Evaluating Interventions

Emma Stone

One of the most frustrating aspects of disability and development work is the lack of critical and careful evaluation of individual projects and programmes. In many ways, this is not surprising. First, project staff may not have the time, resources, energy or skills to do the kind of evaluation that would be most useful. Secondly, there is often a huge difference between "the kind of evaluation that would be most useful" and "the kind of evaluation that projects have to do to secure further funding". Thirdly, most development funders have yet to realise that a good evaluation requires extra and adequate resources.

There are many different views on what "good evaluation" looks like. For the most part, evaluation reports tend to be pithy, focused on those inputs and outputs that are basic but lend themselves to measurement. For example: how many workers were trained; how many people did they work with; how much did this cost, etc. If views and experiences from local disabled people and their families are included in the report, then this is often restricted to snapshots of success stories. All of this has a place in terms of completing formalities laid down by funders. But it doesn't tell the half of a project's story. What is needed is the kind and quality of information that will help other people and projects learn, so that wheels won't be reinvented, mistakes won't be repeated, and good practice and ideas can be replicated.

Questions should be asked about the process of a project; about the assumptions on which the project was based, and whether or not these had to be changed; about where the ideas and impetus came from; about how, and how well, disabled people were involved in different stages of the project; about what the project did and did not achieve; about how the project did or did not fit in with local culture, values and structures, and so on. All of this should be explored from the perspectives of all stakeholders, but especially seeking the views of the disabled children and disabled adults who were involved as agents or subjects.

The need to evaluate project interventions in their wider (cultural, social, structural) context, and with an eye on wider aims (like empowerment and attitudinal change) is vital. In this section of the book, the contributors strive to do just that. These are not "project evaluations" in the narrow sense of the term. Rather, they are papers that maximise the learning from specific interventions,

and that use individual projects to deepen our understanding of issues around "doing disability and development" in the majority world.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Translating Theory into Practice in a Different Cultural Context: A Bilingual Approach for Deaf Children in China

Alison Callaway's focus is an approach to educating deaf children that was developed in and for Britain, and later implemented in China (Callaway was involved in implementing and evaluating the project). Callaway situates the project in the wider context of Chinese parents' attitudes to their child's deafness, the status of sign language and of deaf people in China, and Chinese priorities in education. Callaway asks: "is transferring a foreign model to a different cultural context appropriate?"

Empowerment and CBR? Issues Raised by the South Indian Experience

Ray Lang's study begins with a useful discussion of the concept of Community Based Rehabilitation and the criticisms that have been levelled against it. CBR has become a buzzword in disability and development in the majority world. Lang's interest is how far CBR can enable disabled people's empowerment. He draws on the ideas of Paulo Freire, and preliminary findings from an evaluation of the Sourabha Project in India (its structures, strengths, weaknesses, and potential to enable empowerment).

Development, Cultural Values, and Disability: The Example of Afghanistan

Peter Coleridge looks at cultural values and a Community Based Rehabilitation programme in Afghanistan. What are "cultural values"? What happens when local culture is, or is seen as, an obstacle to the programme and to development aims? When outsider concepts like "discrimination" and "empowerment" are used? When local people are trained to be CBR workers and thereby agents of transferring outsider ideas and practices? These are some of the difficult questions explored in his paper.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What lessons can be learned from these contributions about the rights and wrongs, risks and rewards, of transferring minority world ideas and

practices to majority world settings?

- What works and what doesn't work? And why?
- What is required if project interventions are to be "empowering" or, rather, enable disabled people and the local community to empower themselves?
- How would you evaluate a community-based project? What methods and measures could you use to evaluate the process? What about the outcomes? How would you involve local disabled people in deciding what good outcomes are?
- How would you work in a context where local culture is an obstacle to the stated (and probably western) goals and process of a project?
- Should "changing attitudes" and "promoting equality" be objectives in disability and development projects? Even when promoting such goals means challenging the local culture, values and structures?
- How would you balance the need for a culturally appropriate project with views you might have on gender equality, children's rights, disabled people's rights, etc?
- Is it fair to put the responsibility for bringing about cultural and social change on local people as "agents" in a (probably outsider-funded) project?

Translating Theory into Practice in a Different Cultural Context: A bilingual approach for deaf children in China

Alison Callaway

(Chapter 8 in Stone, E. (ed.) 1999: Disability and Development: Learning from action and research on disability in the majority world, Leeds: The Disability Press pp. 110–129).

INTRODUCTION

In China, the last ten years have seen the beginnings of systematically organised, nationwide provision for preschool-age deaf children. The emphasis is on an aural/oral approach - providing hearing aids and speech training. While this is feasible for children with some residual hearing, it is not ideal for many children with profound hearing loss. As an experimental solution for this group, a "bilingual class" has been established in a nursery for deaf children in Nanjing. In practice, implementation of this bilingual class has been strongly influenced by its cultural context. Crucial factors are parents' attitudes to their child's deafness and its implications; and the status of deaf people and sign language in Chinese society.

This paper seeks to analyse the effects of these influences on the development of preschool deaf education in China; and to discuss key issues in terms of the different cultural perspectives and personnel involved: Western/Chinese, deaf/hearing. The paper begins with an outline of the principles and key issues of bilingual/bicultural education for deaf children as it is developing in the West, with reference to the educational and cultural context within which it has developed. The history of deaf education in China is then outlined, along with recent policies promoting auditory and speech training in preschool-age deaf children. The introduction and implementation of the bilingual class is then discussed, with feedback from English and Chinese deaf people. This is followed by a closer look at the attitudes and experiences of parents of deaf children in China, and of the status of sign language and deaf people, which emerge as key dimensions of the situation. Lastly, there is a discussion of possible directions of development of bilingual/bicultural approaches in the Chinese situation, with acknowledgement of the different viewpoints involved.

A few words about my own role seem necessary here. I have just completed a PhD thesis at the Centre for Deaf Studies at Bristol University on deaf children

and their families in China; previously, I had taught at a medical college in China for several years and learnt Chinese. My proficiency in sign language is still only at a basic level: nevertheless, it has enabled me to communicate directly with deaf people in China on a few occasions - the attempt to do this (and to try and take this further) seems important. The Centre for Deaf Studies at Bristol University in the UK, where I am based, has carried out many research projects involving sign language and the deaf community, as well as initiating a bilingual/bicultural programme for deaf children in the Avon area; close research and working relationships between hearing and deaf personnel are of necessity central to these projects, and it seems important to promote these kinds of relationships in research and development projects abroad.

The project on which this paper is based is a small but innovative project for deaf children currently being developed by the Amity Foundation in China in cooperation with the Centre for Deaf Studies. The project adopts a bilingual/bicultural approach - a relatively new development in deaf education, based on a model of deafness representing cultural difference rather than medical deficit. For information, the Amity Foundation is a Chinese Christian non-governmental organisation based in Nanjing. It has introduced a range of small-scale, innovative social welfare programmes, mainly in rural poverty alleviation. Funding is obtained from church organisations in Europe and the United States, but there is no proselytising component to Amity's social welfare programmes. All staff at the Nanjing office are mainland Chinese.

BACKGROUND: UK

The development of sign bilingualism in the education of deaf children in the UK was encouraged by a number of different facilitating circumstances. A seminal event was the publication of Conrad's investigation into the educational achievements of deaf school-leavers in England and Wales (Conrad 1979), which found that after up to 12 years of education using an aural/oral approach, the majority of deaf school-leavers had poor speech and an average reading age of only nine years. Other researchers, including Gregory (1976), who interviewed the mothers of 122 preschool-age deaf children, pointed out the drawbacks of focusing exclusively on oral methodology and ignoring the possibilities of using sign language as a medium for developing communication and learning. At about the same time, specialists in linguistics in the United States and the UK were discovering the structure and properties of indigenous sign language. The hitherto invisible lives of deaf people, their culture and community, were also investigated. In the 1980s several researchers undertook

detailed studies of the language acquisition, in sign, of deaf babies with deaf mothers: it became clear that acquisition of sign language went through similar stages to the acquisition of spoken language, and occurred at roughly the same time in terms of children's development.

With the recognition of sign language as a language in its own right, deaf people using sign language amongst themselves could be characterised as a separate linguistic group. This has been taken further to view deaf people as a distinct cultural entity on the basis of their identification with the deaf community, and common experiences in education and other spheres of life often alienating or diminishing experiences in a hearing society that discriminates against them. In a radical presentation of the cultural and medical models of deafness, viewed respectively from deaf and hearing perspectives, Lane (1992) draws a parallel between the oppression of deaf people in hearing society, and the oppression and exploitation of African peoples by colonialist regimes.

In the UK, the cultural model of deafness has begun to influence educational policy; this process has been encouraged in a climate where educational provision is explicitly accommodating itself to the requirements of children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds growing up in a multicultural society. The guidelines for service managers issued by the National Deaf Children's Society are a good example of this trend. The guidelines propose that delivery of services should be viewed as a continuum, with the cultural ("difference") model at one end, and the medical ("deficit") model at the other; in practice, the two should not be regarded as mutually exclusive, and choices should be made with regard to the circumstances of individual deaf children and their families (NDCS 1992).

These, then, are the circumstances in which sign bilingualism has developed in certain areas in the UK. It is based on a particular set of values concerning deafness, the place of deaf people in society, and the nature of education. A full description of the bilingual/bicultural approach in terms of philosophy, policy and practice has been outlined in an article by Pickersgill (1997), on which the following account draws.

The philosophy of sign bilingualism originates in a view of deaf people as a linguistic and cultural minority within a hearing society using spoken language. Linguistic and cultural pluralism within a given society is regarded as a positive and valuable development. The tenets of sign bilingualism are congruent with a social model of disability which locates disablement in the societal response to

impairment - and which predicates that empowerment of disabled people can occur when societal responses are altered in appropriate ways. For sign bilingualism, the focus of action is primarily in the education of deaf children.

Implementing a policy of sign bilingualism requires specific initiatives in the use of languages, in the organisation of staff, and in the involvement of parents. With regard to language, the fundamental belief is that British Sign Language is a language in its own right, equal in status to spoken English, and that it can be used in education. The aim is for children to acquire both BSL and English to high levels of proficiency. The initial emphasis is on the natural acquisition of sign language in the preschool period (the critical period for language acquisition) for use in day-to-day communication, and then building on this foundation by learning English as a second language. Children's progress in sign language is expected to be age-appropriate, in other words equivalent to hearing children's mastery of spoken English at the same age. The two languages, BSL and English, should be kept separate and used in separate situations. When English is being used/studied, Manually Coded English may usefully be used - but the exact role MCE has to play in implementing sign bilingualism is not yet clear.[1] A final feature of language use entails assessing individual children's progress and language preferences so that choices for their future provision and nature and level of communication support match the individual need.

A policy of sign bilingualism requires the involvement of deaf people. They should be involved as consultants in early intervention programmes, as classroom assistants providing language and role models in schools for the deaf, and as qualified teachers of sign language classes. More deaf people should be able to qualify as teachers of the deaf. Status, levels of pay and opportunities for training should compare favourably with those of hearing colleagues. Hearing teachers of the deaf need to have high standards of BSL in order to implement bilingualism effectively. Hearing parents of deaf children should be able to develop contacts with deaf people, and learn sign language. The aim is for parents to improve the level of sign communication at home.

The practice of sign bilingualism should comprise initial emphasis on a BSL-dominant approach, moving gradually towards an English-dominated approach by the time the child is in secondary school. Assessment of the effectiveness of a deaf child's education should include not only assessment of academic achievement, but also of self-esteem, of the child's sense of identity, and of communication/social skills.

The bilingual/bicultural approach to deaf education is still developing in the UK: only recently has a working model been clearly and fully described (Pickersgill 1997, Pickersgill and Gregory 1998). The model, as it has been developed so far, reflects the complexity of implementing a bilingual approach where the two languages concerned are in two different modalities. A number of difficulties have been identified: for example, parents experience difficulties and lack confidence in learning and using signs to communicate with their children (Young 1995). Within the school framework, it is difficult deciding how to keep the two languages separate, and choosing the nature and level of communication requires flexibility and sensitivity on the part of teachers to individual children. Clearly this requires constant resourcefulness on the part of teachers. There are a number of areas where policy and practice are problematic and require further definition. Further, the effective implementation of sign bilingualism undoubtedly requires substantial resources to fund all aspects of intervention and the educational programmes outlined above.

BACKGROUND: THE HISTORY OF DEAF EDUCATION IN CHINA

The first deaf school in China was started in Dengzhou, Shandong province in 1887 by Mrs Annetta Mills, the wife of an American missionary. Mrs Mills' school exerted a strong influence on deaf education in China in the first half of this century, serving as a model for other deaf schools. By 1949 there were over thirty schools for the deaf in China.

The new Communist government which took power in 1949 instigated sweeping educational reforms. Deaf schools which already existed were brought under state ownership, and each region was required to provide schools for disabled children in their area. New schools for the deaf were set up, typically in the provincial capitals or other large cities, establishing a network of schools under central control. Curricula were designed and specially written textbooks issued from Beijing (Piao 1987). Since 1949 there has been a steady increase in the number of deaf schools: there are now 980 schools for deaf and blind children in China, accommodating over 90,000 children (China Statistical Yearbook 1997; statistics for schools for the deaf and schools for the blind are presented in one category: however, schools for the blind represent only about 5% of the total figure). The vast majority of deaf children living in or near urban areas now have access to education in deaf schools. In addition, many deaf children, especially in rural areas where there are no special educational facilities, attend local mainstream schools even though they may derive little benefit from the

lessons. The age for starting mainstream school in China is seven; for large urban deaf schools, the starting age is between seven and nine years of age generally speaking; however, children in the countryside may not start deaf school until they are ten or eleven or even in their teens. Until recently there has been no preschool provision for deaf children in China: the implications of this are very significant, since the critical period for language acquisition is in the early preschool years.

The aim of teaching throughout the nationwide system of deaf schools has been for children to acquire speech: but because of the severe shortage of hearing aids and other assistive technology such as speech trainers, and because children start their language learning relatively late, it has not been feasible for deaf schools to adopt a comprehensive oral policy, although there are a few deaf schools in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai which have done so. In order to teach the curriculum, a policy of using Sign Supported Chinese has been adopted.[2]

In order to teach effectively using Sign Supported Chinese, it was perceived that there had to be some standardisation of the signs in current use by deaf people all over China: these varied from area to area. A Sign Language Reform Committee was convened in 1958 to collect signs, decide on standardised versions, and issue these for use in deaf education. Deaf school teachers and members of the Chinese Deaf Association contributed to the process. After interruption of work during the Cultural Revolution, the Committee resumed and produced a series of dictionaries to support dissemination of standardised signs. The resultant body of sign vocabulary is called "Chinese Sign Language" (Zhongguo shouyu) or "standardised sign language" (guifan shouyu).

From 1988 a new state-instigated campaign got under way in deaf education. As part of a range of initiatives spearheaded mainly by Deng Pufang (the disabled son of the Chinese Premier) and the organisation he heads (China Disabled People's Federation), the 1988-1993 Workplan for Disabled People made speech training for deaf children a priority. This initiative has been focused on the preschool age-group, and the special training has been carried out through a network of rehabilitation facilities based mainly in cities. The model or models of rehabilitation of deaf children through auditory and speech training have been derived from several sources outside mainland China, not least from well-developed models in Hong Kong, and reflect a drive for "normalisation" of the deaf child chiefly through acquisition of speech, though other aspects such as healthy psychological development are also stressed.

The associated technology - equipment for diagnosing deafness, and hearing aid technology - has also of necessity been imported. The teaching methodology has been developed to match Chinese educational aims and, like the curricula and teaching content of the deaf schools, is centrally defined and directed. The China Research and Rehabilitation Centre for Deaf Children in Beijing is the model for rehabilitation centres throughout China, and is constantly seeking to improve policy and practice in teaching methodology as well as prevention and therapy for treatable causes of deafness. Their quarterly publication, "Rehabilitation of Deaf Children in China" (Zhongguo Long'er Kangfu), publicises new developments and discusses key issues. Initially debate was focused on promoting early intervention; then on the importance of involving parents as teachers of their deaf children; the latest development is debate on how to integrate children who have attended preschool rehabilitation centres into mainstream schooling.

The characteristics of the base population of preschool-age deaf children have to be taken into account when considering provision. Large numbers of deaf children in China have acquired hearing loss due to disease or the effect of ototoxic antibiotics: they may have acquired some language before becoming deaf, and in many cases have significant levels of residual hearing. Thus early intervention with speech training is likely to enable a proportion of deaf children to acquire speech and language so they can be educated in mainstream schools. However, for those children who are congenitally deaf, and who have little or no useful residual hearing, such methods are unlikely to provide adequate early access to language. There is little in the way of alternative preschool provision for profoundly deaf children in China at present. This is the context in which the bilingual project described below was set up.

IMPLEMENTATION OF BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL PROJECT IN CHINA

Following a series of contacts between Bristol and Nanjing, a "bilingual experimental class" was established by the Amity Foundation in March 1996 within a preschool rehabilitation centre for deaf children which Amity had set up in 1991. Of the sixteen children in the centre, nine were very severely or profoundly deaf, and these children formed the first experimental class. Seven of these children were six years old; two were four years old. Every school day they would have a 40- minute storytelling session, in sign language, with a deaf teacher, a woman with many years teaching experience in Nanjing Deaf School. For the remainder of the school day, this group of children followed the regular rehabilitation centre curriculum, focusing on auditory and speech training as well

as other activities such as physical exercise and art.

To support the aim of introducing sign language to deaf children and their families, a sign language class, taught by a hearing teacher from Nanjing Deaf School, was started on Saturday afternoons: this class was expressly for parents of children in the experimental class, but was also advertised in the city newspaper as open to anyone interested in learning sign language. Most of those who enrolled in the sign language class were mothers of deaf children; there were also a few others, including an 80-year-old man, who thought it would be interesting to learn sign language.

The setting up of the bilingual class, the funding of the two teachers, and incidental arrangements, were all implemented and paid for by Amity. The amounts of funding involved were very modest - for example, a payment of £30 per month for the teacher of the class. Implementation depended on close cooperation between Amity personnel and key staff at Nanjing Deaf School who supported the concept of introducing sign language to deaf children at an earlier age, in order to improve their academic performance when they reached deaf school.

In May 1996, three months after the bilingual class had started, I visited Nanjing to assess the project and discuss its development with Amity: regular contact with personnel from the Centre for Deaf Studies in Bristol had been part of the original project proposal. Subsequently I wrote a brief report which was sent to Amity and Bristol as part of an ongoing framework of assessment, feedback and exchange of information. The teacher of the experimental class agreed to have one of her classes video'd, and the video was taken back to Bristol for deaf colleagues there to view and provide their suggestions, queries and comments. These were relayed back to the deaf teacher in China, by letter, for her to respond to: this particular interchange, between deaf teachers in China and the UK, was especially illuminating and raised a number of key issues. The main points from my 1996 report, and those brought out in the exchange of views between deaf counterparts in China and the UK, are given below.

KEY FINDINGS

Observation of the experimental class showed that the deaf teacher had excellent rapport with the nine children in her class, who were attentive and interested throughout the session. Her basic lesson plan was to tell a simple story, making extensive use of illustrations on the blackboard, to provide the

children with new vocabulary and ideas through the use of sign. She used a variety of activities, including role-play and games with flash-cards, to reinforce learning of signs and written characters. It was evident that a key part of each lesson, often following the storytelling, was devoted to learning characters, phrases and sentences in written Chinese, and that at these points signs were used in the order of written Chinese to support this goal. There were several examples of the children being required to learn signs which would be redundant in living sign language.

Deaf teachers in the UK viewing the video of the class in China were generally enthusiastic, noting in particular the teacher's good relationship with the children and the great value this would have for their feelings of confidence and self-esteem. They also commented on her imaginative and artistic illustrations which they felt gave strong visual interest and support to her teaching. However, they made several more critical points. They noted the high proportion of mime in the storytelling in relation to evolved sign language; but agreed that this matched the children's lack of competence in sign at that stage and was probably appropriate to their current level. They were concerned that the teacher stood up and moved about in front of the blackboard rather than sitting down in front of the children at their level. (The Chinese teacher responded to this comment by saying that it was conventional for Chinese teachers to stand in front of their class.) The English teachers were particularly concerned at the mixing of written language with signing stories - they felt it would have been much better to exclude written language until the children were communicating well in sign and had a good foundation in sign language. This is a core observation and is returned to below.

What about parents' involvement in their children's acquisition of sign language? It transpired that although several parents may have started the sign language classes, only one parent of a child in the experimental class was still attending after three months. Observation of the sign language class showed that the class was very formal, with emphasis on the teacher demonstrating individual signs so the class could memorise them, rather than on developing competence in using sign language for communication purposes at home. This contributed to the overall impression that for the deaf children concerned, sign language and association with deaf people was limited to the daily session with their deaf teacher, and was not supported or extended by involvement of other family members. There was one exception: there appeared to be a significant change in the family of the deaf girl who had deaf parents: following the introduction of the experimental class, the relationship between the deaf girl and her mother

became much closer and happier, with the mother helping her daughter read books by signing the characters with her. Previously the hearing grandmother, who was illiterate, had borne the responsibility for her granddaughter's education, with the deaf parents excluded and her mother feeling depressed that her daughter might follow her example and have to go to deaf school.

The apparent lack of involvement of hearing parents in an educational approach using sign requires closer examination. There is also a need for caution, since this is a difficult area to research. For example, parents are unlikely to say outright that they do not believe in the class, or object to a deaf teacher. More can be learnt from their behaviour, in this case lack of engagement with the programme. It should also be pointed out that with both parents working full-time, it is hard for them to find time for additional activities. With these caveats in mind, an account of parents' attitudes and views on the implications of their child's deafness is provided, based on the writer's fieldwork interviews with parents of preschool-age deaf children in China in 1994 and 1996, as well as a range of documentary sources (Callaway 1997).

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TO THEIR CHILD'S DEAFNESS

A number of professionals in the United States and the UK involved in counselling parents of deaf children have described the severe emotional reactions to the diagnosis of deafness in their child, and stressed the importance of their resolution if parents are to play a positive role in their child's development. Chinese professionals also note the traumatic impact of the diagnosis of deafness on Chinese parents, and point out that this is exacerbated by the one-child family planning regulations which produce a situation in which parents put all their hopes and expectations on their one child: diagnosis of disability in these circumstances is shattering. Unwillingness to accept their child is deaf or to consider the implications of deafness lead Chinese parents to take their child to one doctor after another, first to repeat the hearing tests in the hope that the initial diagnosis was mistaken, and then to search for a cure for deafness. With the plethora of treatments afforded by Chinese traditional practitioners (various forms of acupuncture, qigong, herbal medicine, etc.), there are an infinite number of treatments to try. The majority of Chinese parents expend enormous amounts of time, energy and money trying to find a cure; the effort expended in this direction detracts from efforts parents could have been making to habilitate their child (Callaway 1996).

Interviews with parents and grandparents (conducted on a one-to-one basis in

their homes) showed that parents had no counselling and little guidance following diagnosis: there is no organised network of referral, and parents had to decide their own course of action. There was no well-planned provision of information, and parents generally had little contact with deaf people or knowledge of the implications of deafness. Enrolment of their child in a rehabilitation centre, when he or she was anywhere between three and seven years of age, was the crucial stage at which hearing aid use could be introduced, and systematic speech training with parental involvement could begin. Parents met teachers regularly to discuss their children, and also had meetings with other parents which enabled mutual support and exchange of useful information - including new cures for deafness as well as different educational strategies.

In interviews, parents were also asked about their views towards using sign language with their children: parents generally expressed negative views about the use of sign; parents who had to use gestures with their children to communicate because they were profoundly deaf emphasised the importance of their child learning to read and write so they could communicate through writing.

When parents enrolled their children in a preschool rehabilitation centre, their hopes were that after two or three years' speech training, their child would have enough speech to be able to attend mainstream primary school. By the time children were seven (the age when children start primary school in China, at least in urban areas), it was usually clear to teachers and parents whether the child would go to deaf school or to mainstream schooling. Severe hearing loss correlated closely with enrolment in deaf school. Of 14 children attending the centre in 1994, six went on to mainstream schooling, of whom two were considered by teachers to be unlikely to cope in that setting; one girl, whose parents lived in the countryside, dropped out of schooling altogether; and the remaining seven children went on to segregated schooling. Once placements are made it is very difficult to transfer from segregated to integrated schooling or vice versa. Thus the route taken at age seven has great significance for the child's future, and parents perceive their child has lost their chance to become a "normal" person if they have to go to deaf school. While children in deaf school learn sign language rapidly, parents tend not to learn sign, so they cannot easily support their children's education or even communicate well with them at home. More insidious are parents' persistent feelings of grief and rejection of the child's deafness.

In view of the fact that the use of sign language is a key issue in communication

at home amongst families with deaf children, and in the education of children in deaf schools in China, it seems important to provide an account of the status of sign language in China. This is closely related to the status of deaf people in Chinese society, which is also considered below.

STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE IN CHINA

As outlined in the previous section on deaf schooling in China, a sustained and concerted effort has been made to introduce a standardised system of signs for use in deaf schools. In other words, children in deaf schools achieve literacy and obtain access to the range of curricular subjects because their teachers support the Chinese spoken/written material with signs - in the order of, and using the grammatical construction, of spoken/written Chinese, not that of indigenous sign language.

Chinese educationalists and teachers in deaf schools recognise that deaf people, and deaf children outside the classroom, often use a different order of signs to communicate than that of the spoken language:

> When Chinese deaf people use their hand shapes to communicate there are usually two ways to express their meaning. One way is to use their hand shapes following the order of the oral language. They usually use this way when they talk with normal [sic] people or in formal situations. The other way is to use the hand shapes without following the order of the spoken language. This way is often used among the deaf people or between them and normal [sic] people knowing the sign language. Those deaf people with no education or the ones who do not know Hanyu usually use this way too...Obviously the order of words is extremely important. The deaf people will often make grammatical mistakes in their written language after they get used to the sign language (Piao 1984).

This passage raises a couple of key points about the status of indigenous sign language. It is associated with lack of education - not surprisingly, since sustained exposure to standardised sign language occurs only in the domain of segregated education in Chinese schools for the deaf. And the last sentence reiterates a belief that is voiced time and again - that the use of indigenous sign language disorganises and interferes with the comprehension and production of written Chinese. The solution is held to lie in reinforcing the use of standardised sign language and discouraging the use of indigenous sign language, until such time as high levels of education amongst deaf people will eradicate indigenous

forms. In fact, the real problem for deaf children in China (and other countries) is that they have not had appropriate or adequate access to language, whether spoken or sign, in their early years, and without this they will have great difficulty mastering the use of language at a later stage. The bilingual approach is based on the theory that if deaf children learn indigenous sign language early, through a process of natural acquisition, they have a basic linguistic foundation on which they can learn a second language - the spoken/written language of their country - as a separate language.

Indigenous sign language in China is not only seen to be inimical to effective education, but also limited and inferior in relation to spoken language. Professor Piao Yongxin, China's acknowledged authority in special education, argues that sign language is inferior because its use is limited to deaf people and a few others; its vocabulary and range of expression is limited; abstract concepts cannot be expressed; and meanings of various signs are not exact (Piao 1992). He also states the widely-held belief that the use of (indigenous) sign language by deaf people detracts from their competence in using the written language, and from success in the educational system.

It should be noted that, while the whole process of standardising signs to achieve consistency and uniformity in use of language can be viewed as an appropriation by Chinese (hearing) educationalists of deaf people's language, it also constitutes a recognition and legitimisation of the role of sign language, particularly in education. The "reform" by committee of sign language parallels other mass reforms in language use in mainland China - the introduction of putonghua, the northern Chinese dialect, as China's official language; and the ongoing reform of the written language.

THE STATUS OF DEAF PEOPLE IN CHINA

As in other countries, deaf people in China are defined officially as a category of disabled people. The Chinese government has made great efforts to provide education and employment, largely through segregated facilities, for deaf people. Their rights and interests are protected through the 1990 Law for Disabled Persons, which states that disabled people have the right to full participation in their society. Although the pressure of population and severe lack of resources in China limit provision for deaf children and deaf adults, the 1990 Law represents a declaration of basic policy aims.

Deaf people in China are represented by the Chinese Deaf Association, which

defines its membership in medical terms: all individuals with a hearing loss of over 40 dB are automatically members. (By contrast, membership of the deaf community in Britain, and such representative organisations as the British Deaf Association, is a matter of individual choice and reflects individual preference for the use of sign language, identity as a deaf person, and affiliation with the deaf community.) The Chinese Deaf Association has branches throughout China, and works closely with the government to implement government policy for deaf people - a current priority is providing food and clothing for deaf people in poverty-stricken areas in rural and remote parts of China (Callaway 1998). There do not appear to be the societal mechanisms for an organisation representing the interests of deaf people to adopt an independent stance, or voice any criticism or opposition to government policy in education or other areas.

As in many Western countries, deaf teachers in Chinese deaf schools have been phased out as requirements for increased levels of qualifications have made themselves felt, unmatched by complementary measures to give deaf people access to mainstream training courses. Changchun University in northern China runs courses for disabled students, including fine arts for deaf students, so many deaf schools have deaf art teachers. Deaf people may also teach vocational subjects such as sewing, or may be in administrative posts in deaf schools. But the general trend is for the few deaf teachers who have been in teaching positions to be replaced by hearing staff when they retire.

There is evidence that deaf people in China who have been or are teachers feel strongly that deaf people have particular qualities which make them especially effective as teachers of deaf children. Liu Zhenxing, a deaf man who is one of the few deaf people in China to have completed a teacher training course, states in a newsletter for parents of deaf children that deaf teachers provide deaf children with a positive example of an academically and professionally successful deaf person: this kind of encouragement prevents the development in deaf children of psychological problems such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence (Liu 1996).

VALUES AND PRIORITIES

It should be evident from the account given above that the implementation of bilingual/bicultural concepts in a programme for deaf children in China has been influenced by a different set of values and priorities than in the UK. A closer look at these may indicate the direction of development of sign bilingualism in China.

Deaf teachers in Bristol and deaf teachers in Nanjing believed that deaf teachers were very important for the successful education of deaf children. The UK teachers stressed early use of sign language at home, and the use of sign language for communication with other deaf children and deaf adults. The Chinese deaf teachers consulted put much more emphasis on the importance of deaf children succeeding in the educational system: since this meant achieving knowledge of Chinese, their emphasis was on the value of sign as support for learning to read and write Chinese, from an early age. The use of sign language for communication, informal conversation, exchange of ideas or play seemed far less significant to them.

For hearing teachers in the Chinese deaf school system, the main priority is seen as improving educational standards and increasing the number of deaf children who can graduate at high school level. To achieve this, it is felt necessary for children to start learning at a younger age, and to learn standardised Chinese Sign Language in order, so the reasoning goes, that they might learn Chinese better. Since the implementation of the programme discussed here depended on the support of hearing senior teachers in the deaf school, it is likely that this view will prevail. (If deaf children are brought together at a younger age, they will of course sign amongst themselves and develop their own ways of signing which will depart from standardised forms - natural signing cannot be suppressed.)

IS TRANSFERRING A FOREIGN MODEL TO CHINA APPROPRIATE?

It seems important to address the general issue as to whether it is appropriate to introduce a model for deaf education derived from experience in different cultural situations into the Chinese context. The alternative would be adoption of models developed wholly in China.

In practice, over the last ten years China has been actively encouraging other countries with more evolved special educational provision to provide information, expertise and relevant technology so that China can develop its own special educational services. In other words, there has been a strong initiative from Chinese professionals themselves to seek advice and assistance in this area. For example, the national model for preschool rehabilitation of deaf children, based on an aural/oral approach, developed with extensive input from abroad. A typical procedure is for new approaches or new technology to be acquired from other countries, then adapted by Chinese professionals to suit

Chinese institutions, established practices and priorities. Thus, unless a particular approach is introduced under the aegis of a foreign NGO (non-governmental organisation) and is kept largely under the NGO's immediate control, it is characteristic for new practices to be adapted and reformulated by Chinese agents for use in Chinese settings. In this sense, it is unlikely an imported model could be imposed inappropriately since control over implementation at different levels is in Chinese hands. In educational settings, "experimental classes" are accepted ways of trying out a new approach and seeing which elements may need adapting.

In the particular case of the project described in this paper, the involvement of a Chinese NGO - the Amity Foundation - has been crucial. The Chinese NGO staff are familiar with the local situation and the network of professionals involved. They can therefore negotiate steps of implementation more diplomatically and more effectively than Western professionals who do not have the support of well-placed and expert Chinese counterparts. In the context of this jointly managed project, the Amity Foundation are in the position of being able to modify elements of the project they consider unrealistic or inappropriate, or emphasise aspects they consider particularly important, thereby introducing an effective filter or buffer to the introduction of outside concepts or practices. In fact, in this project the Chinese NGO has generally been keen not to dilute or modify the original concepts, which however may yet alter considerably in the process of implementation.

The project discussed in this paper had three basic aims - to affirm the status of deaf people and indigenous sign language; to build a positive sense of deaf-identity in deaf children and enhance their self-esteem; and to improve their access to language and learning. The first two aims are strongly emphasised in UK bilingual programmes. However in China, it seems likely that due to the difficulty of challenging entrenched prejudice against deafness (also present in other countries), these first two aims can only be tackled gradually, while on the other hand the third aim will have particular appeal for teachers trying to raise standards of academic attainment, and parents who want their children to succeed at school. Given the enormous value attached to education in Chinese culture, and the priority given to expanding educational provision in government policies, it may well be appropriate to focus on the third aim in making the project appealing and acceptable to those involved. In other words, how the bilingual programme is presented to parents and teachers and the manner in which it is implemented is significant, and presentation and implementation need to be closely matched and responsive to the concerns of those involved.

PROJECT UPDATE & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Since the first draft of this paper was written, further steps have been taken to bring the principles and practice of a bilingual/bicultural approach to the attention of Chinese professionals. In March 1998, a three-day training session was held in Nanjing for teachers and administrators from 24 deaf schools in Jiangsu province. At the meeting, particular emphasis was placed on the detailed practical steps that need to be taken within a given school to implement a bilingual approach effectively. This included detailed discussion of management structures within schools, so deaf staff are on a par with hearing staff and so there are explicit mechanisms in place to ensure good practice. There was also specific and detailed discussion of the use of sign language in children's learning, with examples of vocabulary lists for each age level and of schemes to assess individual children's progress in reading and writing. This kind of specific treatment of concerns relevant to teachers seems to be a necessary and practical way of motivating teachers and administrators to consider change in their particular schools.

In addition to supporting implementation of sign bilingualism in the deaf school system, a research agenda is also proposed. Based in the Linguistics Department at Nanjing Normal University, sign language research is planned which will involve deaf people as research partners. The aim is to promote research into the characteristics of indigenous sign language used by deaf people amongst themselves, and thus to strengthen the possibility of its official recognition as a true language. Research is also required to develop appropriate assessment measures for use in schools so that aspects of learning using a bilingual approach can be properly evaluated.

A major area that has yet to be given more attention is the involvement of parents. Whichever educational approach is used, work with parents is crucial to support good communication at home, and to promote effective coordination with learning in school.

In all these areas it is appreciated that challenges will arise just as they do in the UK context. It seems feasible to suggest that solutions can be found in the experience of Western professionals which may be useful in China provided they are implemented with sensitive regard to the specific characteristics of the Chinese context. If the planned steps for research and for implementation in schools can be carried out effectively, then valuable and constructive changes

for the adults and especially the children concerned should ensue.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that more deaf people in China will be able to become involved in the education of deaf children - in preschool, deaf school and mainstream settings. If deaf children are able to have good access to sign language in their early years, and if the importance of acquiring a good foundation in sign language as a language of daily communication is recognised, then deaf children are likely to be far more successful in school when they start to learn to read and write. Perhaps most important of all, parents will acquire more positive images of deafness and deaf people so they will be more likely to accept their child's difference as well as maintain their expectations that their child will succeed academically and have a positive role in their society.

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END-NOTES

[1] In Manually Coded English, signs from British Sign Language together with finger spelling are used in the word order of spoken English. In educational settings MCE can be used to facilitate access to English text.

[2] Sign Supported Chinese (English terminology, by analogy with Sign Supported English) is a communication system whereby signs taken from Chinese sign language together with finger spelling are used in the order of spoken Chinese to supplement spoken words.