



Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery

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**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

***Letter of Support for Continuation of the Jockey Club Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education (SLCO) Program***

As a local consultant of the JC-SLCO program, I am writing this letter in support of its continuation whole-heartedly. Affirmatively, I find the program benefits all educational professionals, the parents, the hearing-impaired children and as well as the normal hearing counterparts.

The overall effect of the program is far reaching in view of the comprehensiveness of the scopes including listening, speaking, reading, writing and learning of the children. As a speech-language pathologist, I would like to comment in particular the areas concerning the oral language development of the hearing-impaired children.

Firstly, sound research findings on oral language development have become evident. It has long been a belief, at least in the field of speech therapy, that sign language impedes oral language development. By showing that the majority of hearing-impaired children in the JC-SLCO program achieve satisfactory progress both on signing as well as on oral language, the project provides the first ever data-driven evidence to confirm that signing and oral language is not in a competitive relationship. By improving language processing in general, facilitation both on sign and oral language could be achieved. This is a very important message to the public as well as to the educators in the community.

Another important finding originates from the detailed evaluation on the oral language abilities of children with hearing-impairment who have been receiving mainstream education. About sixty percent of the mainstreamed students were found to have severe language



impairment. Even more alarming is the fact that the language delay does not necessarily associated with one's degree of hearing loss. The belief of integrating children with hearing impairment into normal classrooms as the best option for everyone deserves a serious re-evaluation. The present JC-SLCO program acts as an alternative platform to benefit the hearing impaired population in the educational field who may not fit into the present mainstream program.

Development of training materials has also benefited the community. I am very pleased to witness the production of the speech perception training material (*Sound Jigsaw: A Speech Perception Training Kit for Cantonese-speaking Children with Hearing Impairments*). This is the first training material specifically designed for improving the speech comprehension ability of the hearing-impaired children. With the meticulous content, picture design and training workshop, the training kit has been well received.

Development of oral language database has laid the foundation for further academic study. The database of "The Oral Language Abilities of D/hh children in Mainstream Primary Schools in Hong Kong" provides a comprehensive dataset showing the various speech and language abilities of the students. The dataset is believed to be the most complete database covering the widest school age Cantonese-speaking children. Setting up such a database definitely serves an important foundation for future research.

I have the privilege to meet the program staff, the parents as well as the students during my school visits and meetings. Professor Gladys Tang and Mr Chris Yiu demonstrate remarkable dedication as project leaders. Their contribution is most admirable. Under their leadership, I have witnessed the enthusiasm of the program staff, the contentment of the parents and the joyous learning environment. The laughter of the students, be it from the hearing-impaired or from the normal hearing children, has always been the most highlighted and memorable part of my school visits. I am very honored to be able to participate the program and I am sure the continuation of the project will bring along more benefits to the children.

Yours faithfully,



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