

## Transcript: Beyond the LEAD-K: Core Values

[A black bald woman wearing black-rimmed glasses and a red V-necked shirt is seated in front of a bright blue background.]

Hello! I'm Laurene [taps L on temple]. I'd like to share my thoughts and feelings on the LEAD-K situation. But before I go there, I want to share my congratulations.

[White slide with black text: Congratulations LEAD-K Passed in 8 states! California, Kansas, Oregon, Hawaii, Louisiana, Georgia, South Dakota, New Jersey.]

Now, LEAD-K legislation passed in those states. What an accomplishment! We should take a moment to congratulate them on all their hard work and in overcoming many obstacles to pass their bills. It's remarkable, and we should honor their Deaf communities for the hard work. Well-done.

Let's move onto a topic I'd like to discuss.

[Slide shows a bulls-eye design on a dark pink background, with white concentric circles. The center circle says, "CORE VALUES."]

"Beyond the LEAD-K: Core Values." I want to talk about specific core values. Now, I want to emphasize that I'm fine with LEAD-K and support it wholeheartedly, that concept. I can't wait to see progress in the areas of language deprivation and I encourage early language exposure so that children can acquire language before kindergarten. There's no question the concept of LEAD-K is fine. But I'd like to talk about my concerns regarding the general context of LEAD-K; it has a major impact on the community. I'd like to discuss five points related to LEAD-K, or rather, core values, not necessarily about LEAD-K. My message may be long-winded, but I'd like you to take time and review what I say. Take your time, and go back and forth if you want. Whatever works for you is good, but I'd like to share my perspectives.

[Black screen with white text: "#1: Humanity, #2: Natural Languages, #3: Equity, not equality, #4: Quality of ASL, #5: Survival of ASL." "#1: Humanity" changes to yellow text.]

The first one is extremely crucial. The community reaction to the announcement of A.G. Bell (AGB) and LEAD-K's collaboration was profound. I took a few steps back and examined the sign they used for "collaboration." It's certainly a buzzword that's also triggering. People reacted strongly, and were upset, and were triggered. I was triggered, too, because of our history and experiences with AGB. Not only that, but our personal experiences as well, which is part of the five core values, and the reaction snowballed for many reasons. This announcement led to distrust, yes, because of the lack of transparency and dialogue. The community was not involved, and especially not people of color; they felt marginalized. That was really not a democratic process where people felt they were engaged and involved in the process. That's where the community felt betrayed. Nonetheless, whether that was intentional or not, I understand. It's important that you understand that reaction, which has led to an "Affective Filter," which I sign like window blinds opening or closing, as hypothesized by Krashen.

[A photograph is shown of a brown-skinned woman with curly black hair wearing a light blue cardigan. She is holding her face in her hands, as if upset. On top is the text, “Krashen’s Hypothesis, Affective Filter.”]

Really, this is related to language. When a language is difficult for a person who can’t understand it, that person will filter it out as if closing mental window blinds. Emotionally, that person won’t be willing to learn the language. That’s Krashen’s hypothesis, and I see that it somewhat applies to our community reaction when the collaboration between AGB and LEAD-K was announced. We all reacted, closing our blinds to filter it out. Now, I understand that people are saying that they refuse to be involved if AGB is, and are resistant. They want to focus on children and the children’s future. I completely understand that. We don’t mean to ignore the children, no, but the emotions took over and our blinds closed out any openness. By doing that, we’re not dealing with people, nor respecting them or providing support with compassion. We’re not listening or opening ourselves up as we unpack or offer apologies. We haven’t done that yet; our blinds are still closed. So that’s where we need to respect that group, people who feel upset. Honoring these people is a tremendously valuable step, just like we honor people who experience domestic violence. For me, it’s like if NAACP partnered with the Ku Klux Klan. Oh, that’d incite mob riots and all hell would break loose, that’s for sure. Emotions are running high.

So, the point of core values where we feel cherished, important, and valued. That’s the first value — humanity. What that means is the people talking about how they’re upset, we should do nothing but listen to them. Listen! Listen to them. At the same time, take time to examine why they say things, why they feel children are important, and why they don’t want to be involved. Hold off on your reactions, and listen to see what happened to cause their reactions and being upset. There are reasons for their feelings. On that note, I’d like to talk about Maya Angelou’s comments. Take a look.

[A black-and-white picture of Maya Angelou is shown, with the quote in black text: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” “...how you made them feel.” is in italics. At bottom in white is “Maya Angelou, 1928-2014.”]

Let’s go onto the second value.

[Black screen shows white text: “#1 Humanity, #2: Natural Languages, #3: Equity, not equality, #4: Quality of ASL, #5: Survival of ASL.” “#2: Natural Languages” is in yellow.]

Now, I’ve seen people say that ASL is natural, but English is the “national” language. Funny, these two words have the same signs, but I’ll fingerspell “national.” That comment really bothers me. Yes, ASL is natural, but English being a national language? I don’t agree, no. All human languages, whether it’s ASL, English, French, or any other language, are *all* natural! Whatever individuals use, in their homes, with their families, or in other environments, they’re all natural languages. Now, English being national — the truth is the U.S. Congress has not officially recognized English as the nation’s official language. Not yet, no; it’s not mentioned anywhere. America is mostly English-speaking, but that’s all. That’s all. It’s so important that we recognize

that all languages are natural, but now the issue is: we have ASL, okay, but we need to also recognize other signed languages, like Mexican Sign Language (LSM), which is used in America as well. Other languages are important too. Exposure to any natural language for babies and their acquisition of language will lead to the learning of other languages after that. We can't recognize only one language, no. There are many others, natural languages.

Now, for English, some people have mentioned signed systems, cued speech, and so on. We can't consider these, because they're not natural languages. The only natural languages are ASL and English, period, along with other signed languages and English, Spanish, and so on. But specifically, I want to be clear about it being natural, not national.

[Black screen shows white text: "#1 Humanity, #2: Natural Languages, #3: Equity, not equality, #4: Quality of ASL, #5: Survival of ASL." "#3: Equity, not equality" is in yellow.]

Thirdly, I've seen people involved with LEAD-K talking about how Deaf people and hearing people must be equal. They must be at the same level, and I say no to that. I don't agree. That's a problematic word, "equality." It's like saying that Black and white people, or man and woman, must be equal. I don't like that way of thinking, because I prefer to look at a Deaf person as a whole person, being the best possible person. Looking at a person, a woman, anyone, as a whole person with individual strengths. Black person, DeafBlind, wheelchair user, all kinds of people — each has their own strengths. To me, "equal" implies competition, and that's not what we're looking for. We should look at each person as a whole being, and that's all we need to be clear about. After all, not all hearing people are great, not all women are great, not all men are great, and not all Black people are great. So what people define as "equal" is not my core value. I look at individuals and who they are as whole persons.

[Black screen shows white text: "#1 Humanity, #2: Natural Languages, #3: Equity, not equality, #4: Quality of ASL, #5: Survival of ASL." "#4: Quality of ASL" is in yellow.]

The fourth value: People talk about who are really qualified to assess Deaf children aged 0-5 and their ASL skills. Different people say, "Well, that could be an ASL specialist, an ASL teacher, or a Deaf educator. Various people can assess a child's ASL between the ages of 0-5." There are milestones, which are fine. But I don't like that, because it bothers me. I'll show you this:

[White screen: "The Truth" is at top center. On the left side, black text says, "Almost everyone can evaluate or assess Deaf children's ASL as long as s/he knows or uses ASL." Below that, in green, is "Fact!" On the right, in black, is "Almost everyone can evaluate or assess Deaf children's English, especially spoken as long as s/he knows or uses spoken English." Below that in red is, "No, not a fact!"]

[White screen: At top center is "Credentials" in black. On the left side is "ASL Assessors" in black, then below that is a thinly bordered box that says, "Note: Licensed/non-licensed Deaf Education teacher (with no training)." Below that in red text: "None!" On the right: "Spoken English Assessors." Below that in a box: "Licensed/certified Speech/Language Pathologist, Licensed/certified Audiologist, Licensed/certified language specialist." Below that in red, "Many!"]

[Top center: “The Truth...” is in black text. On the left side is, “Deaf Teachers of USA in Deaf Education” then below that, in green, is “Few – 15%.” On the right in black it says, “Hearing Teachers of USA in Deaf Education,” and below that in red is, “Many – 85%.”]

So, regarding credentials for a person who assesses ASL: none exists currently. Licensures, certifications, or trainings are sparse out there to date. That’s pretty serious. Usually those individuals are people who studied ASL at other universities, but specializing in ASL for hearing students, and then use these principles to analyze language for ages 0-5. Yet, for spoken English among babies, there tend to be licensed professionals like speech-language pathologists and others to focus on such assessments. Although I’m sure there might be hearing people who assess babies informally on paper. But they *do* have professionals, team members, or even bringing in professional assessors to do that for spoken English. But Deaf people? Ah, [shrugs] bring in anyone. I take issue with that, and that doesn’t align with my core values. They don’t have training, and that’s problematic. That means they look down at ASL and think, “Okay, good enough.” That mindset of “better than nothing” is something I cannot agree with. Even so, there is some good news. We have a group of about 34 individuals who underwent training last summer and then again this summer. They will work towards certification with a specific number of hours focused on assessing different areas. This is good news, and I’ll share more information and a link on that. I’m thrilled we finally have that. It’s a starting step at least.

Going back to people’s general attitude about ASL being no big deal, good enough, not such a serious thing. For ages 0-5, it’s crucial. That’s my core value, and I don’t want that attitude. Both languages should have the same expectations with qualified assessors, documentation, and data. That’s my position on that issue. I know some people disagree with me, but I continue to stand my ground. Assessments must be done by qualified professionals, and data must be documented well and fairly. At the same time, of course teachers or other individuals can perform informal documentation. Doing the best with what we have is fine. But thinking assessment doesn’t require qualified professionals or licensure or certification — absolutely not.

And also, some people say, “We need ASL to improve English skills.” I say no to that. It’s not always true. Not always true. We need English-speaking people to improve our ASL? No, that’s not always true. It’s not always true. By saying we need ASL to improve our English shows that we have the mindset that English is still superior to ASL. No, let’s not say that. We want to support the development of stronger ASL skills. We need to raise the bar when it comes to ASL, and expand our pride and knowledge of ASL. That will help with the acquisition of other languages. We need to invest and have a stronger focus on the foundations of strong ASL skills. We don’t do that; we kind of get by. English has so many resources, while ASL doesn’t. It’s time for us to focus on building and developing quality in people to assess ASL, and provide training and resources.

[Black screen shows words in white: #1 Humanity, #2: Natural Languages, #3: Equity, not equality, #4: Quality of ASL, #5: Survival of ASL. “#5: Survival of ASL” is in yellow.]

The fifth and final core value may be a trigger for some of you. It bothers me, that one. You might not agree with me, but that one is worth recognizing. I’d like to show you a picture.

[Illustration of three women pushing against a glass ceiling; they are covered in a cool blue hue. On top of the glass ceiling are two pairs of shoes/pants in white colors. Black text says, “The Glass Ceiling: The Unseen Power Systems.” On the right side is a blue square with an arrow pointing to the shoes/pants with the text, “Who are standing on the glass?”]

You’ve probably seen that picture of the glass ceiling before; we’ve discussed that in my previous vlogs. It’s similar to women experiencing the glass ceiling and not being promoted, and many other diverse experiences. Deaf people experience this, too, with hearing people standing on top of the glass ceiling. Now, let’s analyze this illustration with the ages 0-5 group. It’s key to analyze one thing: *who* is standing on top of the ceiling? Look at who is standing there. We need to fight this barrier, of course, but who are those people? That’s crucial to look at.

[White slide shows in black text: “ASL will not thrive if:” Below that is a black-and-white illustration of white people standing in a group. To the right of the illustration is a thin-bordered box with the text, “Majority of White Professionals and Community Advocates”]

A blue line divides this top half part from the bottom. At the bottom is a color illustration of children of different skin colors and clothes. To the right of the illustration is a thin-bordered box with the text, “Majority of Children of Color.” At the very bottom in red text is, “Language and Cultural deprivation.”]

[A gif appears of Tina Fey doing an eye roll. At top is “Not Enough POC.”]

To date, I’ve looked at different people who are involved in promoting resources for the 0-5 age group and standing on top of the glass ceiling. They tend to be predominantly white. And then below the ceiling is a large group of children aged 0-5. There are white children, yes, but it’s a dense group. This group of children is still not moving up or thriving. Will ASL thrive? No, ASL will not thrive among these children. Maybe there’ll be a couple of children who will, but they’ll be the exception. Most will continue hit that ceiling. I’d like to show you Chad Ludwig’s [signs “like” with the index finger and thumb for Chad’s name sign] vlog, which I’m showing with his permission. I have a clip where he points something out.

[A white man wearing black t-shirt is sitting in what appears to be a kitchen. The screen shows that this is taken from Facebook, with blue text at top: “Chad A. Ludwig, November 1, at 6:23 a.m.” His post says, “(For Oregonians) Post-LEADK in our state and what’s next?”]

Chad: Two years ago, a LEAD-K bill passed here in Oregon. After the first year, we received data related to Deaf and hard of hearing kids in the school system. The data showed a clear delay in language acquisition among the children, and all failed the kindergarten assessment. Now, two years later, we just got another set of data for the second year a few days ago. The data shows that Deaf and hard of children are still delayed, not quite caught up yet. However, it also shows that Deaf and hard of hearing children of color are even more delayed. That gap is extremely concerning.

Laurene: Chad points out that the collected data shows a severe delay. But remember that when white children are delayed, children of color are even more delayed. That's a major gap and a large group. We can make a difference if we can carry ASL and help it thrive. We can do that...or not. The people standing on that glass ceiling are stuck there. Their intention is to try and help, but they're in the way. They're in the way.

So what can we do? We must have a good sledgehammer to smash that ceiling and break through. We need to break through as a team, pulling children up through that ceiling.

[A photograph of a sledgehammer hitting a fractured glass ceiling; the hand holding the hammer is light-skinned. At top in black is, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling."]

[A white screen has black text saying, "ASL will thrive if only..." Below that is a color illustration of diverse people of different ethnicities and races. On right is black text, "Majority of Professionals & Advocates of Color." A blue line divides the top half from the bottom, and at bottom is the same illustration of diverse children in various colors of clothes, with a thin-bordered box at right that says, "Majority of Children of Color."]

Okay, once the children have gotten through the glass ceiling, with all that diversity, ASL will thrive. Why? Role models. That's all. It doesn't cost anything. Once you have role models, that's it. They'll carry ASL and help it continue. So keep that in mind: who is standing on that ceiling? If they continue staying there on the ceiling and the group of children gets bigger, ASL will not thrive. Maybe a few will break through and make it. But that will only be a very few. Many will not. And it's a huge group of people who will not. Yeah.

You know, if we want to cherish ASL, with my core values and if we want to see a strong presence, with ASL growing and thriving, we must change the people standing on the glass ceiling. At the same time, we want to be careful of who we pull in. There's always tokenism, of course. That's a gray area, one that I vlogged about in September 2015. You can take a look at that vlog where I talked about tokenism. So it's important that you bring in different people of color. I know you might be rolling your eyes, but I'm sorry, I'll be blunt. We/those people of color still exist here. So it's important to bring in people and train them. Please mentor and support them, and come together. You don't realize how this can make a huge difference. If students aged 0-5 can look up and see people of color signing, they'll see that they'll be next. They'll then carry on ASL and ASL will thrive.

In wrapping up, let's take another look at that again: [Black screen with white text: "#1: Humanity, #2: Natural Languages, #3: Equity, not equality, #4: Quality of ASL, #5: Survival of ASL."]

Now, in talking about core values. They go beyond LEAD-K, which is fine. But the core values that I'm discussing — I hope we share the same values. I'm sure you have your own, but my point is, first, to really respect people who are heartbroken and upset. I have my process, too, of introspection, unpacking, trying to understand what it all means, involving people from all sides, and having compassion for their frustrations, resistance, and being upset. By coming together, we can heal, which is essential.

Secondly, it's important to understand that ASL and other languages are natural. As long as humans use them, whether signing or speaking to chat or converse, they're called natural. That's indeed important. Not "national," no.

Thirdly, it's important to not strive for equality, but rather equity. It's not about hearing and Deaf people being equal. Instead, look at the whole person or being.

Fourthly, I really believe in the importance of raising the bar for ASL by cherishing it. Analyze, document, research, and train qualified people on assessment. That will make people really look at languages like English and ASL and realize how much value they have and respect their existence, instead of thinking ASL is "good enough." That's not okay.

Finally, although all of the values are important, this one is really exceptional. If you want ASL to thrive, examine how we can work to smash that glass ceiling. We can get through that ceiling and work together by sharing and having role models. That's how ASL will thrive.

So long.

[Slide shows a bulls-eye design on a dark pink background, with white concentric circles. The center circle says, "CORE VALUES."]