

Higher Education for Deaf Students in the Philippines Today: The Role of De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, the Deaf Community, and PEN-International

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It is with great humility that I stand here before you to share stories of how our institution, the Deaf and hearing people in our academic department, the Deaf community, and PEN-International have continually motivated us in our work with and for the Deaf youth. I hope our stories will inspire you in your efforts of making higher education more relevant in the lives of Japanese Deaf students.

I will talk about three main points that guided our initiative for higher education for Deaf students in De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde (DLS-CSB). These are:

1. the DLS-CSB mandate;
2. the mandate of the Deaf community in and outside DLS-CSB; and
3. the partnership of DLS-CSB and PEN-International in the mandate of the future for postsecondary education in the Philippines.

Background Information

First, I will give a brief background of the educational set-up to which DLS-CSB belongs.

De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde is one of the 63 schools of the Philippine La Salle District. Across the globe there are 61+ La Salle Districts managed by the De La Salle Brothers of the Christian Schools that originated from France. The Brothers' mission is to educate the children of the poor.

Of the 63 schools, DLS-CSB and seven (7) other schools belong to the De La Salle University System. These schools offer baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate studies, and cover all levels. Each of the schools is headed by an Executive Vice President who reports to the President of the System.

Generally, La Salle students come from middle to lower middle class families. However, some schools cater only to the middle to upper class families. DLS-CSB is one such school. These types of schools still make education accessible to the poor. Partial and full tuition subsidies are given to students who cannot afford expensive education. These subsidies are from the general funds and external donations. Ninety percent of DLS-CSB'S School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies (SDEAS) Deaf students are recipients of these subsidies.

There are 7,363 college students in DLS-CSB, 133 of whom are Deaf students enrolled in the SDEAS. SDEAS is one of the six academic schools under the Vice President for Academics of DLS-CSB. The Office of Student Affairs is part of the Academics team but handles the non-academic programs crucial to student development. These non-academic activities are: psychological counseling; career development and placement; spiritual

development; cultural arts; sports; student government and organizations; and leadership and community service training; among others.

In SDEAS, students' academic needs are addressed by the Office for Academic Programs. The non-academic needs are addressed by the Office for Deaf Esteem and Formation. SDEAS collaborates with the bigger Office of Student Affairs for Deaf and hearing involvements.

A. *Institutional Mandate: DLS-CSB*

Historical Basis

In the 1800's, a La Salle Brother taught a Deaf boy to learn about Catholic instructions. He first learned how to sign from the Deaf boy and used it to teach the Deaf boy about the Catholic faith. That La Salle Brother, Benilde Romançon, was later proclaimed a saint. Our sense of history compelled us to acknowledge this significant event. It was therefore only proper that the College named after this saint would open a program for the Deaf.

Vision-Mission: Focus on Learner-Centered Education

The Vision-Mission of the institution also gave us direction. We believe that education should recognize the diversity of learners' needs, interests and cultures; that creative methods should be implemented to respond to this diversity; and that the learning environment and climate should promote success through mutual support and respect for all learners. We strive to be "learner-centered" and the institutional expectation is for everyone to strive in translating this into curriculum planning, faculty development, policy making, and program development.

The Transformation of SDEAS

In 1991, the Deaf program started as a vocational course. In 1993, the Bachelor in Applied Deaf Studies degree program was discussed by hearing educators and key Deaf adults. The goal was to produce Deaf teachers for elementary and secondary education with an orientation in the socio-cultural identity of Deaf people.

In 1994, the School of Special Studies was opened and housed the two programs. The department expanded and became attentive to Deaf needs. But the expectation was to create programs for other people with disabilities. The general target was overwhelming for the department, as issues in Deaf education were neither yet understood nor resolved, and the department saw that the School must succeed in this area before any expansion will be made.

In 2000, extensive consultations were made with the Deaf students, Deaf and hearing faculty to solicit feedback about the effectiveness of the bachelor's degree, classroom processes, faculty core, and the department's overall direction in helping the Deaf students have better lives. Feedback validated the need for urgent change. The school name was

changed to the School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies to anchor the students and faculty to the beliefs and direction it felt was vital.

In 2003, the organizational restructure that eventually paved the way for the creation of two major offices for academics and deaf esteem and formation began. In 2004, the new organizational structure was finalized and the degree program was revised. The revision focused on the development of industry-demanded skills in design and business for students to be competitive, as well as have a leader-advocate orientation and skills, so that they can be their community's own initiators and leaders for change in the workplace and society.

The key to our transformation was the acknowledgement of the top administration that the Deaf students have unique needs, interests and culture that require appropriate interventions and support that are often times different from what is given to the hearing students. It is important therefore that constant collaboration is made to help the top administration understand the Deaf experience and for educators of the Deaf to align their efforts with the thrusts and orientation of the College. The core of hearing and Deaf educators involved in the department can play a critical role in this effort.

B. Deaf People's mandate

Now I will share with you the five core beliefs that reminded the hearing and Deaf educators of SDEAS to constantly remain focused on the specific needs, interests and culture of our students. These beliefs also guided the team to seek out, implement and evaluate the appropriate and relevant interventions for the right learning environment and climate for them to succeed through mutual support and respect for all learners. These five are as follows:

- The Socio-Cultural View of Deaf People
- The Learner-Centered Education
- Evaluation and Feedback for Transformation and Empowerment
- Deaf Community Role Models: Providing Possibilities and Directions
- The Bridge Builders: Advocates among the Deaf and Hearing Core of Educators

Socio-Cultural view of Deaf People

The hearing educators started as incompetent signers. We survived our lectures, but we failed to effectively communicate with the Deaf students.

As we learned to sign better, we realized that their diversity was a product of their own life circumstances and experiences. Their being different did not make them second-class citizens. When students saw the change in our perspectives and the way we signed, they expressed themselves more freely; their intelligence and the future of their raw potentials became more evident.

Later on we learned that the disparity of our views on Deaf people were views that at first reflected the medical/pathological perspective; and eventually, the socio-cultural

perspective. The latter made sense as it referred to the identity of individuals as human beings belonging to a group accepted as legitimate, regardless of diversity in experiences, beliefs and language. This opposes the generally accepted medical/pathological view that deafness is an impairment, and that Deaf people are in essence “to be fixed” in order to function fully in society.

Learner-Centered Education

In a traditional setting, students are seen as mere recipients of knowledge; while the teachers are the “source” of knowledge. The innate capacity to develop knowledge, build competence, and use these to cultivate learning in others seems to rest on the authority that age, positions, and academic achievements dictate. Teachers and administrators, and hearing people in general, are people with authority, and it is then easy to accept that they are more capable and knowledgeable. Students, and specifically Deaf people, do not have this authority, and therefore their knowledge and capability would always be less than what their teachers have. The teachers direct and provide, the students wait and receive.

As we learned to sign well, we began to listen intently to Deaf people, particularly our students. We learned to value their feedback as guideposts for our effectiveness and relevance.

We realized that our traditional view of students as mere recipients of knowledge, and the medical view of Deaf people as impaired, strongly controlled us to adhere only to traditional ways of learning and teaching. We became too comfortable with problems as a product of students’ deafness, and not of their life circumstances, and it stopped us from being creative in our search for alternative and better ways of understanding their needs. And so we started to experiment and test alternative ways of teaching.

Later on, this was further clarified and supported by the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles that our institution has embraced as its key framework for learning and teaching. You may learn more about the 14 Principles from <http://www.apa.org/ed/lcp.html>.

Evaluation and Feedback for Transformation and Empowerment

Raphy Domingo, my Deaf interpreter, was my student in the early 1990’s. He told me then that his experience with student development activities was to wait for instructions. Just like the other Deaf youth that came before and after him, he accepted this as part of Deaf life. But through counseling and other non-academic activities, Raphy discovered that he was capable of critical and creative thinking; and that he can find solutions to problems he faced “without waiting for instructions.”

The processes involved in many non-academic activities of the students allow them to learn the skills of planning, evaluation and reflection. Beyond output, the processes involved were all metacognitive exercises that generated awareness of their capability to think, as well as the capability to create, test their ideas, and learn from the varied experiences of doing everything they saw as vital to the concretization of their ideas. The hearing educator

who took charge focused on guiding them to focus on their goals and learn from their experiences.

The Deaf students organized sign language classes, theater and dance productions, art exhibits, community service, and student organization activities. They were the creative planners, curriculum consultants, scriptwriters, production teams, and community organizers. They were also the teachers, actors, dancers, artists, and leaders. They were not trained in these specialized skills. The perfection of the skills was not the goal. They just wanted to tell their stories. Because the stories were their own, they could not help but simply give their best, and perfection naturally came about. Every production was always called "DEAF LIFE." Eventually this initiative evolved not only to tell stories so that others may understand, but to also celebrate their Deaf lives. These productions are now called the DEAF FESTIVAL.

This environment developed students' inner confidence. Students became more directed and assertive. They took care of the younger ones in their identity search. They were role models in the making. But the problem was that they were young like the rest. The potentials for future advancement were only as close to success in college life.

The Deaf Community Role Models: Providing Possibilities and Directions

In essence, our Deaf students existed in a vacuum. They did not have access to the Deaf community life outside DLS-CSB. They needed proof of the range of possibilities for them to learn and understand so that they may gain the confidence to explore and pursue their own life's possibilities.

We searched for and hired Deaf professionals. In the absence of such, we hired Deaf-para professionals. Those we could not hire, we invited to meet our students. We started to reach out to Deaf organizers, workers, leaders who are respected and admired in the community; even foreign Deaf people with similar track records were invited to share their life stories in the hope that the students will have more Deaf role models to inspire them. Not just to see the possibilities, but also to understand and find courage from the struggles and limitations that the older Deaf adults faced. Maybe with a DLS-CSB education, they can be trailblazers and partners to create new possibilities and realities for younger generations of Deaf people.

The Bridge Builders: Advocates among the Deaf and Hearing Core of Educators/Administrators/Service Providers

Our direct involvement in education can facilitate the transformation of Deaf lives. Educators who are competent in the natural language of the Deaf and believe in the Deaf people's socio-cultural identity can already facilitate changes in the classroom. But transformation should not take place in our presence alone and should not benefit only those we directly teach. Educators can become a collective force, and can redirect the department to be more responsive in higher education for Deaf students through the creation, revision,

and implementation of policies, curricula, faculty development, and program development that will be beneficial to the greater majority.

But aside from being bridges to Deaf people, hearing educators must take the lead to be bridge builder for the Deaf. Advocacy is a vital tool in transformation. This we have realized now. After 15 years of being immersed in education, formation, and employment initiatives for the Deaf, we have overlooked our role in helping the bigger environment gain the confidence to understand the Deaf, and guide them in their direct involvements that may or may not have bearing on the education, formation and employment of our Deaf students. This is the reason why we are working on the creation of a third office in SDEAS that shall deal directly with this concern. This office has been tentatively named the Office for Deaf Advocacy and Partnership Development.

Our setup is not perfect, though. While we figure out ways to create the needed support to address Deaf needs and concerns, we face a daily battle of negotiations and compromises. Not just between SDEAS and the bigger hearing environment we work with, but with the transactions that take place within SDEAS itself, such as among the hearing educators, between Deaf and hearing partners, between hearing educators and Deaf students, and within ourselves as individuals. Sometimes, we forget whom we are here for, and the purpose of what we are doing.

Thus, initiatives must thoroughly be grounded and linked to the needs, uniqueness and aspirations of the Deaf community, particularly the students in the School. The Deaf youth and adults must take the lead here. It shall be your constant feedback and evaluation that shall check, test, verify, and question the relevance and effectiveness of the initiatives, and therefore prevent the educators from becoming too comfortable with what they are accountable for. One way to encourage that leadership is to have Deaf adult role models take active part in the educational setting.

Jose Austria, a Deaf man in his early forties, joined our first batch of Deaf students in 1991. He was an active leader in the Deaf community. After a few months of teaching and counseling, he told me of his frustrations over our failures as educators and the bleakness of his future. But his honesty also reverberated with hope that if we just learn from the Deaf how to sign so that we may know how to listen, he was optimistic that his aspirations for himself and for his younger Deaf classmates would still be possible. It was this kind of honesty that made the institutional mandate to be learner-centered more real and compelling, propelling us to listen to our students so that they can teach us how to teach them better.

It will really be significant if the Deaf adults in the community become teachers, consultants, and colleagues in the educational setting, where they can interact freely with Deaf students and their hearing colleagues, and their ideas take form in the policies, programs and interventions in Deaf education. In DLS-CSB, we hired Deaf people to work with us. To fill certain gaps, we provided a modicum of mentorship and supervision. Hearing educators also get the same from the Deaf teachers.

So to be authentic bridge builders, our work cannot center on work alone. We must build it on relationships. Beyond discussing information and interventions, regular and authentic

conversations will help us to be constantly in touch with the needs and concerns of the Deaf, as well as their uniqueness and aspirations, which would remind us why we have to remain clear with our mandate to be bridge builders in the lives of those we work *with* and work *for*.

C. The mandate of the future: The partnership of DLS-CSB and PEN-International

In this section I will discuss the following points:

- PEN-International, The Nippon Foundation of Japan, and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf
- the role of PEN-International in the initiatives of DLS-CSB SDEAS
- future directions

We acknowledged that we have been a trailblazer in the Philippines, largely as a result of the creative experimentation that our beliefs have led us to pursue. We went through a decade of experimentation where trial and error led us to successes, but there were miscalculations that yielded grave results. The extensive consultations made with the Deaf students and the Deaf and hearing faculty in 2000 gave results that validated this assessment. Because of this, we needed guideposts and “how to’s” to be more accurate and calculating in our efforts so that there would be fewer risks. On a larger scale, our institution needed mentors and experts to help in our efforts.

It was during this time when James J. DeCaro, PhD, Director of Postsecondary Education Network-International, reached out to our institution via electronic mail. Our discussions took place for almost a year. In late 2001, the PEN-International team composed of Dr. DeCaro, Professor Bill Clymer, Coordinator of PEN-International Projects, and NTID-RIT Executive Vice President Robert Davila, PhD came to evaluate our institution’s readiness to be a partner. Immediately after that, Mr. Yasunobu Ishii of The Nippon Foundation also visited us. In January 2002, DLS-CSB became a member of PEN-International.

PEN-International, The Nippon Foundation of Japan, and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf

Postsecondary Education Network-International (PEN-International) is a program that is housed at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in the USA. Since 2001, NTID has received more than \$5 million in grants from The Nippon Foundation of Japan to support PEN-International.

RIT houses the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, one of the eight colleges of the university. RIT was founded in 1829 and has evolved into a major international technological university. There are approximately 15,000 students enrolled at RIT, of which 1250 are deaf. NTID is the home of PEN-International.

The Nippon Foundation is a grant-making organization based here in Japan that provides financial assistance for activities that they determine can improve the quality of living of people around the world.

The foundation acknowledged that while they gave extensive support to Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people from developing countries to study in the United States, very few benefited from this opportunity. The majority could not get postsecondary education of satisfactory quality in their home countries. The foundation saw the need for a support structure to enable Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students to access quality education closer to home. The foundation saw NTID's proposal to develop an international network to improve postsecondary education for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students to be of sufficient interest to fund PEN-International.

Key delegates from universities in Russia, Japan, China and NTID/RIT signed a resolution committing to excellence, integrity and innovation to begin a unique, collaborative network to improve high-tech education and career options for their deaf residents. The signing of the resolution on June 29, 2001 marked the official start of PEN-International. DLS-CSB joined PEN-International the following year.

As you can see from this illustration, there are PEN-International sites around the world — most are in the Asia-Pacific Basin.

The goals of PEN-International are:

- improve teaching, learning and curriculum development
- increase the application of technology in teaching and learning
- expand career educational opportunities for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people around the world

The Role of PEN-International in DLS-CSB SDEAS

Like our own experiences in understanding the needs of our Deaf students, PEN-International took painstaking time to understand our needs. Formal and informal discussions and visits helped us identify key issues and possible workable solutions that we recommended. Succeeding meetings took place, centering on these issues.

We were also provided a lot of opportunities in the areas of Training and Faculty Development, Multimedia Computer Centers, Online and WWW Resources, and Evaluation and Research.

It was clear to us that for the Deaf students of SDEAS, it was their last stop to get the needed support to help them develop their potentials and equally compete for opportunities to improve their lives and contribute in society. That created the urgency for SDEAS to learn quickly what was relevant to us and implement immediate changes in our setup.

We also knew of the great difficulty to advocate the rights of Deaf people in education, industry, and society. We had the philosophy and conceptual frameworks to validate our

beliefs; we had the educators' personal commitments and professional competence to address the issues; we had the Deaf people to work with us, and their stories and aspirations grounded us in reality that the urgency is real. But we did not have the tools and guideposts on how to go about translating these intentions to concrete actions that would yield outcomes contributing further to the efforts to improve Deaf lives in our society.

Significant to SDEAS development are the Training and Faculty Development, the Multimedia Learning Center, and the outpouring of support for endless consultations and feedback from the experts. Major events took place that helped us find the guideposts and "how to's" we were looking for. And these made us more assertive in being creative in our initiatives, as well as more confident to implement traditional and alternative interventions.

Changes took place over a span of three years of involvement with PEN-International, leading to more measurable and specific outcomes that we could track down and follow-up. These are vital references that gave us further confidence to create and implement other interventions to address issues and concerns that came along the way.

Specific outcomes of the support led to the following:

- a. Curricula that reflected both technical and leader-advocate orientation and skills
- b. Internship venues for applying skills in a supervised environment, albeit requiring industry standard performance
- c. The implementation of simple but aggressive interventions to convince employers of the capabilities of Deaf graduates
- d. The implementation of basic support structures in employment sites for hearing colleagues and employers to overcome fears, correct misperceptions, and provide appropriate accommodations for a barrier-free work environment for Deaf employees
- e. The establishment of partnerships with local organizations for and of Deaf people by providing opportunities for faculty development, outreach activities for the Deaf students, and other activities that would benefit the Filipino Deaf in the areas of learning and teaching, career education and advancement, and the like

I should now say here that the eleven years of Deaf education in DLS-CSB have been an intense struggle for the hearing and Deaf community in our institution. The identity of "being special" made educational initiatives difficult to pursue and implement. There is always a question of validity of needs and the legitimacy of interventions, as these are unconsciously being assessed in the context of what is already available for the hearing students, and in the context of the hearing students' realities and experiences.

And so, beyond the details of success outcomes of the support provided to us, PEN-International's involvement the last 4 years has helped acknowledge SDEAS and Deaf people's identity, needs and aspirations. An international organization managed by a respected institution in Deaf education was interested in a small and isolated department, whose own institution and country had not yet understood the extent of their responsibility to the Deaf community. Their presence gave us our legitimate right to be heard, to be understood, and to be given the space to take our natural path to develop and excel guided

by a learner-centered philosophy and socio-cultural identity of Deaf people. It validated the Deaf people's needs and legitimized our efforts to trail blaze in our institution, and hopefully in our country.

Future Directions

So what is in store for the future of higher education of Deaf people in DLS-CSB? At SDEAS, we continue our efforts to develop, enhance, and implement the following imperatives:

- Infuse a bilingual-bicultural orientation into our curriculum. Bilingual would be Filipino Sign Language and English Language/Filipino Language. Bicultural would mean Deaf culture and the Filipino Culture.
- Expand our students' options for career advancement through various academic programs for student development and professional expertise. This would include preparatory programs, associate degree programs, baccalaureate programs and post-baccalaureate programs.
- Expand initiatives for partnerships with employers for internship, employment and advocacy
- Increase our pool of educators with signing skills and our pool of educational interpreters; an increase in the faculty pool will include increasing our Deaf faculty pool
- Strengthen our faculty development in the areas of learning and teaching; develop competencies and orientation to equip educators in facilitating holistic formation across the curriculum; and the acquisition of effective expressive and receptive skills of Filipino Sign Language.
- Expand our student development initiatives for more opportunities to address the needs of the Deaf as well as to put in place a formation track across the curriculum
- Expand our services to help other schools for the Deaf and organizations for and of Deaf people to develop their competencies in key areas mentioned above. These services shall include both the service providers and the target clients.

On a larger scale, the top management of the Philippine La Salle District and the De La Salle University System has been exposed to the needs and concerns of the Deaf and their potentials. They have been exposed as well as to the extent of possibilities of Deaf education in the Philippines.

Across all possible educational programs, La Salle can mandate to include in its mission the Filipino Deaf children and youth. DLS-CSB SDEAS is seen as a future portal of resources and support to contribute to the advancement of Deaf education in the Philippines, particularly in the management of schools or programs for the Deaf, training effective human resources for teaching and interpreting, improving instructional technology for enhanced learning; setting up and enhancing student formation, expanding curricula options, and expanding bridges for better employment of the Deaf. These are big dreams that we hope SDEAS will be able to chart out accurately and prepare for.

With the institutional mandate, the Deaf people's mandate, and the partnership with PEN-International, I believe we will indeed be a trailblazer in the advancement of Deaf education in the Philippines.

In closing, I would like to say that central to all these efforts is our desire to help improve the lives of Deaf people. I know everyone in this room and the organizations you all represent are already doing it and are seeking more ways on how to do it better. I hope my presentation has showed you that Deaf people play a major role in making the efforts of educational institutions more relevant to the lives of the Deaf students we teach.

Let us listen so that we may effectively learn how to sign; let us communicate using their language, so that we may effectively guide them; let us guide them, so that they may effectively take the lead in improving Deaf lives. Let the Deaf adults and students become partners in these efforts to make a difference. In the end, we all share the responsibility in making Deaf lives better. And it is but proper that Deaf people take the lead in nurturing the lives of their own Deaf youth and their community.

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