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Exciting Developments in Deaf Education!
(by Minnie Mae Wilding-Diaz)

From March 7 through March 10, I was in San Francisco attending a TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) convention. TESOL has 17 different "interest sections," one of which is TEDS (Teaching English to Deaf Students). This small interest section hosted several workshops related to teaching deaf students. Because of TEDS, about 35 Deaf people attended TESOL, and to my surprise, most of them had views similar to mine regarding deaf education. I also learned more about some very exciting occurrences in education for the deaf across the country, and would like to share them with you.

After almost four years' worth of struggle, the Indiana State School for the Deaf has recently officially and truthfully adopted a "bilingual and bicultural" approach to deaf education. (NOTE: there is a difference between officially accepting something and truthfully accepting it. Truthfully accepting something means that the idea is actually implemented.) Let me now explain briefly what this approach generally means. It means that students in pre-school through elementary through high school classes will be exposed to both ASL and English. This means ASL will be more than just officially recognized as the child's first language. It will be recognized as the more appropriate language to use as a mode of communication in class. This means that instruction in classes such as science, social studies and math will be presented in ASL. This means English will be taught through reading and writing, and not through inadequate sign systems. This means teachers will not use their voices while signing, thus increasing the understandability of their sign language. This means more Deaf teachers and teacher's aides in the classroom. This means speech and lipreading will be taught in a separate class, not as a component of each class offered during the day. This means a change in the whole school system and philosophy. This involves educating the parents, teachers, administration, and other people involved with deaf children such as houseparents, audiologists, and teacher trainers. It means more study of "Deaf mannerisms" which are crucial to developing good relationships between teacher and students (I will be submitting an article on eye gaze later that will clarify what I mean by "Deaf mannerisms").

The two people (one Deaf - David Reynolds and one hearing - Ann Titus) instrumental in getting this program going at Indiana were at the TESOL convention, and I listened to the story of their struggle at least four times. Each time, I was inspired. These two people put their jobs at risk while fighting to get their proposal truthfully accepted. They gave up a lot of their time and went through a lot of confrontations. I'd like to list the steps they went through (which were similar to the steps the Deaf President Now movement went through).

First, they empowered themselves. It all started during the fall of 1986 in a "Communications Committee" which was set up to establish

Paragraphs marked in yellow weren't included in my submission to the UAD Bulletin - I plan to include these in my follow-up article & expand on it more on the parallelism with Gallaudet's Deaf President Now movement -

a communication policy for the school. Ann Titus was chair, and of the fifteen people assigned to be on the committee, only one was deaf. After a while, the committee members realized that they were looking at different sign systems as different codes of English, none of which boasted of being a language in itself. After four months, the committee read Cokely and Baker's American Sign Language: A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture, and discovered what you and I already know: ASL is a language. It was at this point that the committee (bless their hearts) decided to include more deaf people. The committee grew to a number of 27 people who now worked on empowering themselves by learning more about themselves, about ASL, and about Deaf culture. The committee decided to have David Reynolds become co-chair with Ann, making the committee itself bilingual/bicultural. An interesting idea was that the hearing people who fully understood and accepted what the Deaf people on the committee were arguing, were then called "Allies." This represented a partnership, a collaboration; yet there were limits as to how far the hearing person could go in speaking up for Deaf people. (This is still a very new concept, I feel, and both hearing allies and Deaf people need to test out this new ground.)

Second, they built a "power base." Members spoke to parent groups and deaf people not on the committee. To their (and my) surprise, parents were the easiest group to convince that a bilingual/bicultural approach would be the best way to go for their deaf children. People who went to the presentations completely understood that deafness shouldn't be viewed pathologically (medically) but culturally and linguistically.

Third, the committee stuck together. Things did get rough enough that the superintendent announced he would never hire the Deaf committee co-chair to coordinate the program if it were to be adopted at the school. The committee refused to recommend anyone else except the two people who co-chaired the committee. In the end, this Deaf co-chair was hired after all.

Fourth, the committee developed a list of three requirements and stuck to them (remember DPN's four demands?). The three requirements were: 1) Adopt the bilingual/bicultural program as proposed by the committee now, 2) Appoint the committee co-chairs as full-time co-coordinators of the program, and 3) Change the school's mission statement to reflect this change in system. During a retreat in early January, 1990 (only three months ago), the administration were finally "converted" and agreed to the three conditions.

A pilot kindergarten program will start this fall, and the co-coordinators hope to expand the program throughout the elementary school within a year or so, with the junior high and high school programs following shortly after.

It so happened that another participant at the TESOL convention was a Deaf high school English teacher (Marlon Kuntze) from the California State School for the Deaf at Fremont. He had already

