

ASSESSMENT GAP FOR DEAF CHILDREN

Deaf children who use American Sign Language (ASL) are slipping through the cracks when it comes to assessing their language development. Unfortunately, there has been very little research in this area until recently. Currently there are no assessment tools that are appropriate for measuring the ASL language skills (and specifically, those language skills that can support reading development in deaf children).

To start to address this problem, researchers at the Minerva Deaf Research Lab (MDRL) based at the University of Alberta are working on a number of projects to investigate and support deaf children's sign language development and to develop assessments of the sign language skills of deaf children. These projects are funded by the National Science Foundation's Science of Learning Centre on Visual Language and Visual Learning (VL2) at Gallaudet University.

MDRL is currently developing an ASL assessment for 3-8 year olds, which is delivered on a computer through videos and pictures. The assessment is ready to be piloted (that means it is ready for a trial/test run). This is where you come in. We need your help!! We are looking for Deaf children between the ages of 4-7 who use ASL as their primary language to take the test for practice. This will help us to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment (i.e. do the children recognize the pictures, do the instructions make sense to this age group, is the test too easy or too hard?).

Piloting the assessment is a very important part of the test development process. Once the test is piloted and feedback has been received it is hoped that this assessment will become widely available for use in schools.

As deaf children start school it is vitally important that, like every other hearing child, their language abilities are assessed. The development of assessments for deaf children who use ASL is a crucial area of work to ensure that parents and teachers are able to measure the development and accurately monitor the progress of this group of signing children. In this way appropriate assessments help to ensure that education outcomes are improved for deaf signing children.

If you are interested in participating with your child, please contact our MDRL research team, Shelley Williams and Suzanne Spady at mdrl@ualberta.ca. Please feel free to share this email or print copies and pass it on to everyone you know who

have Deaf children between the age of 4 to 7 that use American Sign Language as a primary language.

Please note: If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Dr. Lynn McQuarrie at lynn.mcquarrie@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Education, Extension, Augustana, Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact Dr. Stanley Varnhagen, the Chair of the EEAS REB at Stanley.varnhagen@ualberta.ca.