign Language, Ha Noi Sign Language, and Hai Phong Sign Language). The courses in the Certificate are taught in modular blocks. Scheduling and length of course has been flexible to accommodate students and the availability of international teachers. Deaf university students, who have been trained in certificate programs in sign language analysis and sign language teaching serve as mentors to interpreter trainees. Currently, the program requires 300 hours of training in sign language analysis, plus 300 hours training in sign language interpretation. Courses include: Language and Linguistics, SL Phonology, SL Morphology, SL Syntax, SL Semantics, Deaf History and Deaf Culture. There are plans to upgrade the interpreter program into a B.A. in Sign Language Interpreting.

SOURCE: Personal Communication from Ms. NGUYEN Thi Hoa, Program Director, via email from Dr. James Woodward, June 24, 2017.

New Zealand

In the late 1970s a national Deaf Association was formed and identified that developing professional interpreting services (as modeled in the USA) was a critical step for the community. They obtained government support to train and employ interpreters in 1985. A first course, of three months, was taught by an interpreter educator from USA, who recruited local Deaf people as language models, and guest speakers to support contextual studies. Despite the short training, an interpreting service was established with the graduates employed by the Deaf Association and demand grew. In 1992, a two-year full-time diploma was established at Auckland Technical Institute, co-taught by a graduate of the first cohort who had gained further qualifications in the USA, and a Deaf lecturer. Local Deaf people were mentored to teach NZSL. The diploma was upgraded to a bachelors degree at Auckland University of Technology in 2011. Interaction with overseas colleagues and links with spoken language interpreters have contributed to the development of the profession in New Zealand.

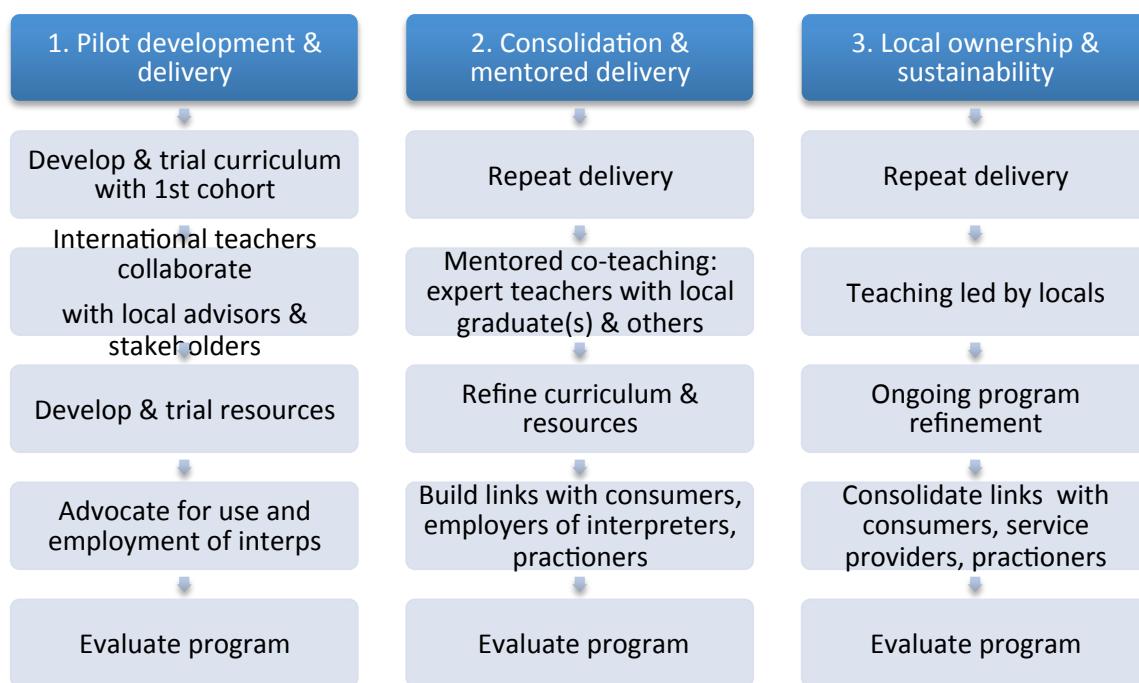
REFERENCE: McKee, R., S. Sameshima, L. Pivac and D. McKee (2009). Sign Language Interpreter Education and the Profession in New Zealand. In J. Napier (Ed) *International Perspectives on Sign Language Interpreter Education. Interpreter Education Series, V.4.* Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 200-220.

Steps towards a training program

The diagram below suggests a three-stage model for developing sustainable interpreter training over an extended period in a country where there is no existing pool of trained interpreters or individuals who have the expertise to develop an interpreter training program.

Note that building strong links with stakeholder communities (consumers, service providers, employers, practising interpreters) is an important element in supporting successful outcomes of interpreter training and professionalization.

Another pathway that has occurred in several countries is for individual interpreters to study and work abroad, returning with professional knowledge and an academic foundation that can be applied to teaching interpreting in their home country.



First Steps

There are some common first steps and content elements that WASLI recommends as part of every country's efforts to develop interpreter education. These are based on countries that have had success in developing formal and advanced interpreter education and we believe these educational components share commonalities regardless of the culture and language community.

Deaf People as Sign Language and/or Interpreter Educators

There is a need to work with sign language communities to train Deaf people as teachers of their sign language and to create mechanisms for the language to be

taught prior to people beginning to learn how to interpret. Strong language skills must be a pre-requisite for successful interpreter education. Many countries have developed strong programs for teaching sign language, Deaf community and culture knowledge, and how to work effectively with Deaf people in order to support them in ways that they desire. These are often called Sign Language or Deaf Studies programs and they have their own sequence of courses.

Documenting the National Sign Language(s) and Regional Variations

Interpreter educators working in countries where they do not know the local sign language are advised to work with local Deaf associations and Deaf people who are the “experts” in their language. To assume that a country does not have a sign language is to risk language colonization as clearly described in Philemon Akach’s (2005) paper in the Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference of WASLI. Spoken language interpreters and linguists can play an important role in helping to document the sign language used by local communities. Finally it is important to also document and respect the language variation that may exist in a country or region, thus supporting all of the diverse ways that language exists in the country. Notice that in the example of training in Viet Nam as described above, the program prepares interpreters in three varieties of sign language, and this is reflected in the name of the qualification. Interpreters need to demonstrate respect for, and practical knowledge of language variation.

Recognizing the national Sign Language

There are many ways to define ‘recognition’ of a sign language. For example there can be social acceptance of the language among a language community, there can be informal recognition of a language by the majority society, and/or there may be formal recognition of the sign language by a government. The lack of formal recognition at government level does not prevent communities and countries from proceeding to prepare and employ interpreters. In fact, the use of interpreters in society often contributes to raising awareness and improving attitudes to sign language, and their availability supports Deaf communities to lobby for recognition goals¹

Creating Sign Language Studies Programs

There are many models of sign language studies programs that provide a foundation for preparing interpreters, however the following components appear to be consistent across several countries:

¹ For a further discussion of the legal recognition of sign languages see Maartje De Meulder: The Power of Language Policy. The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages and the Aspirations of Deaf Communities, 2017, PhD thesis, Jyväskylä University, Finland.

Advanced sign language study 1

This course will review and consolidate students' expressive and receptive skills in the local SL, including the use of typical syntactic patterns, non-manual features, expression of time and number, productive verb morphology, accurate production features, and vocabulary enrichment.

Advanced sign language study 2

SL skills will be refined and extended, including the use of referential space and constructed action, facility with productive lexicon (classifiers) and awareness of SL discourse norms in various contexts (eg, presentational vs. conversational genres). The course aims to increase students' metalinguistic awareness of targeted language structures and their competence in effective use of these in monolingual and bilingual (translation) tasks.

Linguistic structures of (local) sign language

Building upon metalinguistic and practical knowledge gained in sign language study 1 and 2, this course will introduce students to the linguistic analysis of signed languages at the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and discourse. Reference will be made to local and international research literature and learning activities will include opportunity for students to apply linguistic knowledge to guided analysis of aspects of the local SL.

Advanced spoken language study

This module will develop student's awareness of sociolinguistic factors in register and style variation within their spoken language. Interpersonal factors and skills in communication will also be identified in relation to the interpreting process. Learning activities will aim to enrich vocabulary and production skills in a range of discourse genres and registers relevant to the work of interpreters.

Deaf cultural and sociolinguistic studies

Deaf people form a minority group within most societies. This course will develop student's understanding of the life experiences, history, social status, and collective ways of Deaf people in the local and regional context. Critical appraisal of the relevance of Deaf Studies literature from other countries and time periods will form part of course activities.

Service learning in the Deaf community

"Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."ⁱ Students will apply and further their knowledge of sign language and deaf culture by contributing in a practical way to real-life needs or activities in the local Deaf community. The aim is to enrich practical skills, to develop relationships with Deaf and related stakeholders, and to encourage an attitude of service responsibility to the community.

Interpreting Curriculum Content

When students possess the appropriate sign language knowledge and proficiency to begin studying interpreting, an interpreting curriculum may then be developed. A sequence of courses may include the following. This is not intended to be a 'required' list of courses, but to provide ideas about topics and areas that could be addressed, according to the time and expertise available to a training program.

Comparative Linguistics:

The course provides a comprehensive examination of the linguistic structures of the spoken language(s) and the signed language(s) of the country. Topics include study of sociolinguistics with focus on functions of discourse in two languages, the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and discourse, and creation of meaning

Introduction to Professional Practice:

This course outlines how professional sign language interpreting practices and services have developed internationally and locally, with reference to the spoken language interpreting profession. Attributes and competencies of professional sign language interpreters will be identified for reflection. Students will be introduced to models of interpreter role, code of ethics and code of practice, and consider how these apply to the local context for interpreting between Deaf and hearing communities. Aspects of the job market and work conditions are introduced (eg, how interpreting is booked and paid for), including the importance of interpreter organisations in advancing recognition of the profession.

Intercultural Communication:

Introduction to elements of effective and ineffective interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Topics include function of cultures, memberships in cultures, ethnocentrism, and how culture influences identity, communication behavior and discourse norms.

Interpreting Skills and Techniques

This can include several courses, designed to build on each other, ensuring that interpreters have a solid foundation of translation, discourse analysis, consecutive interpreting, and simultaneous interpreting skills and can apply these skills to a variety of texts and interactions. Students begin with dialogic interactions (interviews, consultations, etc.) and progress to dealing with monologic discourse (speeches, lectures, sermons, etc.). Additional seminars will also address working with children, dealing with dynamics of small group meetings, interpreting for non-standard SL users, dealing with technology, etc. Each course will aid interpreters in applying skills needed to self-analyze their

interpreting work, identifying strengths and needs based on an understanding of linguistics and interpretation theory, and models of interpretation.

Co Interpreting: Effective Teamwork

This course explores theory and best practice approaches to working in teams of interpreting, including teams that include interpreters who are deaf. Strategies and approaches to effective message management between the team members remain the focus of this key model of service provision.

Ethics, Professionalism and Decision-Making

Provides a thorough understanding of the codes of ethics, values and strategies that guide interpreters in making decisions in the course of their work. Fosters application of critical thinking to real world scenarios, enhancing the ability to make ethical and sound professional decisions.

Internship or Practicum

Students will observe, practice and critically reflect on interpreting in authentic settings. Ideally students will have opportunities to work alongside experienced interpreters, with student peers, and on their own. Exact requirements will have to be negotiated depending on local conditions. A structured journal of critical reflection on practicum experiences is an essential learning and assessment task in this module.

Specialized settings (based on local contexts)

Students will have opportunities to be exposed to the variations of interpreting in specialized settings. Topics in some countries include interpreting in settings such as religious, platform, medical, educational, legal and Video Relay.

Developing Local Resources

While there are some resources available to WASLI for sharing with countries, it is also important for countries to develop their own materials that support the local context in which the training is situated. Using materials developed for a European or North American context, for example, may not be helpful or applicable. While it can be helpful to examine existing curricula from another country, local educators need to have mechanisms in order to assess the appropriateness of materials for their country, and to be able to create their own or modify existing materials when necessary or desired.

Developing Local Educators and Support for Programs

In terms of developing educators, there is a need to identify interpreters who are experienced and respected by the Deaf community and who can serve as the

first generation of interpreter educators. This also includes Deaf interpreters who may be already working informally in the community.

Advisory groups are also very helpful in shaping interpreter education plans. We stress that there needs to be Deaf community involvement in meaningful ways so that the program which is created is supported by the Deaf community and where they feel that they are a true partner in the training.

Connecting programs and communities

The WASLI Philosophical Statement that shapes our approach speaks to working with spoken language interpreters, linguists, as well as Deaf community members and interpreter educators. There are often developed associations of spoken language interpreters who can act as mentors and potential teachers and who can offer support as the communities of sign language interpreters take steps towards professionalization.

Parallel Activity

While the development of training for interpreters is crucial for Deaf people to be able to access education and services in their community, there is also a need to develop a plan to work with consumer organizations. While interpreters are being trained, Deaf community organizations and interpreters need to find effective strategies to educate and lobby for the creation of interpreter services that are funded appropriately and that provide stable services. This needs to occur across all sectors of the community – health, education, justice, etc.

Conclusion

This document has articulated the WASLI philosophical stance on developing interpreter education in countries where professional sign language interpreting is emerging. It is not the intent of WASLI to prescribe any particular models or processes of interpreter education, as local conditions and opportunities vary widely between countries. The purpose of this guideline is to share some of what has been learned in countries that have experience in establishing and refining professional training for interpreters. This document has summarized examples of pathways to establishing training in several countries, and has outlined potential components of effective interpreter programs. Ultimately, each country must move forward with interpreter education from its own starting point, developing collaborations between local stakeholders and others in the wider profession as appropriate. A key aim of WASLI is to provide an international vehicle that can support these endeavors.

ⁱ See: <http://www.servicelearning.org/what-service-learning>. An example of service learning applied to American Sign Language learners is described at: <http://www.servicelearning.org/slice/resource/american-sign-language-ii-class>