

Hearing in Silence: Immersion in Deaf Culture

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Leah J. Alvis

**Thesis Advisor
Joan Studnicky**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan A. Studnicky". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 10, 1997

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Abstract

The cooperative program between Ball State and the Indiana School for the Deaf in Indianapolis includes three essential elements. These are the work in the classrooms, teaching in the Communication Center of the school, and the experiences of cultural immersion. The first element deals with the responsibilities of the classroom faced by the Ball State students. The second element discusses the duties of teaching to the unique communication needs of Deaf children. The third element encompasses a wide range of topics regarding Deaf culture and the author's contact with them, such as entry into Deaf culture, aspects of American Sign Language, and communicating in Deaf culture. In addition to these three elements is an explanation of Deaf culture to the general, hearing public. A prototype brochure, to use by the Indiana School for the Deaf and Ball State University for promoting the program has also been produced. Included in the brochure are brief descriptions of the three primary components, and photographs of interaction of university and ISD students.

The Program

Ball State University, in cooperation with the Indiana School for the Deaf, offers Deaf Education majors the opportunity to live for two semesters at the Deaf school's campus in Indianapolis. While students are there, they receive credit in SPCED 266, a practicum experience offered as an elective in the major, for working with the Deaf children in a classroom setting. They are required to write lesson plans and carry them out while being supervised by the classroom teacher and / or the university supervisor. During the spring semester, students also teach in each of the three departments' Communication Centers on campus, writing lesson plans and carrying them out with the guidance of the ISD teachers. BSU students are also required to volunteer 15 hours of their free time each month to help the school in a variety of its daily functions. To ensure that the students do not lose credit hours toward graduation, the university offers three or four courses each semester at the Indianapolis campus so the Ball State students have a full course load. Classes are taught by university faculty or faculty from ISD and usually meet once a week. The practicum classes comprise the remaining credit hours.

To assist students in the transition to this strange new world, the Deaf School and the University provide faculty liaisons in Indianapolis and Muncie: Mary Alice Moon an ISD staff member, Dr. Azar Hadadian, a professor of special education at Ball State, and JoAnn Padden, a graduate assistant who lives in the dorm with the Ball State students. Each of these women helps the students scholastically, professionally, and personally, and without their aid, it would have been impossible for us to maintain our sanity under the stressful situations in which we found ourselves.

Ms. Moon has served on the school's faculty for many years in a variety of functions, including classroom teaching and working with Ball State groups. During

our first week, Mary Alice introduced us to the ISD staff and to the other girls. It was essential to become acquainted with one another as we would be living together in very close quarters for the next 9 months and would need one another's help for support. She also helped us become familiar with the campus and Deaf culture. Since 1991 when Dr. Hadadian came to Ball State, she has taken over the responsibility for working with Ball State students. Her role was that of mentor and advisor in all our struggles. She read the daily journals we wrote about our practicum experience and observed us teaching our original lesson plans. Azar also taught our special education law class, in which we learned about the legal aspects of teaching. JoAnn is working toward her Master of Science in Deaf Education, and works at the Deaf School through her graduate assistantship. JoAnn helped us the most by being a friend, offering advice based on having a little more experience, and by being a link to Mary Alice. Her mediation was extremely helpful in settling small difficulties among the group members. Another invaluable person was Linda Ross, a doctoral candidate from the Ohio State University who lived in the dorm with us while doing research about Deaf culture and its acquisition. From her knowledge of Deaf culture, she gave us a great deal of useful information that helped us have the courage to socialize with the ISD students.

The First Week

The first week was a flood of new experiences for which we were all unprepared, and we felt like we had moved to a foreign country. From a certain perspective, we were in a different place than many of us had ever been; a place in which we were no longer the majority. As hearing people, we were in the minority, and felt very out of place. Had it not been for the people who made us feel welcome, we would all have been unable to continue with the year and the work we had to do. One of the problems we faced was most of the students were

so busy catching up with their friends from summer break that they did not have time to help introduce a few overwhelmed Ball State students to campus and the school. We understood their need to hang out with their friends to catch up with all the news of the summer.

During that first week, Mary Alice organized a series of speakers and panels of both Deaf and hearing people to inform us about the school and Deaf culture. Through these meetings, we learned a great number of things, such as how to use an interpreter, classification of ASL as a language, the way some staff members dealt with growing up Deaf, and the services offered through the school. The information we received paved the way for us to become acquainted with Deaf culture, and the non-structured settings were a wonderful introduction to the culture. We received a tour of the campus to begin to learn locations of places at the school that we needed to know.

History

We glimpsed the school's rich history through stories told throughout the year and a walk through the museum, which had been established in the top floor of the Administration Building. The Indiana School for the Deaf was established in 1843 by William Willard, the first American-born Deaf founder of a school for the Deaf in America. The following year, the state officially recognized the school and began financial support of the facility. The school was moved to its present location on 42nd Street several years later. ISD's educational philosophies have changed over time; ASL (American Sign Language) approach in the 17th Century, Oralism from 1880 to the mid-20th Century, Total Communication, and Bi-Bi (Bilingual-Bicultural) most recently.

The change of philosophies was the same as many Deaf Schools in the United States and has included a variety of theories. In 1880, the Milan Conference outlawed the use of American Sign Language in classrooms, although

it had been the language of instruction since the establishment of Deaf schools in America. The Milan Conference was a world-wide gathering of hearing men involved in the education of the Deaf students who decided that Deaf education was failing. Deaf adults and native users of ASL, however, kept the language alive in the dorms where students learned about their culture. As hearing people eventually began to realize the importance of ASL, more schools allowed its use in classrooms. Bilingual-Bicultural Education recognizes the need for ASL in the instruction of Deaf children, its use in learning written English, and the value of Deaf teachers and role models in the schools. The name is derived from the fact that each language (English and American Sign Language) has its place in the classroom and both can be used in education. In the 1980's, Gallaudet University officially recognized Bi-Bi as a valid educational philosophy, which led ISD adoption of it in 1990. The School has emerged as the focus of controversy around the country because it is one of the first Deaf schools which officially recognizes the Bi-Bi philosophy. Despite years of research, though, many experts still discount the need for ASL in the classroom and doubt that a school espousing Bi-Bi can produce successful students.

The Indiana School for the Deaf has many distinguishing factors: it is the only Deaf school in the United States to offer a year-long teaching experience to college students who live in the dorms. To have success in the classroom, Ball State students must learn not only about teaching, but also ASL and Deaf culture. The students in the classes are a part of the culture, and to teach them, we had to understand their history and issues within Deaf culture. Without knowledge of the culture, our time in the classrooms would be wasted because other schools could help us to teach, but no other setting exposed us to their intensely different culture. That part of the experience at the Deaf school is the most important aspect, as all participants will readily attest.

Our knowledge of Deaf culture was mainly acquired through interactions with Deaf people, talking to them and living with them on a daily basis. Other information came from the Ball State Foundations of Deaf Education class taught by a teacher at ISD. Our class time each week was one time strictly reserved for discussions of issues facing Deaf people now and in the past. The class was invaluable and unique, because we could converse with a Deaf adult who was extremely proficient in his history, and an experienced educator. The class influenced our experience at the Deaf School by informing us about issues in the field of Deaf Education, and general attitudes held by some Deaf people.

Membership in American Deaf Culture

The most surprising thing I learned through the year was that membership in American Deaf culture is highly structured and follows a strictly regimented system. Membership in Deaf culture can be accessed by four avenues; audiological, social, political, and linguistic. Though these avenues seem different, they are related to one another through their role in Deaf culture. Audiological refers to the physical loss of hearing which automatically excludes hearing people: this narrow avenue fosters close relations among members of the Culture. Social refers to the ability to interact in the community with friends in the culture and to feel at ease in Deaf culture situations. Political refers to the power a Deaf or hearing person can exert on behalf of the Deaf community at the local, state, or national level, and the motivation to use that power. Linguistic involves the ability to communicate effectively using American Sign Language, an ability which is most integral to acceptance in the community. It is possible to access Deaf culture through any combination of these avenues, and none of them is the "right" way to enter into the community.

In addition to each of these routes, the extent of one's acceptance into the culture depends a great deal on personal attitude. We discovered the importance

of attitudes concerning Deaf people and their culture through conversations with Deaf people as they described the factor which most influences them when meeting someone for the first time. Hearing people are, by definition, restricted to partial membership into Deaf community, and can access it only through political, social, and linguistic means. That is not to say that it is impossible for hearing people to become active members of Deaf community, but that participation will be limited to some degree.

As several paths are available into Deaf community, there are many levels of involvement in the community, which can be described in terms of parental relationships with the culture. Children whose parents are members of the community are born into and have natural access to Deaf culture, because of their parents' involvement. Deaf children born to hearing parents, however, struggle to find their way into the culture but have easier access than hearing people. Hearing people born to Deaf parents usually grow up in Deaf culture among their parents' friends and language, and therefore have easier access. Hearing children born to hearing adults have the most difficult time entering Deaf culture, because they generally do not have natural access through language or friends. While Deaf people have many opportunities for entry into the culture, hearing people usually must learn additional skills to enter the culture, such as ASL or norms of Deaf culture.

The reader should bear in mind that these are generalizations for which exist at least one exception. Another point to remember is that the author is hearing, and has learned this information second-hand from a limited experience with Deaf people. I spent only one year getting to know the culture, and have only a few Deaf friends upon whom to draw my information. While Deaf people have the most natural path into the culture, some choose not to participate in Deaf culture for any number of reasons. I am unable to discuss the reasons why they

should choose not to become active, because I have never posed such a question to a Deaf person. It should also be noted that the ability to function successfully in Deaf culture varies among people, both Deaf and hearing, and cannot be predicted with any accuracy. One must simply begin the process of becoming active and make decisions based on individual situations.

American Sign Language

One of the most important aspects of Deaf culture is ASL (American Sign Language). To fully participate in the culture, you must have the ability to communicate with other members of the culture: for example, one must know at least a small amount of spoken English to participate in American hearing culture. Many of the BSU participants had only limited previous knowledge of the ASL from sign language classes offered at Ball State, but few had experience in real conversations with fluent signers. Our first week was a continuous exercise in asking questions: Who is he/ she?; What is that?; What are they talking about?; What's the sign for...?; etc. We learned quickly to ask for clarification if we did not understand, because you might misunderstand and make a fool of yourself. One of the students and I were having a conversation. When he asked me why I'd started learning ASL. I thought he'd asked where I lived, so I answered that I lived in Kentucky. He looked at me as though I were from a different planet and rephrased his question. After several attempts, I finally understood his query. If I had asked for clarification in the first place, there would have been less confusion in the conversation and we could have repaired it more quickly. Native speakers of a language commonly use repair strategies without thinking about it, but using them in another language is much harder, especially in an uncomfortable situation. Over the year though, we became more comfortable in Deaf culture and with ASL, so that we could communicate more efficiently.

Communicating with Deaf people is different from communicating with hearing people in other ways than just repairing a damaged conversation. I found the most difficult aspect to be the amount of eye contact necessary during conversations. In General American English, the dialect spoken by the majority of people in America, it is socially acceptable to hold eye contact for less than 30 seconds at a time before looking away. Deaf people maintain eye contact for a much longer period of time and for a larger percent of the conversation, which is very uncomfortable for hearing people. The uses of eye contact are very specific and are as necessary to the conversation as the signs themselves. In spoken languages, enough information is conveyed through the voice and words that it is not necessary to have lengthy, consistent eye contact. Signers, though, use eye contact to initiate conversation and is held while the individuals are talking with one another. Eye contact conveys a significant amount of information in ASL and you have no choice but to maintain it in order to fully understand the conversation. The amount of eye contact required was very difficult for many of the participants to overcome. Hearing people can sustain eye contact with family members and close friends, but it is uncomfortable to do so with strangers or acquaintances. Many of the Deaf people were complete strangers to us, so we had to adjust our customs to their culture.

The most noticeable contrast between spoken English and American Sign Language is the mode of communication; auditory versus visual, respectively. The transference of skills between an auditory and a visual language is very small, therefore increasing the effort required to switch between the two. The process of moving quickly between two languages is called code switching and is done by multilingual people around the world. Hearing children of Deaf adults learn this skill very well through their childhood experience of frequently moving between talking and signing. Interpreters and hearing signers also learn this skill quickly and

skillfully. It requires a conscious knowledge of the differences between the languages and the user must be able to distinguish in their mind in order to make the difference in their communication with others.

ASL and English are different in other ways than just the mode of communication, they also differ in the means of receiving and processing the information. American Sign Language is a visual communication; conveyed through the air, received in the eye, transported through the optic nerve, and interpreted by the brain. Spoken English is an auditory communication; conveyed through the air, received by the ear, transported through the auditory nerve, and interpreted by the brain. The effects of the differences far outweigh the similarities in this case.

These differences presented problems for all of the participants when trying to become more proficient in ASL, because we were not accustomed to relying on our eyes for all the linguistic cues. Although spoken English uses some visual cues to convey information, these signals do not change the meaning of or inhibit the message. In ASL, however, some of the essential elements of language are carried through the visual cues. Therefore, in order to fully understand the message, one must process the visual cues efficiently and accurately.

Experience with Deaf Culture

The school itself offered many opportunities for exposure to and learning about Deaf culture. Without a doubt, the most difficult lessons learned through the practicum experience at ISD were confronting American Deaf Culture. Few Deaf Education majors at BSU, prior to their involvement at the Deaf school, have much real experience dealing with and/or communicating with Deaf people. This phenomenon occurs through no fault of their own, but largely due to the aspect of Deaf culture which centers Deaf populations near residential schools and Deaf clubs, which, in turn, are centered around larger cities. Not all large cities have an

active Deaf community, and one's exposure to an existing community varies among people and situations.

Geography is not the only factor which restricts exposure to the community. Another is the educational trend to place Deaf students in residential schools away from their hearing peers, hometowns, and neighborhoods. Therefore, hearing children who would have encountered these children in their neighborhoods and schools have only limited exposure to Deaf children. As a result of these restrictions, the odds of BSU students having had exposure to Deaf people during childhood are slight; a fact which severely hampers their knowledge of Deaf people and their culture. This ignorance of the culture corresponds to an inability to identify with and understand Deaf culture.

Many BSU students have their first experiences with Deaf culture through American Sign Language classes at BSU and other classes in the major. The instructors impart a great deal of important information and give exposure to issues in Deaf Education and culture. While this information is helpful and necessary, it is difficult to integrate the knowledge without personal knowledge of Deaf people on a personal level: integration can only be accomplished through personal exposure. Contact with Deaf people is not enough, however, the interaction must be productive and in an environment conducive to communication and cooperation. Some examples of this type of environment are community or school sign language classes, friendships, churches and other civic organizations. For a hearing student, the practicum at the Deaf School is one of great learning and discovery; one which contains many expected and unexpected difficulties to overcome. While one might assume that the similarities between the hearing and Deaf might be small and few, they are many and various.

Sports

Like other schools across the nation, ISD has sports events for their students to participate in throughout the year, such as football, basketball, track, cross country, and volleyball. The BSU students were able to help the school with some of the sports events and amass volunteer hours while learning about Deaf culture. Student and parent volunteers sold tickets and concessions, helped put together, distributed program guides to the fans, and served as judges in some of the games. Three of the biggest events were the football and basketball homecomings, and the CSSD (Central States Schools for the Deaf) tournament.

CSSD was an especially important occasion, because students flooded ISD from six states to participate in the tournament. The Deaf schools represented in the games were Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Model Secondary School for the Deaf in Maryland, Ohio, St. Rita's, Whitney Young, and Indiana. Preparations for the student's and coach's arrival was more strenuous than the actual tournament. Everyone at the school, including the students, contributed to the effort, incorporating the work into lessons explored in the curriculum. For example, English students interviewed staff and faculty about their memories of CSSD tournaments which were then printed in the bulletins for the tournament. By conducting the interviews, the students gained hands-on experience with a required concept that must be studied in English class.

After the visiting students arrived at ISD, work had to be done to keep them all entertained during their free time and to make sure that they were ready for competition. Finding accommodations for all the visiting participants was another problem faced by the school. Places had to be found in which the guests could sleep; boys and girls basketball teams, cheerleaders, managers and coaches all had to be housed at the school. Some slept on folding beds temporarily set up in the laundry rooms, others in the spare dorm rooms in the

elementary, middle, and high schools, and the rest stayed with middle and high school students. Though BSU students were not directly in charge of visiting students, we still felt a sense of responsibility to help them in a strange, new city. Although the tournament lasted only one weekend, it seemed like a holiday.

The awareness of Deaf culture was felt more deeply during CSSD, perhaps, than at any other time during the year, because Deaf people came together to compete against one another and make friends. This was an interesting observation that the students and coaches were all friends before and after the games, but on the floor they competed. Many of the adults had known each other from high school competitions like this, but rarely had the opportunity to talk. This weekend provided that chance to get together and to catch up on their lives.

Opportunities for socialization among the teams seemed almost more important than the games. One of the stated purposes of the tournament, besides the athletic competition, was to bring Deaf students together. CSSD allowed them to get acquainted with one another from around the country and gave them a chance to build strong friendships just as their parents and coaches had. The need to build community is especially powerful among the Deaf community, partly because they have been persecuted by hearing people for so many years of their history.

Sports offered two other opportunities for alumni to return to the school and revisit their past; football and basketball homecomings. Like any other school, the two drew large crowds, which were a composition of alumni, other students, parents, and faculty of the school. While not as taxing an undertaking as the CSSD tournament, these events required work and were enjoyed by all the participants. Due to the special occasion, team members and cheerleaders were allowed to spend the weekend at ISD -- a privilege which does not occur

frequently -- and enjoy the festivities. The games only occupied a part of the weekend, so the players needed fun activities to fill their free time. The staff gave a dance for the middle and high school students who participated in the sports. Therefore, the teams had time to themselves to socialize and talk with the friends they had made over the years of other homecomings, and make new friends.

Indianapolis Deaf Club

The school was not the only group involved with all these exciting events in the Deaf community; the Deaf Club in Indianapolis sponsored events in addition to helping with the school's projects. They had parties before and after the sports events, arranged potluck dinners, and provided special events for entertainment and socializing among the adults in the area and those from out of town. The Club also offered programs throughout the year, usually coinciding with holidays, such as a Thanksgiving dinner in November and a Valentine's dance in February. They have talent contests, pool tables, card games, painfully loud music, and good conversation. Deaf clubs play a vital role in Deaf communities across the country, because of the safety and security they provide. They are some of the only places where Deaf people can gather and talk with their peers in a non-threatening setting. It is also an organization operated and run by Deaf people without hearing people's involvement, as had been the case in the past.

For the Ball State students, the Deaf Club became a place to practice signing with a variety of people in a welcoming environment, and a chance to witness Deaf culture firsthand. Through the nights spent at the Deaf Club, many of the participants made friends with whom they are still in contact after leaving the Deaf school. We were also given a chance to participate in Deaf Culture and test our proficiency in sign language. One of the only pitfalls of the Deaf Club is its location on 46th St; women must be very careful when driving to or from the Club and in the parking lot. It is an unfortunate circumstance that the area surrounding

the Club is not safe at night and that a fence around the parking lot is needed. The Deaf community, though, is very proud of its Club and the building where they can meet freely, as they should be able to do.

Cultural Adjustments

From the problems I experienced adapting to a totally different culture at the Deaf school, I feel better able to empathize with the problems Deaf people have living in a hearing world. Sitting in a room full of Deaf people during my first week, everything that occurred was lost on me. I was surrounded by flying hands and voices raised in protestation and exclamation, but I had no idea about the content of the conversations. Unless someone directly addressed me, I had no chance to become involved in the conversations. Fighting against my fears, I remained downstairs with the students, and over the course of the year I learned to read signs more quickly and -- more importantly -- became friends with some of the students. A few were particularly helpful by providing information about themselves and their feelings about issues in Deaf culture.

If I were a Deaf person, though, caught in a hearing environment, the chances of "picking up" spoken English would be extremely rare. I would be lost in a sea of mouths that weren't making any noise or hands that were not signing. The odds of my becoming involved in the larger community beyond my family would be difficult unless I had help from others. The courage needed to walk into a potentially hostile environment would take more energy than I possess. I cannot imagine living in that state of mind everyday, and although legislation is providing more access to all persons, it still is not complete or consistent.

Practicum 266

The primary reason for the cooperative program with ISD is the time spent in the classrooms working with Deaf children and their teachers. The school is divided into four levels; preschool, elementary, middle, and high school and each Ball State student spent approximately 7 weeks in each level. During the fall semester, Ball State students taught from 8 - 12 am four days a week and had a college class on the fifth. In the spring, students taught five days in the classroom with periodic breaks throughout the week for participation in the Communication Centers for the speech practicum requirement which will be discussed later. The program offered chances to learn about teaching strategies and classroom management and gain additional exposure to Deaf culture.

My first assignment was in the preschool department with a class consisting of two and three year olds. Though they had only two students for most of the quarter, both the teachers and I kept very busy. One of the children was a Deaf boy who also had other health impairments. The most difficult aspect of his education, however, was that he had no formal language skills and understood nothing which was signed to him. He primarily did whatever he wanted, as any child will do, but was slower to respond to our admonitions. He also was unable to feed himself effectively with utensils, therefore either the teacher or I fed him at lunchtime until he was able to better feed himself. He had much to accomplish in a short time, so we began to teach him sign language by signing to him and then making him do whatever had been told him. He learned slowly and we could not always see the progress, because we saw him everyday. At the end of my time in the preschool, though, he was responding to simple commands and watching the hands of the teacher more often to gain information, which is the starting point for signed communication.

The other student in the class was a hearing girl who had a Deaf sister. She was very compliant and played well in the class, however, she tried to induce me to talk to her. She would ask me questions in English, which I tried to ignore until she signed. Many of the BSU students who were in the same class with her throughout the year had the same problem. As time passed, and she interacted with the other children, she began to use signs more often.

Much of the time, two classes of the same age were put together for most of their activities so that the teachers would have more help supervising and playing with the kids. Altogether, there were about five or six children, which is quite a lot to keep an eye on as we moved between activities. Most of the day was spent playing, of course, either in the gym or on the playground, depending on the weather. We did an art project with the students a few times each week that was very simple and fun: painting; sculpting with dough, which was baked later by the teachers; and coloring. We ate snacks and played in the Learning Center which was a new room in the preschool department with several different learning areas, such as dress-up, blocks, puzzles, and science center. Though it was a new addition to the building that year, the staff provided a large number of learning opportunities in it and the children benefitted from the exposure. One week, a lightbulb was set-up to come on when a sound was registered in a speaker attached to the switch. This provided a great deal of amusement for the students and the teachers alike.

The gym class was of particular interest, because I could not imagine how the teacher was going to have the children play traditional gym games with organized teams, as they had not developed the motoric skills seen in school age children. I soon discovered that their work was to build those skills which would be needed in later years. They played on the balance beam, trying to go across independently; volleyball with a large, lightweight ball and a very low net; and

simple coordination tasks. The instructor also wanted to instill in the children a positive attitude toward physical exercise, games, and gym class. He was always positive and encouraging with the children, helping them to do things until they were ready to do it alone. This type of positive background is necessary for the students to develop a healthy attitude toward their bodies and their physical abilities, and it is almost as important as any knowledge that they might gain.

The preschool also gave me an opportunity to see the ways that Deaf children play and the ways they are similar to hearing children; laughing, reading books, painting, and coloring with as much enjoyment as hearing children. They also had the same problems laying down for naps, keeping their snacks on the tables, and their attention spans lasted as short as hearing children's. They found a hundred opportunities for getting into trouble everyday, and the temper tantrums were just as loud and severe.

My next assignment was in the elementary department with the AEP (Alternative Education Program), which were classes for those students with multiple disabilities. Three classes were situated in one area with about five or six students with one teacher. My class contained four students age 12-14, who needed constant attention to move through a page of school work. The curriculum concentrated on practical aspects of life, such as knowing one's address, phone number and the day of the week. The main objective of the program at this level was to help the students achieve as much self-sufficiency as possible.

It was also in the elementary department that I witnessed how teachers construct their everyday planning for their classroom. My education classes taught me to how write a very structured and logical lesson plan, and the professors emphasized their importance in the classroom and my career. The AEP teachers had to submit a semester and year plan for the class to their supervisors, but their daily plans were very flexible to the needs of the students and the pace of the

day. They have ideas in their minds about the topics which must be covered each day or week, and were able to adjust the plans to their students.

The elementary and preschool departments were very similar experiences. I was in the classroom with the students from 8-12 am, assisting the teachers and occasionally teaching. The children were very responsive to me and accepted my authority quite well, though there were some who did not entirely trust me because I was a strange, hearing person. I had more difficulty understanding the students' signing, though, just as it is sometimes hard to comprehend children's speech. Both groups are still learning their respective languages and make mistakes, as do all people while acquiring language. My inability to understand language proved to be very frustrating, because I was unable to respond to the students' answers to my questions.

The next placement was the high school, and the schedule there was the most confusing and physically exhausting, because I had classes in three different buildings on the campus; physical education, vocational, and main buildings. I worked with 16 different teachers and countless number of students over a two month period of time. The same can be said about middle school, except that the students were younger. I spent the majority of my time in the middle and high school AEP departments and enjoyed working with the students and teachers very much. The JSTC (Job Skills Training Class) students were different from their peers, because they were used to a variety of different people working with them and willing to help me learn what to do in JSTC.

The middle and high schools were a very similar experiences, however, as I had to move from class to class with the students. Now I had to cope with as many as 8 different sets of students and teachers. The number of new names and faces alone was very intimidating, because the students and teachers knew each other already, and I was the newcomer. I had to learn all the different classroom

arrangements, in addition to everyone's name. I also had to learn again how to handle teenagers' attitudes and moods, which was not a pleasant experience. They were much less patient with my slow sign skills, and less willing to help correct my signing. Add to that the height of the students, which made me feel rather ineffectual and intimidated. I did manage to overcome much of my apprehension, though, and become friends with a number of the students, talking with them during class and in the dorm at night.

The older students were easier to talk to about things I was interested in, such as music and movies, whereas the elementary students don't like the same types of entertainment that I do. The small age difference, though, also had its downfalls; it was much less apparent to other people that I was a teacher in middle and high school, because I was surrounded by students only a few years younger than me. In contrast to the general reactions of the older students, the teachers were open and invited me into their classrooms very willingly, offering any help they could. In the classrooms, I aided the teachers by working with individual students and taught a few classes during the semester. The most perilous experience I had was in the Driver's Education class on the days when the students were allowed to drive and I rode with them. Although the teacher was always in the front seat and had his own brake pedal, I was still quite nervous as with any new driver on the open streets of a big city. Despite my fears, though, we always arrived at school in one piece and there were no accidents.

Communication Center

Another integral portion of our experience at the Deaf School was the semester of teaching we did in the three departments' Communication Centers. This teaching time followed a BSU class about teaching speech to Deaf children which was taught by Dr. Joan Studnicky during the fall semester. The philosophy of the Communication Centers, according to information provided by the teachers,

has changed with the prevailing educational philosophies in Deaf Education and those at I&D. For many years, the goal of the Speech classes was to teach all Deaf students how to talk as much like hearing people as possible, which is an impossible task for many reasons. The first reason is the presumption by hearing people that all Deaf people want to talk with his/her voice to fit into the hearing world. Hearing people have made such suppositions without any input from the Deaf community for years, and deprives Deaf individuals of a substantial portion of their autonomy in their children's education. To make matters worse, the teaching of speech consumed the largest part of every school day, to the detriment of other subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies. Secondly, the assumption that Deaf have the ability to speak despite the degree of hearing loss with enough training is a gross overestimation of the abilities of speech/ language pathologists. For a child who has never heard spoken English, how can one hope to instruct him/ her in its production? Children learn their native language by imitating others' use of it, therefore, the chances of a prelingually Deaf person successfully mastering spoken English are not guaranteed. The ability to speak is based on a variety of factors which are difficult to change if the individual does not want to change.

However, it must be noted that some profoundly Deaf individuals speak very well, and use hearing aids and lip reading in their interactions with satisfaction. The point of this argument, though, is to emphasize that not every Deaf person is the same in their preference of communication mode or their ability to use a specific mode. And that was the plan devised by many speech teachers over the years in schools for the Deaf in the US. Each students' needs, abilities, and interests must be considered with the wishes of the parent (in the early years of education) to reach a decision about any educational endeavors.

The Communication Center, as it operates now, respects the rights of individual students and their parents to receive the type of training most suitable to their needs. A great deal of collaboration takes place among the members of the child's IEP Case Conference Committee to reach a decision which will be satisfactory for all those involved, as with the entirety of the child's educational goals. The teachers strive to expose students to a wide variety of communication forms as possible, which will be helpful in everyday situations. The centers are based on units that are functionally based: they utilize roleplay, computer programs, word searches, puzzles, board games, discussions, and TV. The teachers hope that some of the skills practiced in the classroom will be used in a real world setting. The primary goal of the Communication Center is to provide the students with a variety of opportunities to practice a spectrum of means of communication with hearing and Deaf people outside the classroom.

Using this objective, they can study many subjects not normally covered by a traditional curriculum: areas such as safety in a crowd, how to order food in a restaurant, how to find the right airplane, how to get help when you become lost, planning a party, et al. These kinds of topics need to be discussed at ISD for several reasons. One of the reasons is geographical: a majority of the students live on the campus in Indianapolis, away from their parents all week. Therefore, the school is required to help teach some skills normally discussed at home. The other reason for their inclusion in the classroom, although these seem to be very basic skills, is that the students are Deaf and live in a hearing world. They are isolated from much of the information which is available for hearing people without them actively seeking it, but which is blocked from Deaf people. Many of them have limited interaction with their environment and hearing peers that would make them aware of the everyday dangers of life. They also miss some of the small bits of advice parents are notorious for dispensing to their children, if their parents do

not sign. Without these valuable interactions, children must be informed in school, so that they can function successfully in a hearing world.

Volunteering

Another of the requirements for Ball State participants was volunteer time outside of the normal practicum hours. These hours were some of the most enjoyable experiences I had at the School. Of all the places and people to work with at the school, I was allowed to volunteer in two different situations; working at the library and tutoring a fourth-grade student. I worked with Linda Canty at the library after lunch only a few days each week, but I wish I could have worked there full-time. The warm, helpful environment Mrs. Canty created made the experience more meaningful to me. She and her husband both took time to teach me new signs and gave me experience while chatting with them about different topics. I also took advantage of the resources to read a few of the books and periodicals published about Deaf people.

The work I did was typical to any public school library: typing index cards for new acquisitions, shelving books, checking out books, and putting on book jackets. As much as I loved the atmosphere, the work was a little repetitive, and it was fascinating to learn how a school library is operated. Putting the experience into a broader perspective, though, I realize how valuable it was to have experience in a non-classroom aspect of the school, just as we had helping with the sports events. It is always helpful for classroom teachers to have an idea of the resources available to them and their students in the library. Those hours also gave me the chance to help students one-on-one while they were doing research for homework, which helped me get more out of the practicum experience.

The other volunteering I did was tutoring at the elementary school with a fourth-grade student who has Usher's Syndrome. Due to the Syndrome, he was losing his sight and Deaf, but he was very bright and eager to learn, especially

about science and outer space. We spent a lot of time in the library reading articles in science magazines and on the computer researching information about space travel and America's space program. This experience allowed me to glimpse yet another aspect of being a teacher -- working with a student whose instruction must be supplemented to meet his specific needs. This experience also allowed me to become more skilled at planning activities and assessing student interest in the project while involved with it. If I'd planned some activity, but he didn't like it, I had to modify my plans to fit his mood or interest level.

The most fun opportunity we had to volunteer was in conjunction with the athletic department at ISD, as I've mentioned previously. During the fall, we helped sell refreshments at and tickets to football games, cross country meets, and basketball games. January was the CSSD tournament, which provided us with ample time to help and socialize with a wider spectrum of Deaf people from various locations in the country. Then, in the spring semester, we worked at more basketball games, volleyball and track meets. At some of the middle school volleyball games, they needed help with line judging, so I got to become a line judge for a few short periods. It was interesting to learn the official rules which are not always used in more friendly games. As always, it was a pleasure to hang out and chat with the ISD students during the games. We had more opportunity to just sit back and chat with people as they came through the gates or ordered food. We were able to get a view of the wide variety of people involved with ISD, both Deaf and hearing.

Friendships

During the orientation in the first week, Mary Alice told the group that we would become best friends on the campus, and that some of these relationships would last throughout our college years. Few of us believed her words, as we looked at one another -- 10 total strangers in a strange new world. As the first

few weeks progressed, we soon realized the truth and wisdom of her words, and were very grateful to have other hearing people with which to share our experiences. Many of our group had friends at Ball State to whom we talked on the phone to relieve our homesickness, but they could not understand the cultural clash. No one who has not been in the minority can comprehend the feelings of helplessness and being lost. We soon came to rely quite heavily on each other.

Of course, life was not always easy and we had to make several adjustments in our individual practices to prevent temperamental explosions. After disagreements erupted over smaller reasons, resulting mainly from the dishes piled up in the sink and vacuuming the floor, for example, we realized the need for meetings. Getting together over our personal concerns and differences in cleanliness was very difficult to face, but as a result of the meetings, we were able to establish some common ground rules for conduct.

Living at the Deaf School away from our school friends, we did not have exposure to other college kids with whom to socialize, therefore, we discovered the necessity of each other's company. Especially during the weekends, when the campus was virtually uninhabited, we spent a great deal of time together, relaxing from the stresses of the practicum.