

LIFE / STORIES

This story was taken from www.inq7.net

http://news.inq7.net/lifestyle/index.php?index=1&story_id=77963

New center is music to the hearing-impaired
First posted 11:56pm (Mla time) June 04, 2006
By Linda Bolido
Inquirer

THERE'S AN OLD folk song about four beggars having fun. The lame beggar dances, while the mute sings, the deaf listens and the blind watches. The joke, of course, is in having the four people doing what supposedly they are not capable of because of their handicap.

The truth is, however, the deaf is not only incapable of hearing but should also be, technically, unable to dance. Rhythm and beat, after all, so necessary in dance, come from music. If the deaf cannot hear, how can he/she follow the rhythm and the beat?

But at the De La Salle University-College of St. Benilde's (DLS-CSB) School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies (SDEAS), the deaf is accomplishing the improbable—dance. The ability to dance is actually just “gravy” to the skills the school's hearing-impaired students are learning.

The school started in 1991 as a vocational institution offering a two-year certificate course in bookkeeping and accounting. Instruction was handled by the School for Special Studies. At the time, only 15 students were accepted. Eventually, it evolved into what it is now, a full-fledged academic unit with the addition of the four-year degree program Bachelor in Applied Deaf Studies that prepares students to be teachers for the hearing-impaired.

In school year 2000-2001, consultations with everyone involved—students, faculty, and experts—led to the fine-tuning of the school's program and its renaming to SDEAS. The focus of the degree program shifted from teacher-training to deaf studies, with specialization in applied arts or business, broadening the options for livelihood and gainful employment of graduates.

In fact, a SDEAS proposal, “Youth Entre-employment for the Deaf,” was a finalist at the recent World Bank-sponsored Panibagong Paraan 2006 project grant competition among innovative, small-scale development projects.

Training was also broadened to incorporate "formation or nonacademic programs" for student development, hence, the lessons in dance, among others (DLS-CSB has a resident deaf artistic group, Silent Steps).

Though the school has since accepted students from more privileged backgrounds, it is primarily designed to provide opportunities for the underprivileged to be productive members of society.

SDEAS' membership in PEN-International in 2002 further strengthened its capacity to provide adequate and relevant training to its students. PEN, which stands for Post-secondary Network, is an international collaborative network of colleges and universities that provide post-secondary education to the deaf.

Multimedia

The most recent result of this partnership is the opening of the multimedia PEN-International Learning Center (PEN-LC) at the DLS-CSB campus. Dr. James J. de Caro, PEN-International director, attended the formal opening of the center.

Administered by SDEAS, the center is patterned after a similar facility at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf of the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, United States. Supported by the Nippon Foundation, PEN-LC employs the latest in multimedia technologies, including Internet-ready computers, to address the remedial and developmental needs of deaf and hard of hearing students especially in reading, writing and numeracy.

Students and teachers can also use it as a resource center where they can access technologies and reading materials for one-on-one learning or small group studies.

In particular, SDEAS expects that the center will strengthen the learning and teaching of the Filipino Sign Language, the lingua franca of hearing-impaired Filipinos.

It is not generally known that sign is not universal. There are almost as many "sign" as oral languages. But though the country's deaf use Filipino "sign," the language is not developed or patterned after the medium used by majority of the population.

With the new learning center, SDEAS expects it will be better able to accomplish its goals of offering programs responsive to the needs of the hearing impaired, conducting research on innovative strategies for their holistic development and empowering them by preserving deaf heritage and nurturing Filipino deaf culture, among others.