

A BILINGUAL AND BICULTURAL APPROACH TO TEACHING DEAF CHILDREN IN CHINA

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Preface

There are about 1.8 million children in China, under the age of 14, who have a partial or profound loss of hearing; 800,000 of those are under seven-years old. Due to pre-natal or childhood illness, genetics, infection or because of an accident, another 20,000-30,000 children¹ will be born, or become, deaf each year.

Like many children with disabilities in China, deaf children face social isolation, poverty and discrimination.

As a result, many of these children have yet to fully enjoy their rights to protection, development and participation, as guaranteed to them under the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, which China has ratified. These children often lack opportunities to interact meaningfully in a family and social context which subsequently impacts on their intellectual and psychological development.

Since the 1950s, the education policy in China has been to focus exclusively on developing the oral language skills of deaf children, with sign language playing a minor or non-existent role.

While this policy has been well-intentioned, it has failed to equip the majority of children with adequate language or life skills needed to integrate fully in society, which in turn has had a serious impact on their cognitive, social and academic development.

At the same time, studies have also shown that this oral-only approach only benefits those children who have some residual hearing, or who lost their hearing after first learning how to speak.

For the majority, they grow up unable to communicate with their families and friends and with little opportunity to participate within society in a broader context.

There are also a huge number of deaf children who are missing out on education of any kind, because their families - 80 percent of whom will come from the countryside - cannot afford to board them at special deaf schools.

Thus, there is an urgent need to rethink deaf education and to take into consideration the child's hearing, educational and economic conditions and focus on the best way to encourage each individual's intellectual and mental development.

In the mid-1980s, a new approach to deaf education began gaining ground in Western Europe and America. The bilingual and bicultural method (bi-bi) looks at the Deaf and deaf education from a new perspective. It rejects the medical deficit model of deafness and recognises the Deaf as a minority culture with their own language - sign language.

In 2001, with the support of UNICEF, Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre and the Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf collaborated on a project to bring a bilingual and bicultural education to deaf pre school children in the city.

¹ Figures are from the China Disabled Person's Federation and based on a 1984 census.

The focus of the project is to provide deaf children with the same basic rights as their hearing peers, namely access to a comprehensive education, but at the same time, to promote sign language, raise the status of the Deaf and encourage more interaction between hearing and Deaf communities.

Although the project is still in its early stages, significant strides have been made in promoting bi-bi as a viable education alternative for deaf children. But this is just the first step on a long path towards our goal of realising equal education for all deaf children.

In order to provide a better understanding of the bi-bi concepts, we have documented in this publication our experiences over the last three years. We hope that it will act, not only as a window into the bi-bi approach, but also work towards winning more support from the public into recognising the rights of every child to a happy and fulfilled life .

An Introduction to Deafness and Deaf Education in China

China has the largest deaf population in the world, but also one of the most invisible. There are at least 22 million deaf and hard of hearing people living in China with another 30,000 born every year², yet they remain on the fringes of society. There is little recognition or awareness of their culture, or sign language, and as such communication between hearing and Deaf worlds has been limited.

Up until the 1950s, sign language was the preferred method for teaching the deaf in China, and it was not uncommon to find teachers using signs to teach, tell stories to and socialise with their students³.

But as oralism gained greater popularity in other parts of the world, China too followed suit, and in 1957 the Ministry of Education published the "Deaf and Mute School Spoken Language Teaching Plan". Since then, spoken language has become the main method for instruction and communication in the classroom.

The current Deaf education policy in China, which was adopted in 1993, states: "*... Deaf school education should focus on spoken language; make use of textbooks, and utilise finger spelling, sign language and blackboard writing to develop student's language ability.*"

At a November 2000 conference in Nanjing on the Reform and Development of the 21st Century Deaf Education in China, education experts and policy makers also called for the "*strengthening of deaf people's listening comprehension as a language capacity*", according to an article published after the conference⁴.

In accordance with this policy, the 1980s saw China open hundreds of preschool oral-language training rehabilitation centres around the country. By the mid -80s there were 1,422 oral-training pre-schools.

The aim was to offer intensive, spoken-language training at an early age which ideally, would allow deaf children to gain enough language skills to attend mainstream school when they turned seven-years old.

However, the success of this approach has been limited, with only those children who are slightly hard of hearing, or who became deaf after having learned how to speak, showing any improvement. In fact, it has been suggested that just 12-17 percent of the children who attend pre-school training will gain enough fluency in spoken Chinese to enter mainstream schools.

For the vast majority, who are profoundly deaf, oral training is little more than a frustrating exercise in repeating words which they cannot understand.

² Figures are based on a 1984 CDPF census. This is the same size as the deaf population in the much smaller United States. It's estimated that the number of deaf in China is actually somewhere closer to 100 million.

³ Song Pengcheng, 2002, from his autobiography *Tracking Back in the Deaf World*

⁴ Told to the consultant during an interview with Professor Zhao Mingzhi, Director of the Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre in September, 2003

Instead of soaking up experiences, developing cognitive patterns and making friends during their key development years, these children waste time imitating sounds they have little understanding of.

Oral drills continue throughout primary school and because so much time is spent focusing on the blind repetition of words, only about 30 percent of the mainstream curriculum is ever taught. This means deaf children miss out on 70 percent of the education that their hearing peers receive.

For those who do make it into mainstream schools, there is no additional help, resources, sign language interpreters or translation services. They are dependent on the good will of teachers and classmates.

Many drop out and return to schools for the deaf, where again they are at a disadvantage having had no exposure to the sign language used by teachers. Currently this is predominantly Sign-Supported Chinese (SSC) - sign language which follows the grammar of spoken Chinese - and which the Deaf regard as a language imposed on them by a hearing world.

Natural sign language, which comes most easily to the Deaf, is considered by many educationalists and parents to be a primitive system of gestures and a last resort for those children who cannot communicate. Parents and teachers are urged not to encourage it and the general misconception is that learning to sign will corrupt a child's ability to learn how to speak.

At best, sign language is tolerated in Deaf schools rather than encouraged, and in worst case scenarios, children are forced to sit on their hands to prevent them from using it.

Most deaf children leave school, regardless of whether they attended Deaf or mainstream schools, with an academic achievement well below that of their hearing peers, and an inability to communicate fluently in any language, be it sign language, oral or written. Poor education translates into poor job prospects and subsequently a lower standard of life. This perpetuates the misperception that deaf people are underachievers, stubborn and incompetent.

It also strengthens parents desire to "normalise" their child; to prevent them from displaying any signs of Deafness, such as using sign language or socialising with other Deaf people, and to encourage them to act as "hearing" as possible. Parents believe that by maximum exposure to spoken language, their child will eventually learn to speak. They convince themselves that because a child knows a line from an ancient poem, he or she can speak. Many parents leave their children in residential pre-schools well past the age when they should have joined primary school.

The effect, according to testimonies given by teachers, deaf adults and parents of deaf children currently studying under the oral system, has often led to school being a place of frustration rather than fun and many children respond to their inability to express themselves by becoming withdrawn or at times quick to anger.

Testimonies⁵:

⁵ Interviews carried out by the consultant with deaf teachers and deaf members of the community in Tianjin

- *"It was so boring when I went to school. We only had oral training. I had difficulties understanding, so I didn't want to go. I'd make excuses not to go to school,"* **Wang Xiuling, 30-year old deaf teacher at the Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf, and graduate of China's first Deaf University in Tianjin.**
- *"I hated going to school. Oral training was so boring. We just had to repeat the words. Often I didn't understand what the teacher was saying, so (students) would use sign language to explain it to each other after class."* **Wang Jian, 33, deaf teacher at Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf.**
- *"Because of oral training, school was very painful for me. I was stressed, frustrated, because I couldn't understand. I didn't understand the abstract meaning of the word; I just repeated it at the superficial level."* **Gong Xueliang, President of the Tianjin Deaf Association.**
- *"The level of education in normal schools is higher but no one (there) pays any attention to us. The deaf students lick their wounds in a corner."* **Deaf university student.**

Why Reform Deaf Education?

Study after study has shown that the academic performance of deaf students falls well behind that of their hearing counterparts. In one such seminal study in the US, deaf pupils were shown to be leaving school at age 15 with an average reading age of nine; with poor speech intelligibility and with lip-reading skills no better than those of the hearing population, despite their training in this area.⁶

Teachers at a Beijing university that admits Deaf students complained that their students are unable to speak or sign fluently, and often cannot read, and have only got as far as they have through family contacts.

Because deaf children cannot hear, it is impossible for them to acquire spoken language in the same way that a hearing child would, i.e.: subconsciously through informal contexts at home, through society, television or radio. Therefore, deaf children must learn the spoken language in the same way a foreigner might learn a new language. But unlike the foreigner, deaf children in China are being asked to learn a second language, without any grasp of a first language from which to draw linguistic understanding.

There is also evidence to show that those without a mother tongue - one acquired rather than learned - will have limited processing skills for language.

In contrast, research has shown that children immersed in sign language from an early age acquired it in much the same way as their hearing peers would spoken language; developing simple linguistic tools first and progressing up to more complex sentence structure⁷.

⁶ Conrad, R (1979) *The Deaf School Child*. London: Harper & Row.

⁷ Kyle, McEntee, Ackerman, *Deaf Children Developing Sign: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*. 1998.

Furthermore, studies have shown that deaf children of deaf parents who use sign language at home have better academic results. A recent book published in the US, based on a review of 208 studies involving 171,517 deaf people, found that those born to deaf parents outperformed their hearing peers in a number of non-verbal tests of IQ.⁸

Native signers, or those for whom sign language is their mother tongue, also show better ease of transition between sign language and their country's written language than those who learnt sign language at a later stage.

There is another issue specific to China which drives the need for a new educational approach for teaching deaf children and that is the tonal characteristic of the Chinese language. Mandarin's four tones make lip reading a torturous process for many deaf children and adults, and hinder any real interaction between hearing and Deaf communities. And even if a child does manage to lip read or say a few words in the national Mandarin language, they may not be understood, or understand the local dialect - of which there are hundreds in China.

At the same time, a fixation on a child's ability or inability to speak, only reinforces that child's feelings of low self-esteem and failure. It can cause the child to reject their Deaf identity and strive to fit in with a world in which he/she cannot fully communicate. Parents who fail to see anything but their child's inability to master the spoken language end up depriving that child of ever realising their untapped potential.

The psychological effect of this is often traumatic and some students have been found to project this anger back at the parents and society.

THE BILINGUAL AND BICULTURAL APPROACH

Introduction

The bilingual and bicultural (bi-bi) approach first gained momentum in Western Europe and the US in the mid-1980s. It developed out of the frustrations at the limited success of oral training in providing deaf children with a comprehensive education that allows them to make a valuable and equal contribution to society.

Bi-lingualism means the use and knowledge of two languages - in the case of deaf Chinese children, sign language and written Chinese - but it does not predefine fluency in either language as this will depend on the child's capability and their hearing ability as time goes on. It does not preclude oral language but again, this is dependent on the child's residual hearing, and access to hearing aids.

The priority of bi-bi is to introduce at the earliest stage the language which a child can most easily learn; in the case of deaf children, who have been shown to be visual rather than aural learners, this is sign language. A second language, the written language, is gradually introduced with sign language used to explain grammar, syntax and abstract concepts.

⁸ Braden, 1995

The bi-cultural aspect focuses on the culture of the Deaf, their distinct characteristics and provides children with Deaf role models to ensure they develop a positive and healthy self identity. But the approach also teaches children about the culture of the hearing world to enable them to understand and interact in both worlds.

Deaf teachers are a valued and instrumental part of the project, providing both role models and reassurance to the children of their equal status in society. At the same time hearing teachers offer children an insight into hearing culture, and the presence of both teachers will expose them to different forms of communication: some people communicate with their mouths and others with their hands.

As well as the UNICEF-supported project in Tianjin, there are two other similar projects in China. One in Nanjing with the support of the Amnity Foundation and one in Kunming supported by Save the Children UK.

International

China is not alone in its efforts to reform Deaf education. Up until the end of the 20th century, many countries in the west were equally in favour of promoting oralism as the single method of communication in Deaf schools. But this attitude began to change as it became apparent that generation after generation of deaf students were attaining poor grades and that those who did well were those whose parents were deaf and were fluent in sign language. Early detection and parental guidance were also key for deaf children to fully realise their potential.

Denmark

In 1991 Denmark officially amended its Deaf education policy to ensure sign language was given equal status as a language and was used as the main method of teaching in schools for the deaf.

Achievements: In 1970, only a fraction of deaf 16-18 year-olds performed equal to or above hearing students five or six years younger than them. After adopting the bilingual and bicultural approach deaf students aged 11 to 12 are almost on a par with hearing children their own age. Nearly all parents of profoundly deaf children choose the bilingual and bicultural approach and most join sign language classes as soon as their child is diagnosed.

Education:

- Parents can choose a combination of communication methods best suited to their child's education needs.
- **Deaf schools:** Follow the mainstream curriculum; the subject matter and number of classes are the same. Deaf teachers are prominent.
- **Mainstream schools:** It is common for either an assistant teacher or a sign interpreter to be on hand in classes where there are deaf students.
- **Residential schools:** One teacher per two or three deaf children
- **University:** Open on an equal basis to deaf students. Sign interpreters are provided for lectures and class discussions.

- Denmark also has research schools studying and teaching Danish sign language.

USA

By 2003, over 35 of 50 states officially recognised American Sign Language as a language. Research on ASL is regularly published in scholarly journals. Hundreds of organisations offer advice, information and access to services for the Deaf. Numerous conferences occur in areas of ASL, Deaf Cultural Studies and ASL Literature. Deaf people feature in the films, on TV shows and are successful professionals.

Educational Achievements: Classes in sign language, Deaf culture, history, art and literature are available both in Deaf and mainstream schools and are open to everyone .

The Deaf are granted access to universities, jobs and all public facilities through the presence of competent sign language interpreters. The Deaf rights movement gained world wide attention when in the late 1980s students at a Deaf University, Gallaudet, protested against the employment of yet another hearing president to represent them. Today, as well as a Deaf president, more than half of the members on Gallaudet's board are deaf as are many of those who teach and work in the administration. And nearly everyone on campus is bilingual and knows how to sign.

Britain

In March of 2003, the British government recognised British Sign Language as an official language and granted 1.5 million pounds to promote BSL in schools, the workplace and society. The projects include online training materials, a family sign language curriculum and an interactive awareness-raising DVD. Bilingual education is gradually becoming a valid option for more deaf children.

Achievements: Local education authorities are now required to provide or pay for interpreting services in mainstream schools for deaf children. The government is also required to pay for an interpreter or other human aid to assist a Deaf adult in finding a job, and for use while at work, in circumstances such as meetings, training courses or conferences, and for interpreting phone calls.

Special equipment to enable Deaf people to carry out a job, including computer hardware and software, telephone aids, text-phones, mobile phones, videophones, are also available free of charge. Companies such as Toyota Motor Corp employ a number of deaf people and ensure they have competent BSL interpreters, vibrating pagers and minicom systems in order to communicate.

The Tate Modern art gallery in London provides the deaf and hard of hearing with hand held computers that show BSL videos explaining certain collections.

Why Bilingual and Bicultural in China?

In China, the speed of reform and development of an open economy is creating more wealth, yet also creating more poverty, with a greater disparity between the levels of education for hearing and deaf children.

In the cities, there are now many more people who can afford the medical attention needed to catch diseases that may cause deafness. Many can also afford special language training, hearing aids and in some cases 150,000- 200,000 RMB cochlear implants.

But these are just a small minority of the 30,000 deaf children who are born every year in China. The China Disabled People's Federation (CDPF) says that about 80 percent of these children will be born into rural areas, where there is little knowledge of deafness or special education. And where traditional beliefs and the stigma attached to disability mean that many parents will try to ignore or hide their child's deafness until it is too late for treatment.

While there has been a move away from institutionalising deaf children and towards Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) in China, the focus has been on the number of children integrated into mainstream schools rather than on their ability to communicate, or how best to support them once they are there.

For oralism to work, it needs dedicated teachers who can devote time and care to the child's development. In rural areas in China, primary school classes run with 50- 60 students to one teacher; the teachers themselves are poorly educated and local authorities cannot afford to pay for specially trained teachers.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants that could complement oralism are also prohibitively expensive. Most hearing devices are imported, can cost up to a year's salary for some families and need to be changed every three to five years.

A lack of updated medical technology in rural areas also means that early detection is negligible and the poor assessment of a child's hearing capabilities often means many children end up wearing hearing devices that are neither suitable for them nor fitted properly.

As an example, at a bilingual and bicultural introductory workshop for parents in Yangzhou, all 20 parents present said their children wore hearing aids. Only three said the aids gave their child clarity of sound, being able to distinguish between voice and other sounds, and not one said their child was able to understand the meaning of words any better than before they started to wear the aids.

Dialectal differences and the tonal characteristic of the Chinese language means that correct pronunciation and lip reading is much harder in China than in other countries where oralism may have had more success.

IMPLEMENTING THE BI-BI APPROACH AT TIANJIN NUMBER ONE SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

Project Background:

The local counterpart, the Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre (THRC) was established in 1984 to facilitate the rehabilitation of hearing-impaired children in Tianjin. Under the guidance of the CDPF, it has promoted the oralism approach for nearly 20 years. It also has experience in fitting hearing aids and in oral training.

UNICEF has been working with the THRC since 1991 on both rehabilitation of hearing-impaired children and CBR of all kinds of disabled children. In the 2001-2005 cooperative cycle, the partnership turned its focus exclusively to hearing rehabilitation. Having recognised the limitations

of the oral-only approach, UNICEF proposed experimenting with a different educational method; one that had already seen some remarkable achievements in the west.

To do so, the cooperation invested its initial effort in research and fact finding about the bilingual and bicultural approach. The pilot project was launched at Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf in October 2001.

In the early stages, UNICEF invited several experienced teachers from a Deaf school in the UK where bi-bi has been incorporated for some time. They offered advice and support to the Tianjin teachers and provided valuable insight into the bi-bi methodology and its underlying principles. Subsequently, Tianjin teachers have gone abroad to Denmark and benefited from experience exchanges with other teachers carrying out bi-bi in China.

The aim of the project was to develop a viable model of education using sign language to realise the rights of deaf children to linguistic, academic, intellectual and social development. But at the same time it would shine a light on Deaf culture, sign language and the situation of the Deaf community.

While the project started with a focus on profoundly deaf pre-school children (under 7-years old), it has recently expanded to include 17 children in the first and second years of primary school. But the impact is far wider than just deaf children.

Parents of deaf children, educators, the Deaf community, policy makers and all of society are being made aware of the rationale behind the bi-bi project, which is to remove the barriers that obstruct the full participation of the Deaf in society.

Actual Beneficiaries:

- October 2001
 - 13 profoundly deaf children aged 4 - 5 (preschool).
- September 2002
 - 13 profoundly deaf children aged 3 - 4 (preschool)
- September 2003
 - 11 profoundly deaf children aged 4 - 6 (preschool)
- September 2004
 - 17 profoundly deaf children aged 7 - 9 (primary school)
 - 13 profoundly deaf children aged 4 - 6 (preschool)

Project Implementing Agencies and Partners

- Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre
 - Coordinates and administers the project
- Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf
 - Implements the project
 - Develops curriculum, trains deaf and hearing teachers, hires deaf teachers
 - Communicates with and encourages parents

- Assesses progress of children and reports back to parents
- Tianjin Deaf People's Association
 - Supports the development of curriculum
 - Works with hearing teachers to educate and inform them about needs of deaf children
 - Works with parents to promote greater understanding about Deaf culture
 - Promotes involvement of Deaf people as role models in project
 - Interacts with hearing community to raise awareness about D/deafness
- The Deaf Technology Institute of Tianjin Technology University
 - Supports parent-child activities
 - Engages the children in news and story telling
 - Promotes participation of deaf university students who act as mentors (big brothers and sisters) for deaf children

Research Partners

- Beijing Normal University
 - Assisted in development of the curriculum
 - Evaluated progress of the children
- Liaoning University, Dalian
 - UNICEF-supported first-ever research into China's Deaf culture
 - UNICEF-supported research into sign language
 - UNICEF-supported research into professional sign language interpretation services

Strategies and Activities

Because the project aims were complex, and the approach a radical new way of thinking in China, the strategies adopted equally had to be broad, far reaching and multi-strand. The activities below show how we had to start right at the beginning in building understanding about the rights of the child and in promoting awareness about the Deaf.

- **Create a replicable model of bilingual and bicultural education that can be applied nationwide.** The bi-bi approach represents a paradigm shift in educational thinking and thus required a significant amount of investment in developing a curriculum and teaching materials, as well as building the capacity of those involved in the project (teachers, interpreters, managers). We did this through formal training, experience exchanges and opportunities to learn from overseas experts.
- **Develop teaching materials and a curriculum suitable to the needs of deaf children and in line with mainstream schools.** A new curriculum, based on the textbooks used by mainstream schools, but catering to sign language and the characteristics of deaf children had to be developed. The curriculum, which features stories about deaf children, is in a visual mode to draw the students' attention. Stories are told using a mixture of pictures and sign language and children are encouraged to retell the stories using sign language.

- **Employ deaf teachers to work in close co-operation and on an equal footing with their hearing counterparts.** Both deaf and hearing teachers should be able to use natural sign language and be comfortable using it with the children and each other. Deaf teachers are a vital part of the project, providing valuable insight into Deaf culture and its characteristics, role models for the children and a natural base of sign language.
- **Provided opportunities for deaf and hearing teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding of the bilingual and bicultural theory and practice.** This included inviting the head of a bilingual and bicultural school in Britain to visit China and taking teachers and educators to speak with experts in Denmark.
- **Provide deaf pupils with a positive sense of identity and prepare them to enter society.** Adults from the Tianjin Association for the Deaf and university students from the Tianjin Technical University for the Deaf participate in sign language story telling and activities with the children. This gives them a greater sense of belonging to a deaf community.

At the same time, they are taught about animal welfare, the environment and gender equality, ensuring that they are up to speed with developments in a civilised society. They are also introduced to some of the differences between the deaf and hearing worlds, such as it is rude to interrupt someone who is talking, hearing people don't like to be touched by strangers and keeping eye contact too long is considered rude.

- **Enable deaf children to become linguistically competent and confident in social context.** Teachers spend 20-30 minutes every morning communicating freely with children in sign language. Children are encouraged to ask about the signs they are not familiar with and to use sign language as a tool to satisfy their curiosity.
- **Provide extra curricular activities to bring hearing and deaf children and their families together.** Parents and children are encouraged to participate in trips, games and drawing activities. Members of the Tianjin Association for the Deaf also hold sign language classes for the parents of deaf children.
- **To advocate for deaf children to be given equal rights to comprehensive education.** The project promotes bi-bi as a positive alternative for Deaf education and provides evidence that those children learning sign language are making fast progress linguistically, socially and educationally.
- **To raise the awareness of the Deaf community, their culture and sign language.** Research into the native sign language of China's Deaf communities, Deaf culture and sign language interpretation services is a crucial step in winning support from educators and policymakers, many of whom are not aware of Deaf rights. Funding and support of these studies ensures they reach the widest audience possible .
- **Involve members of the Deaf community.** Involving Deaf adults in the development of the curriculum and in the ongoing activities of the school both raises their profile and

develops their sense of self-worth. Children are introduced to an adult role model, who embraces their deafness instead of rejecting it, and parents, most of whom are hearing, are offered an insight into Deaf culture. College students from Tianjin Technical University for the Deaf joined in outings and a summer camp with deaf children and their parents. Every week they came to the class and related the news and told stories in sign language to the children and worked with the children one-on-one. They also organised the parents to go to their college.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

Although the bilingual and bicultural project is only just entering its fourth year, it is already showing positive results. According to teachers, the children who are making the fastest progress, both socially, academically and emotionally, are those whose parents are making an effort to learn sign language. The effectiveness of the trial has also prompted interest in other areas of China, as well as encouraged more research into sign language and Deaf culture.

Impact on Children:

- **Academic Improvement** In recent tests given to three groups of deaf children; those who had attended the bi-bi class, those who were in the oral-only class and those who received no special education, the bi-bi children outperformed the other two groups. The bi-bi class achieved test scores in the mid -80s and high 90s, coming close to the scores of their hearing peers.
- **Increased Self-confidence** Hand-in-hand with their linguistic, intellectual and social progress, observers noted the children were showing a greater sense of self-value. They were more optimistic and open, mainly due to the encouragement they received.
- **Social Improvements** The children have become more sociable since joining the bi-bi class. Learning and using sign language has developed their ability and desire to socialise and interact. They have become more outgoing and eager to communicate. They are reaching out to others without fear.
- **Embracing Deaf Identity** Not only does sign language help the children to develop intellectually, it also provides them with a link to the Deaf community. It gives them an identity as a Deaf person and boosts their self-confidence which is crucial for realising their potential.
- **Knowledge of Sign Language** Sign language has become the main tool for deaf children to gain knowledge and to communicate with others. Once they understand that sign language allows them to express themselves, they are proving to be quick learners, and are making fast progress.⁹ At first some students had difficulties learning sign language,

⁹ All of the children in the bilingual and bicultural class were able to put a series of pictures showing a snowman melting back in the right order after being told the story using sign language, only 50 percent of the children who only attended the oral class were able to do so.

they were depressed and stressed, but they soon caught on. After they grasped the basics of signing, they felt much happier. They felt at ease communicating with teachers and their classmates, which in turn has stimulated their interest in studying, and really improved their ability to learn.¹⁰

- **Increased Curiosity** Through the bi-bi approach, language no longer presents a barrier to learning and communication. Children use sign language to understand the world, grasp linguistic and abstract concepts and as a tool to satisfy their curiosity. This curiosity also reflects their interest in the world about them.

Case Study 1

Fu Yi Ming is a four-year-old girl. Both of her parents are hearing.

Teachers' observations:

"During her time in the oral class she was only able to master saying a few simple words such as "baba" (daddy), "mama" (mummy), "yeye" (grandpa) and "pinguo" (apple). She was quite withdrawn and didn't like to play or share her toys with the other children.

After she joined the bilingual and bicultural class, she became more outgoing and cooperative. She often approached the other children to initiate games or play and showed a willingness to communicate. Most importantly, Fu can now freely express herself to her teachers and classmates."

Mother's observations:

"To me, the most important thing is that the bilingual and bicultural approach really unlocked my daughter's potential. Every day she grows more confident in communicating and in expressing her thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

"She has a much greater desire to communicate with us. Although I don't know much sign language, I can see that she is making tremendous progress in her ability to communicate in this language. I know that eventually her sign language ability will surpass her oral language ability.

"She has changed from a very shy and insecure little girl to outgoing, welcoming and kind-hearted. In the past, when ever she met strangers she was so shy she would hide behind me and not speak to them. After joining the bilingual and bicultural class she has gradually become more sociable and friendly. This is a great achievement.

"In the past, she didn't care about clothes and didn't want me to buy her any new clothes. But now, she is very interested and likes to go shopping with me. She also chooses her own clothes every morning and won't wear something if she doesn't like it. This is totally different from before.

¹⁰ Mr Han, a teacher in the primary school at Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf, 2004

"As for her future, I hope she will be able to attend ordinary primary school with hearing children but I will let her make her own choice; whether to continue with sign language or oral classes. As for her career, I notice she is interested in fashion design so if she chooses to follow this as a profession, I will support her as a mother and a friend."

Case Study 2

Zhang Li Cheng is a six-year-old boy. Both of his parents are deaf and fully supported his joining the bilingual and bicultural project.

Teachers' observations:

"After joining the bi-bi class, Zhang developed very fast in both his school work and his knowledge of the outside world. For example, when he saw the news on TV about the US-led war in Iraq, he wanted to know why two countries would go to war. Also during the SARS period, he asked teachers if the disease would make a return and if it had spread to other parts of the world. As teachers we try to give him satisfactory answers and complete information."

Mother's observation:

"In the past, Zhang was a very quiet child, preferring to play alone and not willing to communicate with others. Now he is very 'talkative'. Also, he is more interested in reading books and frequently asks us to tell him stories."

"He used to be very shy. But now, he will greet all the neighbours and everyone he meets. In the past, he was also very stubborn and only cared about getting his own way. It was very hard for us to reason with him or try to persuade him. He did not want to try and understand our suggestions or explanations."

"Now he is much more open to suggestions and is more flexible and considerate about what others think and feel. For example, in the past if his dad was too busy to take him to the park, he would just cry. But now he can understand and accept our explanations. I hope he can keep learning sign language so that he can better communicate with us."

"Judging by his quick progress and change in behaviour, we believe he is capable of learning a lot of information quickly and skillfully through sign language. But, if he is interested in oral speech, we will also support that. But if it is beyond his ability then I don't think it's necessary for us to force him to pursue that path. As long as he is happy, that is the only thing we ask."

"As for his occupation, I will encourage him to become a computer professional or work in the IT industry and to be successful. I hope he will study hard in school and eventually go to college."

"I have great confidence in Zhang. I hope he will continue to learn sign language. If, in the future, his school decides to stop the sign language teaching, I will continue to teach him and become his best teacher."

Impact on Parents

Parents' support and cooperation is vital. Not only are they a child's first and primary teacher they are also the ones who make the decisions about the education for their children.

- **Change in attitude towards bilingual and bicultural.** For most parents of deaf children, to allow their children to learn sign language is still a difficult choice. Because 90 percent of parents of deaf children are hearing, they naturally hold out hope that their child will learn to speak. Because there is little understanding or knowledge about sign language in China, many hearing parents doubt its validity or effectiveness. As the bilingual and bicultural approach takes sign language as its first language, many parents find it difficult to accept this. But through advocacy and training workshops, and especially after observing the changes in their own children, parents are more convinced and supportive of the new teaching approach.
- **Change in how they view their children.** Parents are now seeing what their children CAN do instead of what they cannot do. Oralism highlights what a deaf child cannot do, lowering parents' expectations and depressing a child's self-confidence. The bilingual and bicultural approach offers, through sign language, a way in which a child can communicate and participate in family and social life. It has not only increased the children's self-esteem and enriched their childhood, but has also opened the eyes of their parents to what they can achieve. Encouraged by the positive response from their parents, children have become more outgoing and pro-active. This has built a healthy and positive relationship between child and parent.
- **Change in attitude towards sign language.** With little access to or information about sign language, most parents considered it a primitive form of gesture that would adversely affect their child's progress in oral learning. Many banned its use. However, the positive changes they now see in the children that are using sign language have forced them to rethink this prejudice. They are now more accepting of sign language and see the benefits of studying it to improve their ability to communicate with their child.

Impact on Teachers and Teaching

Teachers are the implementers of the bi-bi approach so their understanding of; attitude towards and ability in conducting classes will have a direct influence on the progress of the children and the sustainability of the project.

The primary objective of bi-bi school programs is to provide deaf children with learning environment where being Deaf is the norm. As such the role of a deaf teacher is vital.

- Teachers have moved from skepticism about the bilingual and bicultural approach to confidence in implementing its methods.
- Deaf and hearing teachers cooperate on an equal level. Both are valued, where as in the past, only hearing teachers would teach the deaf.

- The natural sign language ability of hearing teachers has greatly improved
- Both hearing and deaf teachers see the value and potential of children through the bi-bi approach.

Case Study 1

Ms Fu is a hearing teacher of the junior class in the pre-school.

"When I heard about this new approach, at first I wasn't sure if it would be good for the children or not.

Although people talk about the weaknesses of oral training, at least there was some success.

But with this new approach, - we had no proof and no examples of success in China.

Oral training in China has been in practice for dozens of years already. Sign language has not had such a long history.

"When I first learned we would use sign language to conduct teaching, I was puzzled and doubtful. I didn't think it would be successful.

But after only one semester its effectiveness and success were immediately obvious and I decided I would join the programme."

Case study 2

Wang Jian is a deaf teacher of the senior bi-bi class in primary school.

"Deaf teachers play an important role in the bi-bi approach. They act as role models for the children and are also the first place for the children to learn natural sign language.

For this reason we need to make sure that deaf teachers play a large role in the project. However, because of their poor education, there are very few deaf teachers with a good teaching ability.

Normally deaf teachers are only allowed to work as teaching assistants. It is the bi-bi project that has brought deaf teachers to the forefront."

Impact on Deaf Community

Members of the Deaf community are valued as key participants in and contributors to the project. Not only has their involvement provided invaluable advice and support, but in turn boosted their self-confidence, and given them a new desire to interact with society. They are gradually learning to accept and embrace their Deaf identity and speak with pride about their experiences. It is these

experiences of being deaf in a school, social and work context that will be the drivers for further support services for the Deaf. The impact on the deaf community has been noted as:

- **Acceptance of their Deaf identity.** In the past they would reject their Deafness, and sign language, and try to adopt the identity of hearing people. Through the bi-bi project they have gained pride in their Deafness and a greater awareness that, provided with the right resources, they are equally as capable as a hearing person. Their involvement in the project has also improved their sense of belonging to the community.
- **Active participation in Deaf issues.** Through the project they have gained a greater sense of self-worth and have become more interested in advocating on issues affecting them. They are developing an identity and a voice to let authorities know their concerns but also to let society know about their abilities.
- **Awareness of their potential.** China is a vast country and due to the stigma attached to being deaf, many Deaf people have little opportunity to socialise, or to learn from one another. As a result of the implementation of the bi-bi project, Deaf people are learning about those who have succeeded, using sign language. This has created a base from which to raise the profile of the deaf community, and has started a groundswell of grassroots movements towards promoting Deaf rights.
- **Contribution to bi-bi curriculum, teaching materials and methodology.** They are actively taking part in school activities such as sign language story telling and teaching sign language to parents and families of deaf children. Deaf university students, encouraged by the positive changes, are eager to work towards developing more services for the Deaf in society.

Case Study 1

Gong Xueliang is President of the Tianjin Deaf Association

"Because of oral training - school was very painful for me. I was stressed, frustrated because I couldn't understand.

I didn't understand the abstract meaning of the word; just repeated it at the superficial level.

"Now, when I go to the school where they are doing the bilingual and bicultural project and see the children so happy, and eager to learn, I think how fortunate they are.

"A lot of deaf adults see the progress and are sad for their own childhood that was wasted in oral lessons. They feel that after so many years of compulsory schooling they still can only make a small contribution to society.

"Oral language has some achievements, but it is still very difficult. I have been to many Deaf schools (where the focus is on oral drills); I see the teachers are very tired and that the results are

slow progress. It's hard work for them. Pronunciation is hard work. I see that the best results are with the bilingual and bicultural project."

Impact on Government Agencies

Policy change is not expected overnight. But through the bilingual and bicultural project, both local and national governments and the CDPF, are aware that there is a new approach practiced on a trial basis which is provoking a lot of interest in both Deaf and hearing communities.

- Policymakers and educators are now thinking about the best way to educate deaf children. They are beginning to question the efficiency of oral training and whether it meets the educational needs of deaf children.
- The local educational department in Tianjin has given its approval for the bilingual and bicultural trial. It also made a statement in which it suggested it was open to the use of sign language, unlike in the past when it rejected sign language.
- Local education and school authorities have expressed interest in and are carrying out bilingual and bicultural projects in Henan, Yangzhou, Fujian and others in Tianjin.

Impact on General Public

- UNICEF-supported seminars on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a study into the effects of the oralism policy have helped parents, teachers and education experts understand why deaf children need their own education system. It has also promoted greater understanding of the right of every child to a full and equal education.
- The wide range of advocacy material created for the project, including multi-media presentations, adverts in magazines, TV spots etc... has sparked a tremendous amount of interest in the project and in Deaf rights. In Tianjin, the THRC has received hundreds of inquiries from parents, educators, and from the media. Local TV stations on several occasions have featured the school and covered activities held by the Tianjin Deaf community.
- Promotion of CSL, through handbooks and VCDs distributed to public services has widened the public's knowledge and understanding of sign language. People other than parents are taking part in the sign language classes at the Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf.
- Research carried out by Liaoning Normal University into China's Deaf culture, sign language and sign interpretation services is helping to improve understanding of the individual requirements of the Deaf, and what is needed to give them greater access to services.
- Outreach and therapy services for parents of newly diagnosed deaf children are helping to diminish the superstitious beliefs associated with disability and provide parents with

understanding of Deaf issues and requirements.

Towards a Replicable Model

- In September 2004, the bi-bi approach at Tianjin Number One School for the Deaf was expanded to allow 17 seven- to nine-year olds in the first and second grades of primary school to gain equal access to a comprehensive education.
- A Deaf preschool in Henan province is already adopting the bi-bi approach, using the curriculum and tools created especially for the Tianjin project. Seven deaf children under the age of eight are currently being taught using natural sign language by four teachers, one of whom is deaf.
- Having heard or read about the successes of the Tianjin project, 16 schools in 11 provinces have contacted the Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre to request information. These include: Changzhou Deaf school, Jiangsu province; Zhongzhou University Special Education Institute and Zhongzhou Deaf School, both in Henan province; Pudong Special Education Centre, Shanghai, Xiamen Special Education Centre, Fuzhou Deaf School, Zhangjiou Deaf school, all in Fujian province; the Baotou Deaf School and Hohot Special Education School, both in Inner Mongolia; the Suozhou Deaf School in Shanxi province, Guiyang Blind & Deaf School, Guizhou; Qingyang Blind & Deaf School in Gansu province, Nanning Deaf School, Guangxi province and Xining Deaf School, Qinghai province.
- Following introductory seminars on the basic principles of bi-bi education for teachers, policy makers and parents in 2003 and 2004, eight Deaf and special education schools have requested follow-up workshops. The schools involved include: the Shanqiu Special Education Centre, Henan province; Shijiazhuang Deaf School and the Tangshan Deaf School, both in Hebei province, the Deaf School in Baodi District, Tianjin, the Xiamen Special Education Centre, Fujian province, the Baotou Deaf School in Inner Mongolia, the Suozhou Deaf School in Shanxi province and the Qingyang Deaf School in Gansu province.
- Extensive documentation of the project's successes and constraints, a training manual and VCD on the principles of bi-bi, and Chinese and English-language illustrative books on the project in Tianjin contribute to the widening of society's knowledge and so the ability to replicate the model.
- Experience-sharing meetings have become an annual tradition, bringing together educators, policymakers, NGOs and members of the Deaf community to discuss the educational and other needs of the Deaf.

CONSTRAINTS

Although in the short term, the UNICEF-supported project in Tianjin is about providing deaf children with a comprehensive education through the bi-bi approach, it is also about raising the status of Deaf people, their culture and language.

While there have been some significant strides towards achieving these goals over the last three years, UNICEF and its project partners recognise that there are several constraints holding back progress.

a) Lack of respect for Deaf and Deaf culture in China

There is little acceptance or awareness in China of the Deaf as a distinct culture with their own traditions and language. Often what is characterised as bad manners by the hearing community is simply a feature of Deaf culture, such as holding eye contact for too long or excessive gestures. This lack of recognition of a distinct Deaf culture is not only common among the general public, but also among teachers of the deaf and Deaf people themselves. Many Deaf people do not feel comfortable using sign language in public and so there is little awareness or recognition of it in mainstream society.

b) Lack of participation of Deaf adults

The participation of Deaf adults is crucial to the success of the bilingual and bicultural project as they provide valid role models for the child and reassurance for parents that deafness does not preclude success. But unlike in the west, many Deaf people in China still are not confident about their abilities.

Many are still trying to integrate into mainstream society by acting as hearing as possible. This is especially common among 18-35 year olds, who have rejected their Deaf identity says Gong Xueliang, President of the Tianjin Deaf Association. Often they do not want to associate with the Deaf community, or their family has forbidden them to do so.

c) Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions about the nature of deafness in China and these will need to be addressed before parents, teachers and society accept that a deaf child can benefit from an education delivered in sign language, or that given the right resources a Deaf person can be as successful as any hearing person.

Society

One of the most crucial aspects is a change in the way the public/hearing world views the deaf. Some common misconceptions include:

- The Deaf should fit into the hearing world and learn to speak
- The Deaf are inherently underachievers. Deaf and Dumb are linked
- Sign language is ugly, inelegant and primitive
- Sign language is not a language
- It is impossible to communicate with a Deaf person
- Deaf workers cannot be successful and will affect a company's productivity

Parents

Parents' misconceptions are a major obstacle. Children have two learning zones; at school and at

home and without full support from parents, to encourage a child's sign language ability, success of the bilingual and bicultural project will be limited. Below are some common misconceptions of parents about the Deaf and sign language which will need to be addressed.

- If a child starts to talk late, he/she will become a great thinker
- A few words of speech are more beneficial than a fluency in sign language
- More oral training will eventually result in fluent speech
- Sign language will hinder a child's ability to speak or write
- Hearing aids will make a deaf child 'hearing'
- Sign language has no use in China

d) Children assessed too late

Early discovery, diagnosis and intervention among preschool children are still new concepts in China, according to an assessment by Beijing University. Subsequently, there is still very little knowledge about the illnesses that can cause deafness, their treatments and deafness in these rural areas.

Families often see it as a stigma, and are unwilling or embarrassed to admit to deafness in the family. When finally they do, it is often too late for treatment, and often these children will have missed out on the optimum time to easily acquire a fluency in sign language or any language.

Many areas in China also lack the necessary medical technology to detect deafness at an early age.

e) Rehabilitation is still the desired effect

Despite evidence to show that oral training has been ineffective in providing deaf children with a knowledge base with which to enter society as an equal, parents and policy makers still believe this is the way forward. Deaf education in China asserts that deaf children should learn how to speak and attend mainstream schools, yet their individual circumstances are not taken into consideration, and there are no additional resources to support them in mainstream schools¹¹.

The government still publishes reports on the numbers of deaf children "rehabilitated" each year in accordance with the latest special education policy, offering false hope to parents that their child can be one of the "success stories".

f) Knowledge of bilingual and bicultural education is limited

Because of its relative newness in China, there is still little understanding about the principles of bilingual and bicultural education. Because of the size, disparity and economic situation of China, the western models of bilingual and bicultural education are of limited use.

Teachers also have little opportunity to gain any practical knowledge of bilingual and bicultural

¹¹ Beijing Normal University, assessment 2003

apart from rare trips abroad and they are unsure how to progress. Some of the questions asked are how and when to combine sign language and written/oral in the classroom? An entire new curriculum has had to be developed for the bilingual and bicultural project for China's Deaf.

The Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre has fielded hundreds of inquiries about the bi-bi project, most of which were with regard to the theoretical or technical implementation of bilingual and bicultural. Below are some of the more common questions.

Theoretical:

1. What role do oral and sign language play?
2. How do children acquire sign language?
3. What is the difference between total communication and bi-bi?

Technical:

- What is the curriculum and what is the method of teaching?
- Are there any classes for oral pronunciation?
- How many classes are taught by deaf teachers?
- What sign language should be used - natural or grammar?

g) Too few qualified deaf and hearing teachers

The implementation of a bilingual and bicultural approach requires a faculty of qualified hearing and Deaf professionals. Deaf teachers not only provide the children with a healthy role model but are also an invaluable resource for them to learn sign language. However, there are very few deaf teachers in China, most only being allowed to teach non-academic studies such as art or music or work as teaching assistants.

In Yangzhou, for instance, where the local education authority has expressed an interest in implementing the project - there is only one deaf teacher.

There is also still a prejudice against deaf teachers, and many deaf university students surveyed by Beijing University said they would prefer a hearing teacher because they are "better qualified" to teach.

At the same time, many hearing teachers lack fluency in natural CSL and are ignorant of Deaf culture.

h) Lack of sign language interpreters

Unlike in western countries there is not a pool of qualified natural sign language interpreters in China, or recognised courses for sign interpreters. This means that the level of sign language being taught to children in schools is haphazard at best.

In the long run, without sign language interpreters, children who are enrolled on the bilingual and bicultural project will have little opportunity to communicate or participate in the hearing world. It will be difficult for them to attend university, unless it is a Deaf university or to get a job other than at a

factory.

Even staff at the China Disabled People's Federation (CDPF) were found to lack sign language skills. One assessment by Beijing Normal University found that they "can hardly communicate with deaf people, do not know the psychology and culture of the Deaf community and so can hardly be said to be serving the deaf people" .

i) Confusion over CSL and SSC

The ongoing debate over natural Chinese Sign Language (CSL) versus Sign Supported Chinese (SSC) is causing communication problems both inside and outside the classroom.

Findings of a recent study carried out by Liaoning Normal University showed that more than half the students polled at a Deaf school couldn't understand any of the SSC that was used by their teachers (hearing). Only 20.8 percent said they understood completely, while teachers said they too were baffled by their students' use of natural CSL.

While the Deaf community prefers natural sign language, most Deaf educators - who are predominantly hearing - favour Sign Supported Chinese as they believe that it will help children to make the transition to spoken language.

The lack of consensus on whether to use natural sign language or Sign Supported Chinese in the classroom can also affect the linguistic development of children in the bi-bi class. In the early stages, while teachers were still building up their knowledge of and confidence in the bi-bi method and natural sign language, observers found that oral and finger spelling still played a dominant role.

This, they said, unfairly provides those children with some residual hearing an advantage over their profoundly deaf classmates. But equally, will prevent fluency in either sign or spoken language as all the children are unsure whether to focus on the signing or speaking teacher. Experts have suggested that keeping the sign and spoken elements of the class separate will provide a clear and pure language model in both CSL and spoken Chinese.

j) Local not National Level

Not a single national agency is involved in this project with all of the counterparts involved at the local level. This obstructs any efforts towards promoting a national policy change for deaf education. If policy change is to be invoked, the project needs to reach the decision makers.

k) Weak assessment and documentation of achievements

Although external consultants have commented on the changes in sociability and communication of children on the bilingual and bicultural project, these need to be properly and officially assessed and documented in order to influence a nationwide policy change.

Without such assessment, this approach could lose support and therefore fail at the sake of deaf children.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

UNICEF is committed to building on the momentum gained over the last three years and, working together with the Deaf community, the Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre, and other project partners, has identified several key areas where it will continue to push for change.

I THINK WE SHOULD PUT BELOW QUOTE IN A SEPARATE COLUMN ON THE ‘CONSTRAINTS/FUTURE ACTIVITIES’ PAGE AS A STANDALONE.

“The bi-bi approach respects and values the deaf. It recognises sign language and deaf culture and provides a teaching method that is suitable for the needs of the deaf children. It is, without question, an advanced level of special education. But there are differences between the west, where the bi-bi concept originated, and China.

Because China’s social security system is inadequate, the deaf have not received the care or attention that they need, their sense of self worth is much lower than in the west. Many are out of work and instead turn to crime or other anti-social behaviours to make ends meet.

The media always reports these social problems, but they never look deeper at the root cause, or call attention to the poor living conditions of the Deaf. Consequently it has created discrimination and prejudice against the Deaf. Unless this prejudice is removed, the slogan: “the Deaf can do everything but hear” will remain simply empty words carried by the wind.

To fully implement the bi-bi approach will take a shift in thinking and a pioneering spirit. We cannot simply copy the western model; we must pioneer a Chinese model in order to meet the needs of Chinese deaf children. Teachers, parents, deaf adults and the whole of society must all work together to create an environment that respects and values the deaf.”¹²

a) Establish a recognisable definition of bilingual and bicultural education

A definition of bi-bi as it relates to China needs to be set out as soon as possible so that so that if a school claims to offer bi-bi, parents will know exactly what kind of education their child will receive.

More information about the curriculum, teaching methods and materials and the roles of sign language, written language and spoken language must be made available to parents, so that they can make choices about their child's education.

The Tianjin Rehabilitation Centre has already supplied materials including an outline of the curriculum, teaching materials, demonstrations, teaching plans, instruments and video tapes for evaluation.

¹² Chen Huamin, vice-chairperson of the Tianjin Deaf Association, 2004

b) Build capacity of deaf and hearing teachers to carry out bi-bi

Deaf people must be encouraged to develop as teachers, and be given a stronger role in the classroom. Schools implementing the bi-bi project must be made aware that this is a core principle of the bi-bi approach.

Natural sign language must become a mandatory part of the training to become a teacher of the deaf¹³ and hearing teachers should also receive training in Deaf culture, or at least be more aware of the various characteristics of Deaf culture, so they do not inadvertently try to make the deaf children act like hearing.

c) Breaking down parent's prejudice against sign language and deafness

Key is overcoming the misconception that sign language is primitive and will corrode efforts to speak.

On a basic level, more outreach services need to be provided to rural areas, offering parents information about prevention of deafness, treatment, education options and how to help and provide for a deaf child.

Counselling from psychologists as well as visits from members of the Deaf community can help to reassure a parent that deafness is not necessarily inherited and that just because their child is deaf, it does not mean he or she is intellectually disabled.

Parents will also need to be convinced, through videos and other visual tools that sign language can facilitate communication and Deaf role models will need to reinforce the idea that even without speech it is possible to succeed in China.

To help encourage their child to gain a natural proficiency in sign language parents need to be advised on parenting a deaf child. They will also be given more help in learning sign language to communicate with their child.

Below are some other ways in which a parent can reinforce their child's ability to learn and grow through sign language.

- Parents should create an environment for their children to communicate freely and with confidence in their native tongue
- Parents should learn to praise their child for his/her achievements. Criticism will only leave a child unwilling or afraid to talk.
- Parents should not compare their child with others. When learning sign language, it may take a while for them to feel comfortable with the signs.

d) Promote respect for Deaf and Deaf culture

There has to be more studies into Deaf issues and Deaf culture, sign language and sign language

¹³ Beijing Normal University assessment, 2003

interpretation services, with the findings made available to the mainstream. Deaf people need to become more involved and consulted on this research.

Members of the Deaf community must also be encouraged to take on a higher profile role, including initiating groups or clubs for parents of deaf children, mobilising community services to provide outreach services for parents and families, and promoting the needs of the deaf.

Teachers, parents and successful Deaf people must act as ambassadors for the Deaf community, promoting their culture to the general public, acting as bridges between the two worlds and encouraging greater interaction.

Project partners and UNICEF can devise a more effective advocacy communications strategy; promoting the achievements of the project on a much wider scale to deaf schools, special education experts and parents. Successful Deaf people can play a larger role

e) Promote sign language and sign language interpretation services

There needs to be more lobbying for the government to recognise sign language as a language in its own right and for natural sign language to become part of the curriculum for teachers who want to go on to become special teachers of the deaf.

The Tianjin Hearing Rehabilitation Centre, with UNICEF support, has provided training on sign language and has produced and distributed a handbook and VCD with simple signs to public businesses. This, however, needs to be replicated on a much wider scale.

UNICEF has also supported Liaoning University in Dalian research into sign language interpretation services in China. This research needs to be made public and the recommendations acted upon as soon as possible if the deaf are to have equal access to education, jobs and other services.

f) Support more research into sign language and Deaf culture

On a broad scale, more research into the linguistics of natural CSL needs to be carried out with Deaf people brought to provide greater insight into their own language. Collaboration could take place with overseas Deaf universities such as Gallaudet in Washington DC, or closer to home, the Chinese University in Hong Kong which has developed an extensive centre focusing on sign language linguistics.

There needs to be recognition of sign language at a national level with more research conducted into its grammar and syntax.

A sign language dictionary would provide a single resource for deaf and hearing to

g) More advocacy at National as well as local level

More National partners will be included in workshops and seminars. Those who need to play a greater role are the Ministry of Education, CDPF and the National Training Centre on Hearing

Disability. In absence of a national unified policy, dissemination of the bi-bi approach must come through bottom up, targeting first the leaders and deaf schools and parents, and the local education authorities and education ministries.

At the same time, communication and advocacy activities will also target the general public in order to raise awareness of the Deaf and promote more respect for their culture and language. Deaf people will be encouraged to come forward to talk about their experiences and achievements.

h) Strengthen assessment and documentation of achievements

Each child will be assessed on a regular basis. External consultants from the UK have suggested filming a child's ability to provide sign language commentary to a known, videotape story as a good way of assessing linguistic competence and performance. The same assessment can be re-taken at a later stage to provide a progress comparison.

CONCLUSION

Three years ago, when UNICEF supported the first seminar on bi-bi education in China, there were just a handful of people who were familiar with it. Today, the numbers are growing and bi-bi is becoming a much talked about concept.

Dozens of deaf schools have shown an interest in bi-bi and several are currently using the newly-developed curriculum, enabling pre-school and primary school children, for the first time, to gain access to mainstream lessons. Driving this take up are the obvious changes taking place in the children enrolled on the project. The bilingual and bicultural approach has not only provided them with a language with which to learn, develop and communicate, but also a culture and community with which to identify.

Although in the short term, the project is about providing deaf children with a comprehensive education, it is also about raising the status of Deaf people, their culture and language and encouraging their interaction with the hearing community.

There is still a long way to go however, and much rests on the removal of the stigma attached to being deaf in China.

Success will also require a seismic shift in how parents view sign language and their willingness to learn to use it.

Lastly, there will need to be a change in government policy from the current emphasis on making all deaf children learn to speak, to a focus on each individual child's needs, from a social, intellectual and emotional standpoint.

