

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A DEAF WAY OF EDUCATION:
INTERACTION AMONG CHILDREN
IN A THAI BOARDING SCHOOL

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This is an ethnographic study of peer society in a boarding school for deaf children in the Kingdom of Thailand. The aim is to describe the students' after-hours interaction together and its function in their intellectual and social development. Deaf children tend to be institutionalized because they are unable to fully participate in the process of socialization conveyed by speech. Deafness is perceived as an inevitable loss to intellectual and social capacity. Considered to be uneducable in ordinary settings, they are sent to residential schools, which remain the predominant placement worldwide.

The informal interaction among deaf students has largely been ignored or decried as impeding educational goals. Yet as their first opportunity for unhindered communication, the interaction among deaf students reveals their learning capacity and preferences. Aged six to nineteen years, the youth created educational activities to learn the sign language, in-group and societal norms, and worldly knowledge. They devised a complex social organization via a sign language that is little used or appreciated by teachers. They regulated their modes of interaction with each other according to relative skill in the sign language and mental acuity (a "social hierarchy of the mind"). This provided a pathway of gradually diversifying learning activities. The

confinement to a given status group fostered teaching and learning among youth of similar skill levels (and provided an example of Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development.")

Student leadership was split into elders who wielded authority and those few youth who were skilled and creative masters of signs. These "signmasters" were generators of new ideas, storytellers and interpreters. This honored role was aspired to by youngsters, and the skills had been consciously passed down. At the same time there was pressure, by some students and teachers, to supplant creative activities with regimentation. The study recommends that educators examine the overall school environment to assure that there is a "normal" balance of activity that is similar to other children in the society, and to consider the value of deaf students' interactions and sign language as resources in the classroom.

A DEAF WAY OF EDUCATION:
INTERACTION AMONG CHILDREN
IN A THAI BOARDING SCHOOL

ลักษณะของความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างนักเรียนคนหูหนวกและอิทธิพลในการเรียนรู้

by

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Chapter I

Background of the Problem

To a deaf person, the sense of vision is a starting point. People who are deaf primarily rely upon the visual channel for communicating and learning. This is the key difference between deaf and hearing human beings. Although it bears upon physiology, deafness is not a medical condition requiring continual attention. The cognitive faculties are untouched by most etiologies. Deaf people have themselves demonstrated their orientation of perception towards the visual.¹ Given the chance, they form social groups and create their own opportunities of interacting in a visual channel via signs.

About one in one thousand children becomes profoundly deaf before the age of four (Ries, 1982). The social response to deafness, not the biological condition per se, determines its impact on the child's learning. The wide variance in ease of interaction and learning that is seen within the population of deaf children is attributable to the conditions of childrearing. The point can be demonstrated by examining the prevalent conditions in which deaf children are raised and educated.

Since over ninety percent are born into hearing-speaking families, most deaf children are raised in settings where audition is the primary channel of communication. Deafness precludes easy communication through spoken language. When a high proportion of the information needed for social and cognitive growth is contained in auditory signals, the deaf child misses out on what other children easily learn. There can be very serious consequences for their development (Schlesinger and

¹ Ertling (1982) wrote, "Deafness is a visual experience."

Meadow, 1972). Excluded from full social rapport, they miss critical input needed to learn the fundamentals of a language. Lenneberg's (1964) statement remains true, "Congenitally deaf children have in many parts of the world virtually no language or speech before they receive instruction in school" (pp. 65-88). Without language, a child's main avenue to shared meaning and knowledge is greatly narrowed. A very few children and their families are able to manage using only vocal language and ancillary skills like lipreading. Many deaf children are intellectually and socially diminished.

If deaf children under no conditions showed an ability to fully communicate with and learn from other people, we might fairly suspect that deafness itself is an inevitable obstacle to interaction. This notion is disproved by the many instances in which our senses serve as a functional channel during the breakdown of another. Blind people successfully learn to read through their fingertips. Deaf-blind individuals have learned to recognize speech through haptic perception, in which "the body detects vibration, changes in the positions of the bones, and pressure on the skin" (Gallaudet Research Institute, 1991). Deaf people have developed sign languages. The unavailability of one sensory mode does not preclude successful interaction.

The critical role of social interaction in childhood learning has been well established by Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (1990), and others. Yet childrearing proceeds so easily that the fundamental elements of interaction are ordinarily outside our awareness. Values of right and wrong are impressed upon the child during everyday activities. Through shared experience the child is introduced to a terrain of emotional sensibilities. The child gradually and naturally acquires knowledge to become a member of the society. The failure by a deaf child to learn easily like other children throws into relief the process of interaction which it

threatens. Deafness compels closer attention to precisely how the nature of interaction affects childhood learning.

Two elements of interaction are highlighted by deafness: (a) the requirement for a shared channel of communication between interlocutors and; (b) the embedding of a vehicle of meaning, namely, a natural language.

(a) The degree to which there is a match between the perceptual orientation of a child and the channel of communication has specific implications for the child's ease of interaction and learning. It is a natural assumption that children share the same innate faculties and perceptual abilities as those around them. Deaf children dash this expectation of hearing-speaking people. An invisible barrier seems to isolate them from speaking caregivers and to prevent their full participation. Deaf children have been referred to as "living in a glass room." The lack of a shared channel of communication stymies the processes of interaction that are the basis of socialization.

The success of interaction with a deaf child depends on the extent to which others adopt visual means of communication.² The term "visual accommodation" is coined herein to refer to the modification of communication so that a deaf person is enabled to participate.³ In fact, this comprises a continuum of accommodations. Minimally, a shared reference for basic communication can be established through the visual component of everyday physical action and use of objects. A deaf Thai woman, Nipapon Reilly, recalled how she learned to cook from her non-signing mother:

When I was younger I just watched Mother. Then later she had me do the chopping. And I watched her put the bits in

² The likelihood of effective oral rapport is higher with people who are deafened later in life.

³ This concept was inspired by talks with Remi Clignet about his article, *The double natural history of educational interactions: Implications for educational reforms.* (1981).

the pan and fry. I took it all in through my eyes. Over time
I could cook myself.

The mother recalled that she had “showed my daughter how to cook” (in Thai, literally, ‘show-her-to-see’). By reference to objects they both could see, the mother and deaf daughter had opened up a channel of communication while jointly involved in a task. Some cultural groups encourage children to learn by observing and participating in adult tasks. Communication tends to be through non-verbal means and subtle cues to behavior (Rogoff, p. 129). Such childrearing practices may enable full participation by a deaf child.

(b) The child observes and imitates actions within an environment filled with situated use of language. If conducted in speech, the deaf child is left out. Thus, another fundamental element of interaction, the presence of a vehicle of meaning, i.e., a natural language, is made problematic. The point is illustrated by returning to the cooking lesson. The daughter explained: “I didn’t know the names of the vegetables, I didn’t know words for ‘well-done’ or how long to cook something.” Mother and child had no shared terms of reference, and no way to extend the rapport beyond the here-and-now. Some families with deaf children devise simple “home signs.” The daughter never knew the names of her family members nor their background, like where they used to live. She was sent away to boarding school at the age of nine. Years later she filled in the gaps in knowledge, via written queries to her parents. She passed this information on to her two deaf sisters by Thai Sign Language. Now grown-up, the three daughters remain isolated from full involvement in family affairs, and chronic misunderstanding threatens the emotional unity that they wish to feel for their family.

There are more positive outcomes in families where the parents are deaf themselves and use a natural sign language. Using a sign

language, interactions among deaf people are of a far less constrained nature than interactions the deaf person typically has with hearing people. Children born into deaf families who use a sign language acquire that language in a normal manner and rate, because it is fully accessible via the visual sense (Bellugi et al, 1994). The deaf child benefits fully from the home environment. Deaf children of deaf parents are often superior in school achievement (Meadow, 1968). Corson (1973) argued that the reasons include early exposure to a natural sign language and better coping by deaf parents who therefore give better educational and emotional support. The advantage of unhindered rapport is enjoyed by the less than 10% of deaf children who have deaf parents (Strong, 1988, p. 115). These are rare examples of easy and meaningful communication by deaf children while growing up.

Linguists have recognized scores of natural sign languages around the world. Sign languages have developed where deaf people have had the opportunity to form a community. There is no inherent limit on the topic, style and level of abstraction. Research findings are summarized by a 1987 Resolution of the World Federation of the Deaf:

Whereas: Recent research both in linguistics and in neurobiology has firmly established the spatial languages of deaf people as fully expressive languages which not only exhibit complex organizational properties, but also display grammatical devices not derived from spoken languages. Distinct sign languages are now seen as fully developed languages with complex rules of grammar, with a rich variety of inflectional processes and an extensive variety of derivational processes, built from both a vast vocabulary base and sophisticated grammatical devices from lexical expansion. These are also autonomous languages comfortably capable of intellectual wit, conversation, evocative disputation, and poetry.

The most sophisticated and enduring examples of full visual accommodation are the interpersonal strategies of deaf people. Their

socio-linguistic behaviors during discourse are a collective adaptation to a condition of visual orientation. Eye gaze is integrally involved with turn-taking and regulation of interaction between signers (Baker, 1977). For example, the uni-directional nature of vision demands that “a deaf speaker cannot initiate signing until the specified addressee is looking at the would-be speaker” (Mather, 1987, p. 13). The ways in which teachers use eye gaze and nonmanual (facial and body) expressions have specific impact upon the effectiveness of interaction with deaf students (Mather, 1987; Erting and Stone, 1990). Deaf people’s signed conversations give insights about the effective use of pragmatics of communication in a visual channel and are now the subject of current research studies.

Learning and enculturation by the deaf child proceed to the extent that the sense of vision is a basis. In other words, when caregivers enable the child to observe and collaborate in activities before them, deafness in the child is irrelevant. However, if the linguistic information is carried by speech the deaf child misses out. The communicative process is fundamentally deficient, and unequal to that in which hearing children are raised. Other factors have impact upon the learning of deaf children, such as delayed diagnosis and the belief patterns of particular groups. Nevertheless, a shared communication channel with an embedded language underpins effective childhood learning in general, and thus is essential for deaf children. This is a logical argument in that it points to the elements of interaction which underlie effective learning by children and indicates that the ease of learning by deaf children relies upon these elements being present in their social environments. This highlights deaf people’s inherent similarity to other children, the biological-perceptual differences notwithstanding.

There is still an unresolved question of how hearing-speaking caregivers, including parents and teachers, should respond to the deaf

child, so as to create a learning environment. This may be seen as essentially a question about whether the caregiver should move towards the child (accommodate to visual orientation) or make the child move towards the typical (assimilate to hearing and spoken ways). In either case, the envisioned outcome is that the child and the caregiver will share a channel of communication and a language. The fundamental and indispensable elements of interaction are not in dispute. However, there is great controversy over which channel of communication and language should be used. The debate has centered in the schools.

Educational response to deafness

Formal schooling for deaf children around the world has long been dominated by the issues of communication, channel, and language. At the core are differing ideas about human disability, the purpose of education and the nature of learning. This overview touches only upon the communicative and linguistic strategies of the education system for deaf children, with underlying assumptions, in order to frame the research questions. For thorough histories of pedagogical techniques see Moores (1982), for institutional development see Van Cleve (1989) and Lane (1984) for ideological shifts.

1. Oral-auditory methods

The education of children born deaf is essentially a war against cognitive poverty. In Britain, as in most countries, educators have committed themselves to the exclusive deployment of spoken language to wage this war. (Conrad, 1979, p. xi)

Oralism is based on the idea that only through speech can a child think and know language. Originating in sixteenth century Europe, the approach became dominant after 1880, primarily on the weight of arguments about the need for integration of the deaf into hearing

society. Ironically, the shift to oralism eliminated an educated class of deaf people being produced by schools in France, many of whom were respected professionals in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Lane, 1984). In school the deaf students and teachers, many who were deaf themselves, used a system of manual communication that aided their development of written French, and they used the natural French Sign Language socially. However, the oral reformers believed that full humanity itself relied upon speech.

Kugelmass (1987) has stated that a medical model perspective is often taken concerning children who deviate from the norm, leading to treatment of the child as if they are “sick.” The cure offered by modern educators of the deaf was applying intensive training and technology to bolster residual hearing and to develop spoken language. Aural-oral schooling made no systematic accommodation to the visual orientation of deaf children.

Modern versions of oralism have embraced technological devices to increase the role of sound in the lives of deaf people. The aim has been to provide sufficiently clear representation of spoken patterns for the child to be able to perceive and reproduce them. Sound is composed of a range of different frequencies. Most profoundly deaf people have sustained damage to the auditory nerve. The integrity of the signal is lost by inaccurate reproduction during transmission to the brain. Amplification and auditory training cannot provide the critical missing element: the ability to finely differentiate sounds sufficiently well to naturally acquire spoken language. Devices that provide visual representation of speech, like computer-aided images, have enabled accurate perception and reproduction of speech patterns. Yet as Conrad (1979) notes, the challenge is helping the child to internalize the language:

But from then on in the process, we are faced with a critical psychological problem. How do children generate the sound

when there is no picture to match? What is there for them to remember? Remembering the picture is useless; without the device they cannot generate a matching picture (p. 239). . . . It is futile to ignore the close association that there must be between linguistic ability and its internal vocal expression. Children with unintelligible vocal speech in general have unusable internal speech which cannot--and evidently does not-- support fluent and rich linguistic forms. . . . We are confronted with an inflexible chain between deafness and oral language which continues to defy technological assault. (p. 241)

The remediation of retarded spoken language development became the focus of most educational efforts in deaf education (Moore, 1982; Myklebust, 1964). As a student in the 1970s, the researcher surveyed services in Great Britain, which at that time embraced aural-oral education. The “good” parent and teacher never flagged in attempts to exploit daily activities for practicing speech and hearing. All possible resources of parent and teacher needed to be brought intensively to bear upon the child in all settings. (The concept of “early intervention” in the lives of children still pervades programs for the deaf.) Sound was pumped into the child using powerful amplifiers and hearing aids. The rationale for exceeding the pain threshold in decibel input was that “if language isn’t gotten into them now (via audition), they are lost.” The non-speaking deaf child was labeled an “oral failure” and transferred to boarding schools for vocational study (Reilly, 1977).

The dismal standards of academic achievement by most deaf students helped compel a mid-20th century reform movement in deaf education that largely supplanted oral-only programs in the U.S. and most of Europe. The frustrations of trying to mechanically overpower auditory loss are now acknowledged. Children were explicitly taught a first language which they could not learn by themselves. Overcoming the communication barrier was such a predominant concern that the

teaching of curricular content was slighted. Instructional methods were often simplified and structured; didactic styles of teaching prevailed, because of the difficulty of rapport. The schools failed to inculcate in the typical deaf child strong spoken and written language skills, as indicated by the widespread illiteracy of many deaf graduates.

How deaf children responded collectively to the oral approach is another indicator of the encumbrances it imposed. Stories about oral-only education are mixed with recollections of the relief that students found using gestures and signs surreptitiously with each other. Under the premise that aural-oral skills would suffer, communication through signing was prohibited. Some British schools sought to avoid "contamination" of the learning environment by not admitting deaf children who already knew signs, like the children of deaf parents. Deaf adults were barred or discouraged from fraternizing with current students. Because it is extremely difficult for deaf children to speak with each other, the oral approach hindered rapport between students within the classrooms. In spite of these impediments the children expressed their need to communicate in the groups which they formed out of sight of teachers. In a novel by Joanne Greenberg (1970), a deaf person reflected on his school years: "I came to associate sign with the smell of urine, for the toilet was the only place we could sign."

While classical oralism has been largely supplanted by more visual approaches, oral-only settings remain a major part of many deaf children's upbringing. Most families are unfamiliar with deafness and so are unaware of visual strategies of communication. Profoundly deaf children are sometimes classified as educationally hard-of-hearing leading to placement in oral classrooms. Many deaf children in regular schools are isolated due to the lack of interpreters and signing teachers, even while visual support is intended. Since many mainstreaming

programs enroll only a few deaf children, these children lack the support of peers in creating a visual “underworld.”

2. The use of invented gestural codes

The prevailing strategy of deaf education today involves visual accommodation to the deaf child through manual-gestural communication. This is part of a widespread shift towards an accommodating philosophy called “total communication,” which calls for providing whatever forms of communication children need, whether speech, a natural sign language, invented codes or other means. Of course, the concept of “individual need” is problematic, and communication policy in schools for the deaf have more often been set according to teacher and parental preferences.

In general, this has meant the simultaneous use of manual signs in the grammatical order of the national language and speech. The artificial systems of gesture have no community of language users, so it is a misnomer to use the term “sign language” here. These invented sign codes are intended as a way for deaf children to gain visual access to spoken language. To a greater or lesser degree, these codes attempt to precisely represent a spoken language unit-by-unit on the hands. The key point is that deaf education has made a dramatic shift towards visual accommodation (by changing the modality used), but has not adopted a natural, visual language. Instead, spoken language is adapted to the visual modality.

The adoption of visual-manual communication has helped expand deaf students’ participation in schooling. More deaf people today are more successful than under oral methods of instruction. A substantial minority of deaf people has attained high levels of education and employment. However, overall academic achievement and literacy gains have not risen to the level of deaf children’s intelligence.

The manual communication approach has been criticized on the grounds that it ignores the inherent differences in the nature of a spoken language and a signed language. The number of manual units is designed to equal the spoken units in a one-to-one match. Because signing and speech have a different rate of production (Klima & Bellugi, 1979), the signed codes are difficult to produce accurately at normal conversational speed. Write Johnson, Erting & Liddell (1989):

The task for a hearing person attempting to speak and sign simultaneously appears to be psychologically and physically overwhelming. Under such difficult conditions, one or both parts of the signal will deteriorate. A hearing person will typically begin to audit the speech portion of the signal and will allow the sign signal to deteriorate either by omitting signs randomly or by deleting those signs that do not fit the rhythmic pattern of English speech. . . . In our view, it is not an exaggeration to say that the signed portion of the SSS (Sign-supported speech) presented in nearly all of American deaf education is only partially comprehensible, even to skilled native signers. (p. 4).

For supporting linguistic analysis, see Johnson & Erting (1989). A final concern is that the manual communication approach overlooks a child's need for learning through participation in a community of language users. Because the invented codes are not used naturally by any language community, they are a highly variable pidgin, and thus fail to provide a consistent language model.

3. Bilingual-bicultural approach

The roots of a bilingual-bicultural approach in deaf education grew from the recognition of the sophistication of natural sign languages. Sign language research since the late 1950s has demonstrated both the universal features shared with other languages and the unique modifications for the visual channel. For example, The American Sign Language (ASL) has been described as:

an autonomous language with its own internal mechanisms for relating visual form and meaning. ASL has evolved linguistic mechanisms that are not derived from English (or any spoken language), thus offering a new perspective on the determinants of language form. ASL shares underlying principles of organization with spoken languages but the instantiation of those principles occurs in formal devices arising out of the very different possibilities of the visual-gestural mode. (Bellugi et al, p. 279)

In the social and political realms these new understandings have led to realizations that deaf people form a linguistic minority (given the chance). There has been the inception of the idea that deaf children have the need and the right to learn both the majority language and the language used by deaf people like them. The 1987 Resolution of the World Federation of the Deaf stated:

Be it adopted: The distinct national sign languages of indigenous deaf populations should be officially recognized as their natural language of right for direct communication. . . . Teachers of the deaf are expected to learn and use the accepted indigenous sign language as the primary language of instruction.

The principles of bilingualism (using a natural sign language and a written language) have been applied within a few programs for deaf children since the 1980s. In the history of education of deaf people there are only a few examples of schools making a full visual and language accommodation to deafness. The underlying belief is that “if deaf children are to develop as other children . . . there would be no difference in instruction and relations, apart from the fact that everything would be based on sight instead of hearing” (Wallin, 1994, p. 324). While research reports are sparse, it is known that the increased rapport through a sign language has allowed deaf children to become more knowledgeable and engaged with others (Wallin, 1994, Mahshie, 1995). The language of

signs allows rapid, substantive communication, and this permits curricular instruction more in line with the child's age.

Research about the acquisition of literacy within a bilingual, signing environment has only recently begun. It is surmised that by acquiring a first (sign) language in a natural manner the deaf child gains the unhindered access to social experience and knowledge that is the key to higher order learning, including a second (written) language. This view gains support from the numerous examples of fully bilingual deaf children who have been raised by signing deaf parents. This is an ideal case in which a child has early and full access to a language uniquely suited for a visual orientation, namely, a natural sign language. Since this advantage is not normally available to deaf children with hearing parents, a key challenge to the bilingual approach is providing sufficient immersion within the school for the child to acquire a primary language (signs) and a second language (a written language).

The bilingual-bicultural approach has been challenged as running counter to the aim of integrating deaf children into society. A dilemma for these nascent programs is to demonstrate how accommodating the visual needs and language preference of deaf people will produce children who have skills for functioning in society. The bilingual-bicultural approach is a promising innovation in education of deaf children. Ascertaining its potential awaits long-term implementation, an opportunity which has only arrived within this past decade. For more background, see the book by Mahshie (1995).

There is widespread dissatisfaction among parents, educators and members of the deaf communities around the world about the outcomes of schooling for deaf children. Many deaf children still continue to achieve academically far below their cognitive ability. In the United States, where a wide variety of techniques and approaches are used, the

Commission on Education of the Deaf declared in 1989: "Education for the deaf in the United States is unsatisfactory." In nations where special education is just emerging, poor academic achievements hinder the possibilities of deaf people obtaining jobs and becoming labor contributors in society. In the Western nations, the success of a minority of deaf individuals has led to the realization that it is no longer tenable to blame the biological condition of hearing loss as the source of academic failure. Frustrated communication between deaf children and teachers is widely seen as the primary obstacle to effective teaching and learning. This has fueled the search for reforms in educational arrangements and practices to unleash the full potential of deaf individuals.

The research problem

The problem calls for in-depth description of the processes of interaction among deaf youth in a boarding school in order to ascertain its role in their learning.

Approaches within deaf education have tended to be assimilation-oriented, that is, regarding deaf children as needing directed instruction in social language and norms. Yet in the face of intensive socialization efforts, deaf children have expressed their own thoughts in their own ways. They have done this by their creation and maintenance of patterns of communication and organization among themselves using signs. Freed of the stultifying communication gap that bedevils instruction, deaf children reveal how they prefer to communicate, to teach and to learn.

Only a few research studies have examined first-hand the patterns of interaction that deaf children experience in school, either inside or outside the classroom. To look at deaf children engaged in unhindered interaction demands a rare vantage point. Most education systems for

deaf children sanction only spoken language, writing and derivative gestural codes, which many profoundly deaf children learn only with extreme difficulty. Presently, there are two major settings in which deaf children can engage in extended sign language interaction within schools. The first suitable site is in the few schools that have adopted a bilingual-bicultural approach, especially if there is a school-wide commitment. The second setting is the informal domain of everyday social relations among deaf students in boarding (residential) schools.

A study of boarding school life affords a rare chance to see deaf children in fluent and unhindered self-expression. Boarding schools remain the predominant educational placement for deaf children in most nations. In the dearth of contact with family and community these deaf children are compelled towards intensive association with other youth who share their visual orientation. Joshua Fishman wrote:

Even more so than for the hearing child, the residential school is the very heart and soul, the veritable center, of the social experience of deaf children. (1982, p. i)

All children teach and learn things from each other. Yet such experiences are only one of many sources of learning about life for the ordinary child, which include family, teacher and societal inputs. For the deaf child raised in a hearing-speaking family, the boarding school is an extraordinarily formative domain.

For many of these near languageless children, the institution will structure the self, the mind and the stock of knowledge, and one's place in it. It will also provide the children with a language, an argot unfamiliar and unknown to most family members and others in the society at large. Objectified in a unique visible language (signing) is a configuration of meanings--a culture--which defines the world for the deaf child. For an extended period of time (all of one's schooling), very few people outside the residential school will have linguistic-symbolic access to the child, to his definitions of reality. Thus school peers and staff members

have a near monopoly over the structural definitions of the world which the child may experience. The child's very existence is grounded in the school's womb-like effect. (Evans and Falk, p. 13)

For many deaf children the move to the boarding school was the only time and place in their lives when they were around people who shared their visual orientation. Accounts of school days relate the astonishment and delight felt at discovering deaf others. People speak in terms like awakening after a coma and of light dispelling darkness. An excerpt from Willard Madsen's poetry hints at what deaf people feel when others use a sign language (in Gannon, 1981, p. 380):

What is it like to comprehend
Some nimble fingers that paint the scene,
And make you smile and feel serene,
With the "spoken word" of the moving hand
That makes you part of the world at large?
You have to be deaf to understand.
What is it like to "hear" a hand?
Yes, you have to be deaf to understand.

Since the late nineteenth century the presence of interaction among deaf children in boarding schools has been recognized. Residential schooling is a site of peer-peer socialization into the language and ways of a deaf community (Markowicz & Woodward, 1978; Wright, 1969; Padden & Humphries, 1988). This is known principally by the outcomes of such schooling conditions, not by first-hand studies of interaction. Foremost, newcomers to the school rapidly acquire what is often their first language from older students--a natural sign language. "This unique language learning and maintenance takes place in the dormitory and playground, not in the classroom" (Supalla, 1994, p. 586). This outcome occurs whether or not teachers know the sign language, and often they do not. Since language learning both involves and enables

the transmission of worldly content, a substantive teaching-learning process among children is implied. Many deaf graduates attribute their interaction with school fellows as the main source of worldly knowledge while growing up. The social relations formed are so strong and satisfying that they maintain their life-long bonds in a signing, deaf adult community. This situation belies assumptions held by their educators and parents that auditory impairment renders deaf children incapable of engaging in full-bodied interaction and learning.

The value of such informal teaching and learning among deaf children remains a controversial question. Some writers have judged such activity as unrelated or antithetical to the goals of schooling (Bell, 1888). Others believe that the deaf child of hearing parents overcomes early linguistic and intellectual deprivations by participation in a signing environment. Some appreciate the role of the school in sustaining a vibrant deaf community, with unique cultural assets. Surprisingly, the role of the social interactions among deaf children within the residential school has never been fully considered by educators and policy makers. Clignet (1981) reminds us that, "The outcome of any educational interaction (as measured by academic performances) depends upon the processes involved." Neither criticisms nor counter-arguments about residential schooling have been based upon study of the actual processes of interaction among deaf children. This is because of insufficient information from first-hand study of interaction within the school--a shortcoming which this study aims to redress.

Chapter II

Design of the Study

Statement of the research questions

The central question addressed is how deaf children living in an isolated boarding school organize their social relations to create educational opportunities for themselves. This involves describing the nature of the interactional process among deaf students, including its forms and educational functions. This is both a study of youth's production of social activity as it relates to their learning and of their reproduction of a way of life via teaching of younger pupils. Answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What kinds of group interactions occur among these deaf children? What are the properties (form) of these activities?
2. What function does each type of group interaction have in the learning of language, knowledge and social norms? What value do the children themselves see in these interactions?
3. How does children's intellectual and linguistic condition relate to their social standing in the student body? What are the varying interactive opportunities available to children of different ages and gender?
4. How does the structure and climate of the boarding school affect interaction and learning among students?

Review of Literature

Accounts of life in residential schools for the deaf

The process of socialization in the boarding school of a deaf cultural group with its own distinctive language has been recognized by educators and researchers for centuries (Peet, 1871; Bell, 1888; Markowicz & Woodward, 1978; Benderly, 1980; Supalla, 1994). Wrote Schein (1989):

The initiation and continuation of a Deaf community⁴ also depend on both formal and informal teaching that Deaf children receive. Their education comes not only from schools, but also from peers, family and others whom Deaf children encounter while growing. Cultural knowledge derives as much, if not more, from experience outside the classroom as from instruction within it. (p.18)

There is frequent reference to the impact of schooling in developing sign language and a deaf community, but typically without much explanation of the underlying social processes. This is true whether the writers have viewed deafness as a great loss of humanity or as opening a unique world of visual culture.

Much of the nineteenth century writing and earlier assumes that deafness is a pathological affliction:

In this view, deaf people are diseased or disabled—they lack the attributes of full humanity; therefore, the proper role of the scholar is not to understand deaf people's past for what it might reveal about the human condition but instead to find a cure, a way to make this lamentable condition—and people who suffer from it—disappear. (Van Cleve, 1989, p. vii)

⁴ The use of the capital 'D' is a convention which indicates that the Deaf person is aware and proud of their communal heritage and uniqueness of their natural sign language. In this text the distinction is made only when the writer or interviewee suggest they adhere to this sense of identity.

The scholarship of the period bears little value for the purposes of this study, since it focuses on presumed effects of association among deaf students, rather than its nature. For example, Alexander G. Bell was a leading scientific thinker in the field of deaf education who disparaged the socializing effects of residential schools:

How would the breeder go to work, supposing that he wanted to make a deaf race? The first thing that he would do would be to collect all the deaf mute children at as young an age as possible, take them away from their homes and hearing people, bring them all together and make them live together from early childhood up to adult life. Is not that just what we do? . . . That makes them more likely to marry one another than to marry hearing people. . . . the only practicable plan, but it would be efficacious, would be this: do not let your deaf mutes think in English language; make them think in a different language from the language of the people, and then you have got the conditions. . . . the hopeful feature about the whole case is that these are artificial conditions. (Mssr. Bell to British Royal Commission, #21, 547- 8, June 21, 1888)

Such arguments were used in the late nineteenth century to challenge and greatly diminish the sway of residential schooling. In response, deaf people defended their use of signs in school. Van Cleve and Crouch (1989, p. 131) wrote, "Deaf people used their own experience to argue in favor of education that permitted the use of manual language and against day schools that prohibited it." The issue centered on whether signed or oral language was the most efficacious and acceptable choice. Deaf people argued that signing was central to their well-being and a key to their humanity. Teegarden wrote (in Gannon, p. 363):

Nature hates force. Just as the flowing stream seeks the easiest path, so the mind seeks the way of least resistance. The sign language offers to the deaf a broad and smooth avenue for the inflow and outflow of thought, and there is

NO OTHER avenue for them like unto it. (Teegarden in Gannon, 1981)

Nevertheless such counter-arguments also failed to elucidate the details of everyday lives of deaf children. The actual processes of interaction and their functions in learning were not brought to light, even by those who knew this hidden aspect of schooling so well. Nor is much insight gained from the writings of teachers and administrators. As Italian historians discovered, educators of deaf children wrote about what concerned them:

From the written records, we could reconstruct quite precisely the history of the school with regard to its foundation, its founder and his successors, their methods of teaching and administrative and organizational aspects of the school. (Pinna, Rampelli, Rossini and Volterra, 1993, p. 352)

Little insight about students' perspective on their schooling can be gleaned from this kind of material.

The written records were often very detailed, but they were always written by hearing people, for official purposes and with a formal style, and provide no information about the everyday life, thoughts or feelings of Deaf children attending the school. (Pinna, Rampelli, Rossini and Volterra, 1993, p. 350)

Consequently, historical work on the education of deaf children has been greatly hindered by this incomplete record. The major international deaf history reader has only two articles dealing with student life (Pinna *et al* and McDonnell & Saunders in Fischer & Lane, 1993). The photo section, "At School", portrays only great deaf and hearing leaders and scenes of lessons. Even specific writing about "the residential school experience" focuses on individual children in terms of their adherence to discipline:

Principal Tyler reported "favorable accounts . . . in all respects of [Thomas's] health, behavior & improvement." Still, Thomas's unstructured childhood habits had to be suppressed to fit the rigid institutional existence residential schools necessarily demanded, and this caused some conflict

with school authorities. Tyler reported that the eight-year-old from North Carolina at first showed a "boyish disinclination to the restraints of the school." And the school did have restraints. . . . They arose from bed at four or five. . . . Tyler then led the pupils in prayers at seven-thirty, followed by academic classes until one in the afternoon. . . . The afternoons were devoted to two and three-quarters hours of vocational education. . . . Supper followed a short recess, then more prayers, and finally the younger children had free time from seven to nine in the evening, when they went to bed. The older students had to be in bed by ten. Despite this rigid schedule, or perhaps because of its routine, within a few months Tyler wrote Mr. Tillinghast that his son's previous resistance to the school's regimen had "passed away & he has become quite docile." (Van Cleve & Crouch, 1989, pp. 52-53)

The neglect of micro-social processes within the deaf school stems from an educational climate that has traditionally not valued sign language nor informal interactions among youth. Prior to the spread of linguistic research commencing in the 1950s the sign language was felt incapable of conveying complexity and abstractions. Most deaf people shared this belief. A climate of failure has influenced deaf people to believe that their sign language is impoverished, as Schroder reported from Norway (1993, p. 245). Teachers of the deaf usually did not bother to learn signs proficiently. Considered random and unsystematic gesture, there were few courses of instruction in signs. Hearing teachers, parents and scholars were cut off from the world of the deaf school child as Victor Galloway (1973) reported:

The miniature social system and the frequent upheavals and readjustments of the system were some phenomena that occurred constantly under the eyes of the caretakers but were never recognized by them. (p. 16)

To this day, insight into the residential school experience relies largely upon the recollections of graduates. A reconstruction of the history of a deaf school (and thus, the deaf community) depends upon

study of both official and informal aspects, noted Pinna, Rampelli, Rossini and Volterra (1993, p. 355). During their interviews of deaf school graduates they got "a great deal of information of a different kind." They noted graduates' recollections of "Tales, part reality and part imagination, of escapes from the dormitory and pirate raids into the giant attic" (p. 358). It is such insights into the "underlife" of everyday student life that this literature review has tried to locate. To bring this material to light is to work to reveal the multiple facets of the residential institution.

While the residential school experience was profoundly influential in many deaf people's lives, only a few have written or otherwise revealed what schooling meant to them. Van Cleve and Crouch (1989) noted that historical research was hindered because "only the deaf elite—those who were educated and literate—left behind written records . . ." (p. viii) Even the extant writing is incomplete, as confirmed by Galloway (1973):

Although I have been able to describe some of my experiences of the earlier years in the dormitory, I can only vaguely recall other incidents or fairly significant events. . . It is as if this past is being viewed through a thin veil or is just as foggy as the background of some of the pictures taken by Matthew Brady of Civil War fame. In many Brady pictures only the figure is clear and sharp and the background is often completely out of focus. Such is my view of the past. (p. 17)

After all, these children were sent away and immersed in a way of life that completely shaped their way of being, especially for the majority who discovered understandable language for the first time. As Carol Erting has remarked, the schooling experience shaped deaf people's sense of self so totally that it remains an indivisible and unanalyzed part of the individual (personal communication, February, 1994). Galloway notes:

The negative aspects of such experiences are considered thus only in retrospection because, as a child without any frame of

reference and understanding or realization of what life ahead was to be, I could not possibly have exercised valid judgments on the various aspects of my dormitory life. (p. 14)

There is a growing body of autobiographical writings and dramatic plays in which deaf people disclose their hitherto private experience in residential schools. These performances echo a tradition of oral history carried on within deaf communities worldwide. Such public airings are found where deaf people have forged communal consciousness, like the United States and parts of Europe. These works are discussed first, followed by a summary of the sparser information from developing nations and a few scholarly works. Some sources scattered in numerous fields have surely been overlooked. The scope is limited to English and Thai language materials.

Everywhere deaf people reported that as students they formed intensive social relationships among themselves. Of the United States Padden and Humphries wrote (1988, p. 6):

For these children, the most significant aspect of residential life is the dormitory. In the dormitories, away from the structured control of the classroom, deaf children are introduced to the social life of Deaf people. In the informal dormitory environment children learn not only sign language but the content of the culture. In this way, the schools become hubs of the communities that surround them, preserving for the next generation the culture of earlier generations.

Noted Evans and Falk, "Using some ingenious and creative ploys students preserve self even in the face of round-the-clock surveillance" (1986, p. vii). This was so whether or not the school authorities condoned the use of sign language. In some cases, isolation and enforcement prevented the national sign language from taking root, leaving rather "our own peculiar argot, a tribal language" (Wright, 1961, pp. 52-53). Ironically, where educators retained high expectations for student achievement they were likely to have adopted zealous strategies to

oppress the use of signing, believed to interfere with the learning of speech (McDonnell & Saunders, 1993, on Ireland). Still the urge to communicate led deaf youth to surreptitious gatherings using gestures and signs, and further kept the details of their private society from their teachers.

The way children view their boarding school experience reveals the tremendous diversity in their upbringing and self-identity. The heterogeneity within a deaf student body needs to be a major consideration in ethnographic research. For youth from speaking homes the school was often the place where they were introduced to signing. A sense of awakening and coming into the light of day are common recollections from early days. For children from a deaf family the school may be an extension of a way of life their parents enjoyed. Using the same language as at home, they sail forth into the larger world of peer society, much as any hearing child does. To many deaf youth, the entry to the boarding school meant a welcome joining with others like themselves. The shock of being left behind by his mother and the awakening to the exciting realm of possibility in the deaf school is touchingly recounted by Bernard Bragg (see translation in Padden & Humphries, 1988, p. 97). The elation is apparent in dramatic performances such as *Reflections of Residential School Days* by Patrick Graybill and *Institution Blues*, a play by Don Bangs and Jan DeLap.

This positive outlook on being sent away to school is in sharp contrast with the views of the minority of deaf authors who stated that the boarding institution meant a loss of contact with their "real" world. Bertling (1994) in *A Child Sacrificed to the Deaf Culture* felt imprisoned and betrayed by his parents. This seemed to occur when the individual was oriented to hearing and spoken ways of life, as when late-deafened. Often these individuals find comfort in neither hearing nor deaf world:

“Partly I felt alien among the hearing, just as I had felt, when I first arrived at Northampton, alien among the deaf” (Wright, 1961, p. 80).

David Wright of Great Britain wrote about his years in a student body that was trained to value the ability to speak and to read (1961). He wrote that “From the day I entered the deaf school I had begun to develop a schizoid life, to develop two simultaneous personalities [to cope with the ways of the hearing and the deaf].” Wright saw the vitality of the deaf children’s socializing as detrimental to integration.

It is hard for the deaf to resist the temptation to segregate themselves. . . . Deaf children, particularly deaf-born children, cannot help behaving differently from hearing children. Yet this different behavior is in part contagious. If deaf children are herded together it must inevitably accentuate those idiosyncrasies and mannerisms created by the condition of being deaf. Having no other deaf models the children naturally imitate one another. This intensifies little peculiarities of speech and demeanour, which in turn helps the segregation process. (Wright, p. 80)

He had no respect for the intellectual offerings of the majority of his peers: “It is almost impossible to exaggerate the narrow scope of the general information of a deaf-born boy . . .” (p. 59) He refers to youth raised in speaking homes without signs.

The intellectual powers of profoundly deaf children, unable to draw upon the speaking environment, were turned inwards towards each other. This engendered their ingenuity in creating and using signs: “Our peculiar argot of signs and gestures derived from those of us whose verbal equipment was the smallest” (Wright, 1961, p. 52). In the peer group the child who communicates in an informative or inspirational manner in a visual modality is often popular.

Physical confinement and linguistic isolation from family and teachers meant being cut off from an open flow of news and information. These conditions motivated peer instruction, as reported by

deaf writers worldwide. Of early twentieth century Italy, Pinna, Rampelli, Rossini, and Volterra (1993) found that:

During playtime or in the evening before going to bed, the older children told younger ones about events that they had seen or heard about from others. . . . Sometimes a schoolmate would tell the story of a movie (for example, Tom the cowboy or Tex), while others invented stories. (p. 358)

In the absence of information and meaningful relationships with non-deaf people the deaf children determine to develop their own. Teachers often undervalued these informal exchanges, because they did not understand the signs. Dennis Berrigan, a graduate of a Catholic American school for the deaf in the 1960s, recalled a classmate admired for his skills in mimicry and storytelling: "His English wasn't so good, but he was a fabulous storyteller and humorist. We always gathered around and watched him intently." However, the teachers felt that he was shiftless and ignorant. Recalls Dennis, "They said he would not succeed in the world, but instead he owns his own company in California. He's a millionaire. Which goes to show how little they understood of us" (personal communication, January 24, 1995). The students' signing was unintelligible to the nuns, who thus judged it to be flashy and unworthy.

Even Wright (1961) admired the memory capacity of his peers:

Like the tribal chroniclers of the Zulus we had no written records but maintained a kind of oral history. The repositories of this history were those boys who had been at school longest. . . . the best reportage I ever listened to (watched may be the word) came from my companions at Northampton. I even find it hard to remember whether I actually witnessed, or only heard about, some of the contretemps that occurred during my time at school, for any dramatic happening (we were inveterate gossips) would be immediately retailed for the benefit of those who had missed it—the narrator (or historian) reproducing the actions and mannerisms of each participant so graphically that the incidents seemed to take place before one's eyes. (p. 70)

Creative initiative among deaf youth seems to have been spurred by a high degree of communicative isolation from caretakers. From the United States Jean Boutcher vividly recalled her upbringing:

The education I received from older students at the Maryland School for the Deaf in 1950's was a fabulous one. Quite a classical education that today's mainstream students do not possess, unfortunately. At the Maryland School for the Deaf, not only were older female students great storytellers of classical literature from *Ivanhoe*, *Les Miserables*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Joan of Arc*, *Robin Hood*, *Oliver Twist*, *Moby Dick*, different Biblical stories, including *Samson*, but they were also very creative and imaginative, inventing stories with a lot of symbols. They would tell a story about deaf students riding on a WHITE horse in a knight's uniform with armor and sword combating against illiterate hearing housemothers on black horses and hanging them in the ward of the Tower of London [original emphasis]. . . . Ironical as it may sound, it was the illiterate houseparents who were a blessing in disguise because they were the ones who helped us become passionate in creating stories influenced by Charles Dickens' novels. At night, we girls would play as *Dracula*, vampires, and ghosts in the dorm when the housemother turned the light off at 10 p.m. Sometimes we would go to the attic and invent stories if we could not sleep. (Sept. 18, 1993)

The free association allowed among deaf children of all ages provided the structural conditions for heightened creative expression among deaf children. Boutcher and her peers displayed a level of sophistication in their use of language and concept that was impossible for them in spoken settings. By leaving these children alone, the educators unwittingly provided the elements that "are conducive to fostering this willingness to explore the possible" (Singer & Singer, 1990, p. 4). They wrote:

There must be a key person in a child's life who inspires and sanctions play and accepts the child's inventions with respect and delight. There must be a place for play, a "sacred space" (no matter how small), and time, open-ended and

unstructured. And there must be simple objects or props to help inspire the adventure. . . . With these essentials, and the "cosmic sense" we described earlier, children can create a world of wonder they will remember and carry with them throughout their lives.

In France, older deaf children are important sources of knowledge in the French boarding schools, remarked Eric Lawriw (personal communication, May, 1994). In the 1930-40s a child who was fortunate enough to see a movie would practice re-telling it in signs afterwards. Upon his return to the institution, the movie-goer was begged to recount the cinematic experience. In his own schooling in the 1980s Lawriw recalled young deaf students holding up pictures to older pupils, who would delight them with elaborate explanation. Lawriw felt that deaf children in France today still remain the principal sign language models for youngsters. He suggests that increased teacher involvement has reduced the tendency for creative self-initiative by children.

Storytelling is an ever popular activity within groups of isolated deaf children. This was the case in Great Britain until the later quarter of this century, where students surreptitiously told stories using a forbidden sign language. The British Deaf News wrote:

At the BDA's Congress in Blackpool this year was a workshop on a subject that many Deaf people could identify with--storytelling in BSL [British Sign Language]. It not only brought back memories of schooldays, but, also, for the lucky ones, more recent experiences. (Daunt, 1992, p. 13)

Deaf people's recollections of childhood storytelling are windows on their times together. They learned content, manner of presentation, and skill in the vernacular sign language. In such imaginative scenes the vocabulary and range of meaning is stretched far beyond the ordinary routine usage. This realm of intellectual exercise was unrecognized and even discouraged by many educators, with no substitute offered in return. The following passage shows how capable these children were of

creating their own sophisticated diversions. In an empty space they sat spellbound during stories told by peers.

In the middle of the war, in that appalling Victorian dump, we spent the days learning nothing in the classrooms and in the evenings doing nothing in the playground or playroom. The so-called playroom was a barn-sized semi-basement with a bench along one wall and lockers on another wall—that was all, unless you count the occasional rat. But most evenings, there would be a little crowd of girls entranced and oblivious of their bleak surroundings, watching 152 “tell a story.”

152's stories were about cowboys and indians, pirates, cops and robbers, beautiful girls, handsome heroes, wild horses and ships on the high seas and full of romance, action and adventure. Dorothy took all the parts in these dramas. She was the galloping horse and the long-haired maiden clinging to the hero's waist, the cavalier sweeping off his plumed hat and the galleon ploughing the waves, the soaring eagle and the damaged plane tumbling from the skies. She was as good as television. (Pat Dugdale, *British Deaf News*, April, 1993, p. 7)

By storytelling the students demonstrated a yearning for meaningful and extended narrative. Remi Clignet surmised that deaf children

are constantly scared of loneliness and the ensuing unsocialization. Hence, storytelling creates a culture in the fullest sense of the word since socialization to storytelling is a socialization of gestures and of a repertoire. (personal communication, Dec. 21, 1994)

Today Western deaf communities consider their narrative practices to be forms of cultural transmission. The *British Deaf News* reported:

Storytelling in BSL (British Sign Language) is an art or skill that has been passed down through the generations of Deaf people. It can be seen at any club night at Deaf Centres throughout the country. Until recently most profoundly deaf children attended special schools for the deaf, the majority of which were residential. Often the most popular pupils were those who had Deaf parents because they were fluent in British Sign Language and good storytellers. These skills were soon picked up by many other children

and, when they left school, were continued to be used at Deaf Clubs. (Daunt, 1992, p. 12)

Seeing deaf storytelling as a form of folklore, Rutherford (1985) analyzed the "group narrative" of American deaf children. This involves cooperative acting out of stories with elaborate sign language and mime. She found that these "serve as an educating tool for the learning of cultural rules, values, and specific competence." The joint action in a visual modality helped the deaf children learn cooperation:

The simultaneity of language production in the Deaf group narrative further provides for richness of expression both linguistically and stylistically that cannot be duplicated by spoken languages. Simultaneous images of weather—such as building thunderheads, lightning, river waters rising and washing away river banks—can be signed in unison, producing a very complex linguistic backdrop to, say, a small boy struggling against the elements to warn the town of an impending flood. (Rutherford, 1985, p. 147)

Stories and gaming may help deaf children learn about the nature of sound (see Padden and Humphries' chapter, "The Meaning of Sound", 1988).

Because storytelling is so prevalent in deaf communities worldwide, it is a good entry point for a discussion of the basic issues of deaf cultural and linguistic transmission. Many writers have argued that the generative force of cultural transmission is deaf families and their deaf children in the school. Supalla (1994) states the dominant viewpoint among Western deaf intellectuals:

Residential schools for the deaf are more than just schools in which many deaf children enroll. These schools have a special role in fostering and maintaining the language of the Deaf community. ASL is maintained and transmitted to succeeding deaf generations primarily because most deaf adults marry other deaf persons (Rainer, Altshuler, & Kallman, 1963). A small percent-age of these marriages produce deaf children. For such a child born in a family of deaf parents, ASL is likely to become the native language (Quigley and Paul, 1984).

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Upon enrollment in a residential school, this child then becomes the linguistic and cultural model for deaf peers from hearing families . . . These children acquire ASL naturally through immersion with native ASL-signing children, usually through informal exposure on the playgrounds or in the dormitories of residential schools. (Padden and Humphries, 1988)

It certainly seems logical that the few children who already knew a sign language would take a leading role as “linguistic and cultural models for deaf peers.” Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence offered to support the claim, due to the paucity of interactional research in deaf education. We must rely upon anecdotes and recollections, such as seen in the play “Institution Blues.” A girl who had deaf parents was a leader by virtue of her facility with the sign language and her broader experience. When the teacher turns to the blackboard, the girl quickly explains in signs what the teacher is trying to convey (the story of *The Three Little Pigs*). At one point the frustrated teacher wheels and asks the girl if she wants to tell the story herself. The girl gives a spirited and elaborate rendition, which delights her classmates and silences the teacher. There are many examples of such student leaders in the literature. Deaf children of deaf parents are especially skilled by virtue of their early, continuous exposure to signing at home.

However, it is not only deaf children from deaf families who take the leading roles. Deaf children of hearing parents who embrace and master the visual modality of communication may become creative leaders. A noted American Dorothy Miles of Great Britain had hearing parents, lost her hearing at the age of about eight, and often wrote her poetry in English before translating into British Sign Language. For children like Dorothy, the freedom to associate with peers in signs provided an opportunity for creative expression.

Not many people who read this will remember Dorothy Miles from 50 years ago at RDS (Royal Deaf School), Old Trafford, Manchester. Unbelievable as it may seem now to give children numbers, the Deaf people who were at that school then still refer to each other by their numbers as well as their name. Dorothy was 152, I was 226.

152 Dorothy Squire had been at Old Trafford 2 or 3 years by the time I got there in 1942. She was already a leader in the Deaf community of the school— a small but sturdy child, with the bright blue eyes, fine skin and a trick of standing with her feet planted firmly when she intended to start talking, which she never lost. Sign Language was nominally banned then, but who cared? 152 used it fluently, inventively, joyously. It was as natural to her as breathing and, at the same time, coming from a family devoted to amateur theatricals, she loved to act. She was also one of the few children in the school with perfect English and a love of reading. . . . Awful as that school was, it was there that Dorothy 152 began to be the BSL authority, the actor, the poet and writer, the leader and champion of the Deaf known internationally as Dorothy Miles. (Pat Dugdale, *British Deaf News*, April, 1993, p. 7)

The reference to skills in English language reminds us that there are several cultural and linguistic sources available to a deaf student body. The child who lost hearing after the acquisition of speech often has much greater access to information drawn from the hearing world and the printed word. This may give them an advantage in peer leadership, especially in settings where information from “the outside” is prized. Those with more hearing and speaking may have closer relationships with hearing teachers, and thus gain authority over their peers. Ironically, the references to hard-of-hearing or late-deafened children taking leading roles in deaf schools is often provided by researchers and writers who were themselves in this auditory status (Evans, 1982; Wright, 1961). These writers have neglected the influence of deaf children of deaf parents. At the same time, those writers who emphasize the

transmission of Deaf culture seem to overlook the potential role of hearing and speech in deaf peer leadership.

Thus, deaf children draw upon (and generate) different sources in weaving their own unique tapestry of shared meaning. A given individual's leading role seems to stem chiefly from an ability in acquiring and transmitting knowledge in an appealing and visual manner to peers. The bringing of information into a signed form relies upon an advanced ability to grasp and to re-configure meaning. To an intellectually and communicatively isolated deaf child of non-signing parents a simple account of a movie may appear as magical. Yet the deaf child of deaf parents may simply be telling stories like his parents did with him. For other children, the discovery of signing at the school may give them a way to express their captive thoughts. Highly motivated, they acquire and master signing in a few years. The noted American Deaf storyteller, Patrick Graybill, who had hearing parents (and a deaf sibling), is an example. Dorothy Miles drew upon her knowledge gained by reading and early speech. The key to her success with deaf peers was that she, unlike Wright, adopted the use of signs wholeheartedly, and made it her vehicle of creative expression.

Despite their varied backgrounds, these students assume a common role of leadership by virtue of being sources of new ideas in a closed world. Masters of signs among them help deaf children to transcend their isolation, and even touch intangible realms of spirit and sound. Such individuals are valued for what they are: sources of knowledge and inspiration in a too-closed world. Post-humous memorials revealed deep appreciation of Miles' role:

You came into our lives to bring the sunshine
Slowly, as the beautiful buds do open,
Did you open our eyes to the beauty of God's earth.
You didst teach us the wondrous love of His holy word.

Through your hands, music was the sweetest voice,
The sweetest of violin notes you could convey.
You gave us the courage to bear our burdens,
The message in your hands could sooth our troubled minds. . . .
No more will your hands sing for us,
Silent now are the hands that could bring us laughter and tears
to every eye. (Audrey Travis, *British Deaf News*, April, 1993)

Any theory of deaf cultural development needs to account for the complex social behavior among deaf children in the schools where there is no connection to a signing, deaf family or community. This may be the most prevalent situation in deaf schools worldwide. Besides the fact that less than 10% of deaf children have deaf parents, there are specific reasons for why many schools have no such students. Being raised in a signing family depends upon the deaf parents having been to school, where they themselves learned to sign. Many nations have not yet established schools for the deaf. Elsewhere, deaf people aren't permitted to marry. In some cases their progeny may be taken away to be raised by relatives who use only speech. In the case of Thailand, only one deaf child with deaf parents has attended the schools for the deaf during the past forty years. Cases of deaf children learning from each other without evident links to the outside deaf community should provoke re-thinking about the basis of deaf culture. In many instances, the transmission of language and knowledge may be more a testimony to deaf children's memory capacity and teaching ability than an example of deaf communal socialization of new members.

The simultaneous drive to learn and the conditions of dependence are further illustrated by looking at the sources of their ideas. The deaf British storytellers noted: "Storytelling can be based on four different categories: experience, imagination, films seen and stories passed on by older friends and family members." Notably, these are all internal to the

individual mind or the circle of deaf people. Deaf children in these circumstances become resourceful at finding ways to satisfy natural desires to know and to imagine. They look out upon the world with curiosity. In doing so they dispel fears about the inwardness of a "deaf world." In the way they adapt ideas to fit their unique visual modality they demonstrate a powerful ability to act upon outside input and make it meaningful.

In frequently adopting topics from hearing people, they show their dependence upon the larger community. The topics of many stories told by deaf children emanate from outside the school, such as movies and books. How such information enters the closed world of residential schools is intriguing. Undeniably the youth learn something from their teachers and textbooks. Even when oral methods are strictly enforced there are one or more teachers who strive to break through and establish rapport with the students. The knowledge conveyed by responsive adults has great impact in the student body by virtue of being one of a few sources of reliable information.

Staff who are themselves deaf have profound influence. Although frequently uncredentialed, these deaf adults have full fluency in the signs used by the youth and perhaps a desire to really engage deaf youth, even if only to dispel their own loneliness. However, they often struggle against administrative obstacles:

At that time the staff members had strict orders to refrain from the use of the language of signs, even in the dormitories and the dining halls. It created stressful conditions for many of the boys and for a number of staff members who realized the futility of trying to create a home-like atmosphere under such conditions. As a result the boys were deprived of any real contacts with adults. . . . One of the deaf instructors was becoming exasperated in his attempts to maintain meaningful relationships with the boys and such frustration eventually led to "clandestine"

meetings in his room on campus on Sunday afternoons, when he could loosen up with five or six selected boys and regale them with tales in the language of signs. (Galloway, 1973, p. 18)

Many of the Western writings are recollections of extinct situations, rather than portrayals of deaf children's lives now. In the West, residential schools have been greatly reduced in number, size and degree of isolation during the past thirty years. In the United States presently over 75% of deaf children attend regular schools. The Deaf community has asserted their point of view in response to policy shifts in deaf education. The play "Institution Blues" opens with a rally of deaf people protesting the closing of a residential school. A reporter asks why they are defending such an institution. The protesters attempt unsuccessfully to explain the importance of the school in their lives to someone who has not shared the experience. Frustrated, they decide to create a dramatic portrayal of their daily life from enrollment until graduation. In this tale, which is a composite of many deaf people's memories, the appreciation of belonging to a community of peers and sharing easy communication is clearly expressed. Policy shifts have threatened to deny this opportunity to following generations, which has motivated deaf people to examine and publicize their school experience.

The educational reforms towards mainstreaming have been accompanied by a sense of loss among graduates of residential schools.

Often I ask today's students if they had ever been storytellers in public or mainstream schools. To which they reply Nay. Neither of them [who attended those two types of schools] . . . has ever heard of *Ivanhoe*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and so on. When I ask former residential students the same question about their experience as storytellers, they reply Aye. So, the residential school for the deaf is the mecca of the deaf and hard-of-hearing. A fabulously classical education. Long live, residential school! (Jean Boutcher, Sept. 18, 1993)

In Britain deaf people their "oral history" giving way to reform:

The art of storytelling has now sadly declined along with the closure of many schools for the deaf. The same opportunity is not available in Partially Hearing Units and the mainstreaming of deaf children in hearing schools. But like some old houses of historic importance, storytelling needs to be preserved. (Daunt, 1992, p. 13)

So in the Western nations, researchers must now turn to answer the question that Stokoe (1995, p. 7) asks, "What has replaced the residential schools once so important as places where deaf children from hearing homes first encountered and learned Deaf culture?" This query drives important work on interaction in mainstreaming classrooms by Ramsey (1993), in day schools for the deaf by Johnson and Erting (1989) and in deaf families (see the articles in Volterra and Erting, 1994). These are all elements of research on the "deaf way of education."

The residential school for the deaf remains the dominant arrangement in the developing nations, offering numerous sites for research. Unfortunately, no publications along the lines of this study have come to light. Deaf people are hindered by the fact that less than five percent of the deaf cohort goes to school in many developing nations (Joutselainen, 1991). Low literacy and a lack of sign interpreters is a daunting obstacle to the schooled minority.

In Thailand, the only written source is interviews by foreign aid workers.⁵ The Thai deaf graduates stated that attendance at the boarding school was the most significant event of their lives, giving them a primary language and membership in a social group. The vast majority who did not attend school were not considered members of the deaf community, because they did not use Thai Sign Language.

⁵ Interviews by the researcher and colleagues in 1981-82 and by Swedish consultants in 1986-87.

James Chao of Taiwan has been searching for historical records in Asia since 1988 and has uncovered no written works about the boarding school experience (personal communication, 1992). Trish Ross reported first-hand observations about Nepal:

Because the schools are oral the students didn't understand what they learned in school. There was a street corner where all the guys met. Younger and older. The older men would explain things to the younger kids [using the Nepali Sign Language] and help them read and understand their text books and notes. Women and girls were not permitted to join cause it was not proper for girls to associate with men. So the girls and women tended to miss out on all this through the air communication. (Trish Ross, personal communication, July, 1993)

In Africa, Okombo (1991) wrote about Kenya and echoed the widespread perception among deaf people that school is an essential opportunity for learning via social interaction:

Schools are a matter of life and death for the deaf. They are the only centres for learning intellectual and vocation skills, [and] they provide the only opportunity for deaf children to live in a community of deaf people, where the human yearning for social interaction will force them to develop, learn and enrich their sign language. (p. 6)

Naniwe (1994) of Burundi quoted a parent talking about how school attendance changed the social relations of his deaf son:

He's been going to school for three years now, and since then I have the impression he has learned many things. I don't understand the signs but when he is with his schoolmates, they have the same language, using their eyes, their arms, their mouths. It's very funny, but no one else understands it. In fact, it's the only time I ever see Vincent radiant, because he can joke around with his friends, tell things, while with us, with his little brothers and sisters, the only noises you hear are the slaps! (p. 579)

Regardless of schooling conditions, when deaf children are put together they demonstrate a capacity to develop sophisticated

communication patterns. In some nations, the inception of schooling offers the first chance for deaf people to form a sign language. The capacity of deaf children to form an effective communication system in Nicaragua was noted by Pinker (1994)⁶ in *The Language Instinct*.

Until recently there was no sign language at all in Nicaragua because deaf people remained isolated from one another. When the Sandinista government took over in 1979 and reformed the educational system, the first schools for the deaf were created. The schools focused on drilling the children in lip reading and speech, and as in every case where that is tried, the results were dismal. But it did not matter. On the playgrounds and schoolbuses the children were inventing their own sign system, pooling the makeshift gestures that they used with their families at home. Before long the system congealed into what is now called the Lenguaje de Signos Nicaraguense (LSN). Today LSN is used, with varying degrees of fluency, by young deaf adults, aged seventeen to twenty-five, who developed it when they were ten or older.

Since these are day schools, the formation of a common language by deaf students in Nicaragua is even more impressive. The opportunity to develop such conventions depends upon the conditions of their schooling, such as the numbers of deaf children and the length of time that the educational program has existed. At one end of the spectrum, a long established program with many deaf children will have a tradition of generational transmission of signs. If they get to school, deaf children discover a natural sign language being used informally among the students there. At this point many begin to learn their primary language at the age of seven or older. In a smaller or newer program the sign system of the children may be in a formative stage, as in Nicaragua. The stage of communication development within an institution distinguishes the informal domain at different schools.

⁶ Based on reports by R. Senghas and Kegl (1994) and A. Senghas (1994).

The work of Evans and Falk

The most substantial work on deaf student life to date is the dissertation by A. Donald Evans entitled *The Social Construction of Reality in a Total Institution: An Ethnography of a Residential School for the Deaf* (1982) and the book by Evans and William Falk, *Learning To Be Deaf* (1986). These writers were interested in the role that everyday interaction plays in deaf children's lives, especially in how they are socialized and how they cope in a "word-based world." Their ethnographic study of a state school for the deaf aimed to "produce a 'picture' of this island--its norms, values, symbols, language(s) and patterns of interaction." Evans and Falk noted that total institutions are often portrayed as restricting one's sense of self (Goffman's mortification) and rebuilding identity in a situated culture (disculturation). They found that for deaf children the residential school is a site of enculturation.

In this point Evans and Falk differ from many Deaf writers as to the nature and intrinsic value of institutional enculturation. Contrary to scholars who see the school as enabling learning of a rich deaf language and culture, Evans and Falk describe a meager institutional culture: "This world and its fund of knowledge is relatively closed, local and concrete." The isolation from community and family is a removal of the deaf child from participation in a fully endowed, mainstream social process. They attribute this to "constant group life, low degree of permeability, and relative isolation from the larger world" (p. 105). Evans and Falk argue that the structural conditions determine the nature and the outcome of student interaction. While acknowledging its profound role in socialization, Evans and Falk found the residential school to be an impoverished setting in linguistic and conceptual areas.

The effect of institutionalization on the students is experiential deprivation (Evans, 1975) and linguistic and conceptual underdevelopment (Evans, 1982; Evans & Falk, 1986). Evans wrote:

One major consequence is insufficient exposure to, and lack of learning of, socially significant norms, roles, attitudes, values and patterns of behavior (the culture) commonly induced by members of our society . . . this condition would probably prevail even if no communication problem existed! (1975, p. 545)

Evan's 1975 study began by "assuming that adequate socialization requires heterogeneous social experiences . . ." and found that "many residential schools are homogeneous sub-cultures having various norms, roles, myths, values and attitudes peculiar to themselves" (pp. 548-9). His assumption needs to be validated in light of actual childrearing processes in a number of cases. Apparently Evans would not value the socialization that occurs in any isolated setting, such as among rural folk and aboriginal forest dwellers. Primitive societies, often construed as homogeneous, effectively transmit their ways intact. It is the heterogeneity of values via increasing diversity of experience that threatens these traditional patterns of socialization (LeVine and White, 1986). In this light, Evans' assumption that heterogeneous experience is essential for "adequate" socialization seems misconceived.

Evans and Falk assume that the structural features of the total institution produce a similarly limited form of language, namely, the American Sign Language (ASL).

In the symbolic universe which we call SSD, a state school for the deaf, the sign language experience is much more iconic and ideographic than the alphabetic syllabic, or arbitrary word, culture of the conventional speech community. Signs at SSD resemble those used by early human beings who graphically represented salient parts of their local reality by means of holistic ideographs in the form of cave paintings and rock engravings. In a similar way

American sign language (ASL) . . . is a unique language that tends to reify significant objects found within a local situation. (1982, p. XIII)

Evans and Falk view ASL as a restricted code of communication which effects a restricted self and world view. The argument about iconism in signing was very active when they were writing. Today it is accepted that some signs bear resemblance to physical referents and actions, but that this doesn't bear upon the attainable level of abstraction. This issue was never considered central to the issue of the capability of a sign language among those scholars who Evans and Falk liberally cite. In short, there is no support for their view that a natural sign language is inherently limited. In fact, they contradict their assertions by their citations of research that shows ASL's grammatical and semantic capacity. It may be the case that an isolated group of deaf children displays a narrow vocabulary and grasp of language. However, this must be demonstrated on a case-by-case basis.

Either Evans and Falk overlooked or did not find the socializing influence of the larger deaf community. The prevalence of deaf children from deaf families, who provide a link to a deaf community, is related to the birth rate and settlement patterns of deaf couples. The history of educational development influences the opportunities for the formation of signing, deaf families and community. Where schooling for the deaf has recently begun, the number of signing deaf adults may still be quite small. However, in Evans and Falk's American case, there were deaf staff members. They do not mention deaf children of deaf parents. Clearly, they were not attuned to the idea of a deaf community expressing itself within the school.

Evans and Falk rely inordinately upon teachers' observations to support their statements about deaf children's behavioral and mental attributes. Discussing how languageless deaf children conduct their

cognitive processes, the writers notes that “these children often seem to have a memory problem” (p. 39). During a field trip to feed fish, a teacher reminds the class that in their essays they should “remember Mr. Evans.” Otherwise, felt the teacher, “the children would likely write about the trip to feed the fish and not remember that Mr. Evans was there.” Examples like these, say Evans and Falk, support the idea that these children are presented with a world which is “cognitively captured in a fragmentary yet holistic way. Thus an overall experience is retained (viz.; feeding fish) with little retention of details” (p. 40). The languageless state, because it denies the use of symbols, impedes their cognition. However, it may equally be the case that the mental abilities are developed, yet this is obscured by the lack of an vehicle of expression and communication, as Furth (1966) would argue.

The scope of Evans and Falks’ data about children’s interactions is limited because they spoke only with high school students in semi-structured interviews. Evans (1982, p. 400) said he wished he had spent more time observing on the playgrounds. Nevertheless, he raises some intriguing questions, for example, surmising that low language users will have low status in the student social organization. This makes them more likely to join the underlife of the school, which is defined as “the acts of members who habitually employ unauthorized means . . . in the process of their daily existence in the institution” (Evans, 1982, p. 12). Because English language dominates academics, the child who has difficulty with that language is driven to find other avenues of expression informally. The interesting issue for this dissertation is ascertaining the extent to which the external conditions of the school constrain the nature of student interaction. It is worthwhile to challenge Evans and Falk’s interpretation that the institution is the primary

determinant, especially in light of literature by deaf people that points to the minor role played by the authorities in their socialization.

Socio-linguistic research in schools for deaf children

The very few studies which have looked at interaction with deaf children provide valuable information in broadening our knowledge about the influence of different educational conditions. It is difficult to directly relate these studies to this dissertation, chiefly because most have been done in classrooms with adults as active participants.

The most pertinent study is the work in an American day school for the deaf by Johnson and Erting (1989). They identified patterns of interaction between teachers and children, and among children. Their principal concern was how language is used in particular settings, and in how children are socialized into these patterns. They did detailed analysis of lunch time rapport with four relevant findings: (1) There is a tendency of deaf children to form groups by language skill levels; (2) In informal situations, there is rarely communication between children who are highly proficient in a (sign) language and peers with low (sign) language skills; (3) Adults' use of the sanctioned language (English) and authoritarian manner of communication causes children who are linguistically capable to turn inwards to their own group; (4) The process of education conducted among deaf people using a natural sign language is recognized by teachers but unexploited in instruction.

This study suggests that the structure of social relations among children is influenced by language skills. This complicates the question about the role of children from deaf families as cultural and linguistic models at school. Erting and Johnson had assumed that "both the deaf adult and the deaf children of deaf parents would informally and formally teach the children of hearing parents" (reported in Erting,

1980, p. 168). This assumption was not directly borne out by their data. The elementary class split itself into a group of proficient users of American Sign Language (ASL), referred to as Group A, and those who were not skilled signers. The good signers were mostly children of deaf parents, and the others had hearing-speaking parents. In unstructured situations the proficient signers rarely communicated with non-proficient signers. The less proficient signers "tended to copy signs from [Group] A children's conversations" (Erting, 1980, p. 169). In the play "Institution Blues" the sign-savvy students ridicule and exclude the newcomers. Moreover, Johnson and Erting found that low language children were more oriented towards adults. This study is useful in indicating that the children's level of language will probably influence their social organization and nature of peer learning.

A few research studies have looked at language usage between hearing and deaf adults and deaf children. While this work is of indirect concern to this dissertation, these studies do indicate conditions under which deaf children do and do not participate comfortably. For example, Mather (1997) found in a case study that the hearing teacher often failed to correctly use eye gaze and other nonmanual elements of signing. This behavior confused group exchanges. It is reasonable to surmise that children will associate more with those people, adults and peers, who use their vernacular in a smooth and effective manner. Erting (1980, 1982) has found that children conduct longer and more frequent conversations with deaf adults than with hearing adults. Erting attributes this finding to the shared use of a natural sign language.

Study of classroom interaction helps shed light on the social and linguistic repertoires which deaf children acquire. Erting (1980) noted that the "signing of both the children and the teachers looked different depending on the situation and depending on the people involved in the

conversation" (p. 165). Adults, deaf and hearing, shifted their language use between English and ASL on an activity-by-activity basis. English-like signing tended to be associated with more formal, curricular instruction. In these settings the highly fluent signing deaf children turned inwards to communicate among themselves in ASL. They increased their interactions with the deaf adult when she shifted back to a manner of communication that was more informal (seating herself besides the children) and used natural signs. This has nothing to do with understanding itself. Rather it is involved with the affect and the position of authority that the adult takes in the interaction.

When speech is used, the range of communicative strategies used by deaf children and their interlocutors is greatly narrowed. In a study of manner of communication, Wood, Wood, Griffiths and Howarth (1986, pp. 167-8) found that in spoken settings

When older deaf children are involved in conversations with teachers the non-contingent, overly controlling styles of adult interaction often found with deaf pre-schoolers continue. Control is now manifested in adults' verbal control over a child's attempts at communication and by their frequent attempts to 'repair' his efforts. Conversation plays an important role in social and linguistic development but the question-answer exchange, which typifies most adult-child 'conversations' in school, does not promote but actively inhibits such development.

Unfortunately, there are many such situations available for documentation within schools for the deaf and mainstream settings. Far scarcer are the settings where deaf children can acquire and utilize a full repertoire of communicative styles without hindrance.

Selection of the case

The less economically developed nations with their large boarding schools, even asylums, provide the best available conditions for studying the informal learning among deaf children. The industrialized nations have very few remaining examples of full-bodied boarding schools. An outcome of educational and bureaucratic development has been a trend towards isolating deaf children from each other in regular schools. The residential school tends to be an educational placement of last resort, with a disproportionately higher percentage of economically disadvantaged and intellectually diminished children. By contrast, many developing nations utilize the boarding school as the placement of choice for deaf children. Many of these schools have large and diverse enrollments of youth drawn from across the socio-economic and intellectual spectrum. Given a communication gap between hearing caretakers and deaf students, and a tendency to leave deaf youth to their own devices, such schools have conditions that are conducive for robust interaction between students of all ages. This kind of traditional school for the deaf is well-remembered by older deaf people in the West, who must turn to developing nations to find living examples today.

Since the study aims to uncover the nature and effects of interaction among children, the ideal case is a school where children are allowed ample opportunity to interact freely with each other. Because informal youth interaction in schools has been so little studied, there was no guiding theory to help select a case on the basis of conditions, practices or demographics. The researcher knew from personal experience that the boarding schools for the deaf in Thailand supported a particularly undisturbed domain of child-to-child interaction. The identification of the problem was derived from work with deaf people themselves, whom

the researcher met as a teacher at the Sethsatian School for the Deaf in Bangkok in the late 1970s and during community service in the Thai deaf community from 1980-85. The contrast between the easy communication among deaf fellows and their thwarted relationships with hearing people was as conspicuous as the shifts between Bangkok's tropical heat and its air conditioned buildings. Hearing people often assumed that deaf Thais were ignorant and incompetent because they could not speak. Deaf people were a hidden community, largely left to their own affairs.

The Bua School for the Deaf,⁷ located in rural north-central Thailand, has nearly four hundred profoundly deaf students from ages seven to nineteen. The school combines features of a "total institution"--confining and long-term residence--with a high degree of self-regulation by students. In short, these deaf students are physically and socially confined and their teachers are psychologically distant and linguistically unintelligible.

Following is an overview of pertinent conditions of the Bua School for the Deaf. These points are explicated in Chapter IV.

(1) The pupils are cut-off from outside life. The rural site and closed nature of the boarding school virtually eliminates contact with the family and community.

(2) The pupils have facility with a natural sign language. The Thai Sign Language is capable of a full range of meanings. The 1,800 pages of dictionary already published represents only a small fraction of Thai Sign vocabulary and grammar, which the researcher is aware of because of his central role in these works (Suwanarat & Reilly, 1986; Suwanarat & Wrigley, 1990). Since the researcher had no prior experience at Bua

⁷ The schools have been given fictitious names in this document, that is, names of Thai flowers.

School, interviews were conducted with graduates to assure that signs were being widely used by the pupils.

(3) Thai educators are tolerant of the deaf children's use of a sign language as the vernacular. The policy of the Royal Thai Government permits deaf students to use whatever means they desire to conduct conversation. In many other countries, deaf students have had to communicate surreptitiously because educators believed that the use of signs hinders the learning of speech. Since this research is interested in the potential of free-time interaction among deaf children, schools in which the official policy forbids or discourages the use of signs among children were not suitable for this study.

(4) There is a wide communication gap between teachers and children. They share no common language. The teachers use Thai speech and writing. The children are nearly languageless when they arrive and become monolingual in Thai Sign. Most teachers do not struggle to break through the "glass wall" isolating them from their students. The poor communication is a symptom (and a cause) of a great psychological distance between teacher and child. Interactions with teachers tend to be ritualistic, restricted and regimented.

(5) Pupils associate without adult disturbance for extended periods of time. After-hours and on weekends the children are largely left on their own. Older pupils managed routine activities of everyday living, like meals, bathing and monitoring of rules. Children chiefly rely on their own resources except in dire circumstances.

(6) Interaction between children of different ages is only minimally impeded by barriers in the structure of space and time by adults. In nations with age-graded and highly organized school systems, children of different age are kept physically segregated. Younger and older children

occupy separate classrooms, if not different school buildings entirely. Schedules are arranged to keep age groups of children apart, even during meal times. Children's freedom in establishing their own relationships across age groups is reduced by this kind of structure.

In the Thai boarding schools youth of all ages are in very close physical proximity to each other. The circumstances encourages togetherness, partly by giving them few choices and little privacy. During the tropical days the children gather in the shade under the open-air halls and the trees. The evenings are spent under a few bare light bulbs in open dorm rooms. Everyone is within eyesight of each other far more than in modern Western institutions. Gender separation is enforced only during evening hours.

Thailand is a special case in terms of characteristics when compared to the body of knowledge about deaf education, which is almost solely generated in Western nations. Thailand differs on several key characteristics which influence schooling arrangements, namely, the role of schooling in the society, perceptions of disability and allocation of resources. This study has produced additional empirical data for understanding the processes of education of deaf people on a more worldwide basis. The non-Western setting allows a check on what aspects of deafness and its outcomes remain constant across societies.

Thailand shares demographic and economic characteristics with many nations with nascent human services. Yet Thailand has stable schooling institutions for the deaf with a full range of grade levels, thereby facilitating a study of school life. The findings from the Thai case should be helpful in suggesting approaches to nations which share some of Thailand's characteristics. Thailand has an advisory role with deaf education in neighboring Burma and Laos.

Moreover, the lessons learned in the developing nations may transfer to nations with established services. The residential schools in developing nations are inclusive organizations, enrolling an intellectual, socio-economic and ethnic cross-section of the deaf cohort. Of special importance here is the schooling together of the brightest and the average of all different ages in an "integrated" and open environment. These conditions tend to produce a richer and full-bodied process of informal education among deaf children than is likely to be found in more bureaucratized and mainstreamed settings.

These conditions in this Thai case make for an unusually undisturbed "child world." As such it is an excellent site for studying the nature of interaction among deaf children.

Significance of the study

Documenting precisely the children's free-time lifestyle is a step towards a better understanding of the needs of the deaf child. In Thailand, where this study was done, and in many other nations, deafness in a child is still perceived as an inevitable loss to intellectual and social potential. The obstacles to communication seem insurmountable. The deaf child within a hearing-speaking family and social settings is devoid of opportunity to show their full faculties. In these nations, improvements in educational standards are stymied by a lack of recognition of the intellectual and communicative capability of deaf people.

Finding patterns of effective teaching and learning of language and skills among deaf children would belie the assumption that they are limited in their capacities. The attention might be shifted from the presumed limits of the disabled individual to the conditions in family and school as an explanation for their academic failure. Fortunately, the policy of placing deaf children in residential schools provides a setting for

study of their ability as manifested in their social interaction. Models of human development would presume deaf children incapable of normal cognitive and language growth by virtue of their isolation from meaningful interaction with adults. Yet in the dorms and playgrounds of the boarding school these languageless children are transformed to fluency in a sign language and to participants in a complex social organization with other children. This late blooming of language and cognitive ability is an extraordinary feat and warrants extensive study.

Uncovering the features of educational interaction among deaf children will have direct benefit for teacher practices in Thailand. Benefits gained by this focus include: assessing children's preference as to manner and form of communication, learning about their interests, and assessing their state of intellectual capability. The study will provide to teachers more accurate insight into deaf children's learning ability and intelligence, because the child will be observed and interviewed in a language modality in which the child is proficient.

It will be informative for policy makers in deaf education by documenting an unrecognized aspect of the boarding school arrangement. Child-child interaction is a hitherto unstudied outcome of the policy of boarding children at school. During the past thirty years, the integration of deaf children into regular schools (or mainstreaming) has become popular in some countries, and challenged the predominance of the boarding school arrangement. The operative principle is placing each child in a "least restrictive environment," which is taken to mean the regular school. Criticism of boarding schools has centered on the social deprivation that institutionalization is presumed to impose on residents.

However, there are very few extended, first-hand studies of the processes of interaction within schools for deaf children. Only first-hand, descriptive study can reveal what is actually happening among teachers

and children. When educational policy makers deliberate over the tough trade-off between boarding schools and mainstreaming, this study will help assure that the criteria of evaluation includes the informal processes of learning among children.

Limitations of the study

The focus on a single school imposed limitations inherent in the case study approach. Because the study is about deafness and schools for deaf children, there is a tendency to make explanations solely in those terms. Because the study did not cover regular schools in Thailand, it is impossible to judge to what extent the findings of this study are unique to residential schools. It is not the purpose here to determine how different are the schools for deaf children. It is expected that the structure of schooling for the deaf will reflect an intensified and urgent agenda of socializing these Thai children. Since the aim is to understand student life, this sometimes requires knowledge of the school climate and context of Thai childrearing. For example, is the quasi-militaristic spirit of school regimen widespread in Thailand, and what is its purpose? This would be a more thorough case study if it had included general Thai schooling in its scope. While resources were too limited to permit this, reading, minor interviews and observations were done to learn about the larger world of education of children in Thailand.

A seven-month period of data collection does not permit anywhere near full understanding of the pathways of experience in a residential student body comprising youth from six to nineteen years of age. The study is more like a snapshot of the children's public realm activities and social organization. The study is a sort of mock-longitudinal study in which it is assumed that by looking at the present-day experiences of children of different ages the sum process of growing

up deaf can be fathomed. Yet no specific child has or will actually experience school life as it is presented in this study. Even if the behaviors and routines today seem to be generally stable over the years, the meanings of those activities will likely shift. Ahistorical ethnography is unwise, obscuring the shift of time absolutely (advancing years) and shifts in the relative meaning of behaviors (what it means to be deaf may be different in 1970 than in 1990). The older child today did not go through precisely the same experiences that the younger child is having today. A longitudinal research design would overcome these limitations of a "snapshot" case study.⁸

Though child experience is given primacy, this study is not a story of school from the child's perspective. Adults face obstacles to full participation in the creation of meanings and activities among children. In some instances the researcher is welcome but unable to participate in child activities without altering their nature. The novelty of a foreign adult who uses their sign language (albeit a different dialect) dashes hopes of unobtrusiveness. It was very difficult to observe activities in their natural state. Students are actors in a decade-long drama within school. As they grow and learn they change their fundamental sense of self and group. They are unself-consciously making their own history with others. They act for reasons that are rational within the terms of their situation. The researcher recognizes that lived experience over time is the touchstone of validity for this study. However, at best the study is an adult's interpretation of the aspects of child experience that they choose to reveal and which they unwittingly revealed.

To attenuate these threats to validity, children themselves were asked to recount their social and intellectual experiences in the school and to help interpret videotapes and photographs of their present

⁸ Remi Clignet brought this issue to my attention.

activities. In Chapter IV, quotations are provided so that readers have some material from which to make their own judgments and explanations. The explanations of children's behavior are presented with references to specific observations, interviews and other sources.

The exclusive focus on the school obscures the role of the family in shaping their learning behavior. This study ignored the influence of home background in the informal learning of children. However, the aim here is not causal explanation of learning gains. The descriptions may be considered incomplete, but not for this reason inaccurate.

A practical obstacle to the dissemination of findings from this study is that under 20% of Thai deaf children even go to school. These people usually remain in the rural area, like 85% of the Thai population and live almost entirely among hearing people without visual accommodation. Presumably they engage in labor-intensive farming and small-scale manufacturing, communicating by esoteric gesture to the extent possible. There is need of study of this unreached majority of deaf people. The findings of the study will apply very little to helping this vast majority, unless parents can be persuaded of the advantages of schooling. In Thailand the residential schools for the deaf do serve as sources of information about deafness for the general society. Suggestions adopted by educators may eventually reach families.

Researcher qualifications and resources

What motivates and qualifies someone who is neither Thai nor deaf to study the daily lives of deaf school children in rural Thailand? My background in this line of inquiry needs to be revealed, to assist the critical reader to sense bias. This study follows seven years of an intensive effort in bettering the conditions of deaf people in Thailand. As a volunteer teacher in an institution for the deaf for three years in Bangkok

(1978-81), I learned to read, write and speak the central dialect of the Thai language. My social relationships in the school were mostly with deaf staff and students. I saw a wide gap between their ability and their achievement. The students came alive only after leaving the classroom and the deaf staff were their most cherished instructors.

I adopted the perspective of the Thai deaf person facing the school, minus the defeated attitude. I tried to tap the resources of the deaf people as classroom teachers, by initiating an experience-based curriculum for the new pupils who had no language. A shift in official attitudes seemed so remote that a handful of deaf colleagues and I quit the school. We immersed ourselves in setting up a representative organization of deaf people as a vehicle of social services, advocacy and sign language research. As a project manager for International Human Assistance Programs (USAID-funded), I worked as the chief organizer and trainer of the nascent National Association of the Deaf in Thailand. This work brought me into contact with graduates of the Thai schools for the deaf. Many of these people had lost their curiosity and drive to learn. They suffered the loss of rapport with hearing individuals, including their own families. Self-blame was a common response to their diminished life-chances. My energies were devoted to providing the training and resources for self-help.

My intimate contact with the deaf community brought me fluency in the Thai Sign Language. I was the first professional sign language interpreter in Thailand and, with Manfa Suwanarat, compiled the first dictionary of Thai Sign. As translator of the signs, this task demanded precision in understanding the deaf people's meanings. However, the signing at the research site was an unfamiliar variant of

Thai Sign.⁹ My level of misunderstanding of the children's utterances was unacceptably high so I enlisted the aid of a Thai native signer, Nipapon Wannuwini Reilly, who is my spouse. My fluency in spoken Thai enabled smooth relations with the teachers and my literacy in Thai made possible my reading of school records. However, my incomplete grasp of these two languages has certainly resulted in unwitting errors.

While my background provided skills to undertake ethnographic study in the Thai deaf schools, it inescapably influenced the focus and design of the study. I have long held the assumption that interaction in the visual modality, particularly via natural sign languages, is an indispensable approach in the development of deaf children's intellect. This belief is not shared by most Thai educators. A dissertation about interaction within the classrooms would have been an acquiescence to the dominant view that academic failure is the inevitable outcome for those who cannot hear. The Thai educational authorities wisely permit children to interact as they wish. The Ministry of Education granted me access to all aspects of student life.

Data collection and sampling

A case study of the Bua School for the Deaf in rural Northern Thailand was conducted over seven months. About 180 hours was spent observing and interviewing at two other deaf schools, Dok Khooon School for the Deaf and Kulaab School for the Deaf. The limited comparative work was helpful in verifying and refining the types and properties of interaction and the conditions that influence the vitality of student interaction.

⁹ The signing at Bua School was unlike that anywhere else in Thailand, and seemed to differ in the "accent" (cadence, rhythm) more than in vocabulary. The children seem to have modified older Thai Signs in their own way, and passed this on to later generations of students.

The objective of the data collecting task was to identify, catalog and describe the types of educational interactions among the children in the school. An inventory of daily events is a useful prelude to this study of the processes of interaction among the students. Schwartzmann (1983) modified an adjacency matrix to catalog the "communication contexts" in a school. While a full ethnography of communication would explore all combinations of actor, the table shows only the contexts in which students are directly involved. This study chiefly addresses the "student-with-student" contexts (settings) listed in the left column. When the point is to study the interaction within and between natural social groups of children, the classroom is not an ideal unit of study. Early visits to every classroom gave a general sense of how children interacted with teachers and with each other during instruction.

Table 1. The communication contexts of the pupils

	Students	Teachers	Family	Researchers
Students	Interact in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorms • Classrooms • Public areas • Assemblies 	Interact in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classrooms • Assemblies 	Only during two term breaks for 2-3 mos/yr.	In the dorms, play areas & classrooms.

(The researcher taught in a Thai deaf school for three years.) Relations with family are outside this purview. Relations with the researcher are discussed in the Appendix.

Since any face-to-face encounter can be educational, a thorough study would examine the universe of interactions among children in the school. This is an overwhelming task even had the resources been more substantial (especially time). The scope of data collection is limited to free-time activities, with minor study of the school-imposed routines and classrooms. The emphasis is on the function of youths' social

activities in their intellectual development, more than the form (structure). What seems most needed is a documentation of the intellectual capacity of deaf Thai youth, who are perceived by educators to be uneducable. In light of the limited resources for the research, this scope seemed a suitable first step.

The “student-with-student” contexts were prioritized for investigation, as listed in order in the table.

Table 2. Settings for observation of student - student interaction

Setting	Students	Focus
<u>In-depth:</u>		
Dormitory	Both genders, all ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer and dorm groups; • Older-younger encounters.
Public areas	All ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gatherings of all sorts; • Meal times, work details.
<u>Cursory:</u>		
Classroom	All classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Back channel” signing excluding teacher; • Occasions when pupils act as instructor.
Assemblies	All-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When run by pupils.

Because so little was known about the topic, the data collecting was approached inductively, with the researcher engaging in a process of learning to classify and analyze educational interactions. The techniques included participant observation, interviews and videotaping and photography. The general research questions were broken into specific queries as below, which drove the initial steps of data collection:

1. What is the form and context of the activity (who participates and who does not, when and where is it held)?
2. Who takes instructional role, if any? Who takes the learner role? What are their personal attributes?
3. What manner of communication is used by the youth?

4. What function and meaning did the activity have for participants?

Below is an explanation about how each of the tasks was approached. The first three tasks involved identifying the form (structure) of the interactions. Each educational interaction was described as to its form and context, including the participants, their basis for inclusion, and the time and place. In short, "Who does what with whom, when and where?" (Whyte, pp. 83-86). In line with Levi-Strauss' statement that in some situations "group spatial configuration seems to be an almost projective representation of the social structure," diagrams of individuals' positions were made (Levi-Strauss quoted in Bohannon and Glazer, 1973, p. 384). Examples of the technique are given in Whyte (1984, chapter 5) and Coleman (1955, pp. 174-183).

These personal attributes of leading interactants were recorded:

Attributes of the individual child which vary over time:

(a) Chronological age, and physical maturation; (b) cognitive ability (as judged by peers) (c) year in school; (d) membership status in student body and; (e) skill in the sign language.

Fixed attributes:

(f) Age at entry to school; (g) home background: physical condition, residence, parental occupation and education; (h) hearing status— severity of hearing loss, onset of hearing loss and; (i) gender.

No school or audiological records were reviewed to verify the information above. Instead, teacher and student interviews were used.

To identify the students' manner of communication when there were clear leaders, their behavior was classified by Jules Henry's *Cross-Cultural Outline of Education* (1976). The most pertinent section is "How is the information communicated?" (See Table 3). Henry used this schema to categorize teaching methods in educational settings around

Table 3. How is the information communicated ?

1. By imitation	29. By telling
2. By setting an example	30. By watching
3. By instruction in schools, ceremonies, or other formal institutions	31. By listening
4. By use of punishments	32. Question and answer Teacher question, pupil answer Pupil question, teacher answer
5. By use of rewards	33. Holding up class, ethnic, national or religious ideals
6. Problem solving	34. By doing something on his own
7. Guided recall	35a. By repeating child's error to him
8. Giving the child tasks to perform beyond his immediate capacity	35b. By repeating the child's correct answer
9. Mechanical devices	36. By accusing
10. By kinesthetic association	37. By following a model (Human, Non human)
11. By experiment	38. By comparison
12. By doing	39. By filling in a missing part
13. By symbolic association	40. By associative naming
14. By dramatization	41. By identifying an object
15. By games or other play	42a. By group discussion
16a. By threats	42b. By class discussion
16b. By trials	43. Physical manipulation
17. By irrelevant association	44. Rote memory
18. By relevant association	45. By working together with a student
19. Through art	46. Through special exhibits
20. By stating the opposite of the truth ("water's a solid, isn't it?")	47. By having children read substantive materials
21. By holding up adult ideals	48. By putting the child on his mettle
22. Acting in undifferentiated unison	49. Through group projects
23. Physical force	50. By giving procedural instructions
24. By positive or negative assertion	51. By demanding proof
25. Repetition	52. Through reports by students
26. By specifically relating information to the child's own body, bodily function or experience	53. By pairing (one child gives the state and calls on another child to give the capital)
27a. Through ego-inflation	54. By asking for volunteers
27b. Through ego-deflation	55. Through isolating the subject
28. Through use of humor	

From Henry, J. (1976). A Cross-Cultural Outline of Education.

the world, including informal settings. While designed for adult-to-child interaction, nevertheless Henry's schema is useful for some peer interactions. In general, the weaknesses of pre-specified categories are well-documented. Stubbs and Delamont (1976, p. 9) have noted, "If the

categories systems are used to assist explanation, then the pre-specification may render the explanation tautological. That is, category systems may assume the truth of what they claim to be explaining." The toughest dilemma here is to find ways to describe the range of peer interactions in ways that helps us understand why children consider them worthwhile pursuing. As will be explained in the beginning of Chapter IV, the degree of authority and participation was discovered as a central organizing element of the students' interactions. The subsequent descriptions of manner of communication focused upon whether the participants were voluntarily or involuntarily involved in the activity, their degree of participation and control, and the elaboration or restricted nature of the language used.

The unit of study is the "communicative act." This acknowledges the dynamic nature of face-to-face interaction and is concerned with the process of give-and-take among participants. In raw physical terms an interaction event comprises two or more people coming together and communicating in a particular manner over time. As Clignet (1981) notes, people in educational relationships are engaged in a circular process over time in which any given behavior may provoke responses and also be a response to an earlier behavior by another. By its nature learning takes time. Thus, the study of learning processes requires the researcher to commit time to understand the shifting course of personal relationships that comprise face-to-face education.

Uncovering the meaning and function of the interaction to the children themselves is the pivotal task of the data collection. It is assumed that children's activities contain clues about how they prefer to learn effectively. The meanings that children assign to the act of storytelling and other gatherings, whether as leaders or audience, are keys to understanding their function in their learning. As Hymes says,

The observer's analysis ultimately stands or falls on its success in understanding the values and meanings that inhere in the observed behavior. Aversion of the eyes, for example, like silence, is an act of many meanings, and only the implicit knowledge of participants can disclose whether it is due to apprehension, hostility, disinterest, or respect. . . . The difficult and important point is that one cannot tell the act from the form of the message. . . . The place of something said in a sequence of things said, the scene, and the rights and obligations that are recognized as obtaining between participants in speech, all may enter into defining the status of what is said. We must recognize how the community norms of interpretation are embodied in speech. (Hymes, pp. xxvii-xxx)

Situations can not be differentiated by mere observation. Only by inquiring as to how people interpret experiences themselves can the function of the gathering be determined. It may well be that for some individuals an event may serve an educative role, as in showing new twists on language, even while others view it only as pure entertainment. An event may serve several functions some of which are out of awareness for the individual.¹⁰ Using behavioral clues and subjects' interpretations, the study tries to be attentive to subtle differences in meaning of activities held by different youth.

This complexity raises problems for the researcher, both because of the limits of perception during observation of fleeting events and the threat of being overwhelmed by a great volume of data collected. This compelled a selective focus on interaction events involving three or more children. Support for this decision comes from ethnographer William Whyte (1984) who, drawing upon the work of Chapple and Arensberg (1940), argues that "set events," or group interactions, are better indicators of informal group structure and interpersonal relationships than "pair events," or interactions between two people:

¹⁰ Credit to Carol Erting for bringing this concern to my attention.

If we observe only pair events, we often find it impossible to make valid judgments about who is influencing or dominating whom. . . . In set events the structural relations become clear--and without our having to assume that the stimulus for the activity is an order, a direction, a suggestion, or an entreaty. We observe here the interaction, including conversation, through which there is an objective change in the pattern of group activity. (Whyte, p. 84)

There is no doubt that pair events are critical parts of social experience growing up. Nipapon Reilly noted that, "Friendship pairs are the most important relationship at the deaf school. When you find someone you can trust you tell them everything" (personal communication, July, 1994). Ever in the public eyes of their peers, the child learns that private thoughts can be entrusted only to the eyes of confidants. The researcher was not able to gather information at this private level. The elimination of dyadic interaction is an undeniable drawback to understanding the full scope of educational interactions among children.

Overall more time was spent with the boys than with the girls. A communicative man was a rare and welcome treat to these isolated boys. I was invited to join them in sports and conversation. Only purported illicit and late-night affairs were unobserved. Access to the girls' society was more problematic. The girls protected their privacy by conducting their talk in out-of-sight places. Only by building a long-term and trusting relationship with the girls could their interactions be studied. This was accomplished by my field companion, Nipapon Wannuwini Reilly. A Deaf Thai woman who attended a rural boarding school, Nipapon handled data collecting in female-only groups. She recounted her observations and gave insights based upon her own experience. Nipapon acted as interviewer in some situations where a native signer was indispensable. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) have noted

that, "It is difficult to generalize to girls on the basis of what has been learned about doing research with boys." While the text notes some distinctions between boys and girls, undoubtedly later research will clarify and correct conclusions here.

What was learned at the initial stages was used to direct and refine later data collection and analysis. Such an approach is advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who state, "Beyond the decisions concerning initial collection of data, further collection cannot be planned in advance of emerging theory. . ." (p. 47). They argued that theoretical criteria and purpose must guide the decisions of data collection. The steps of decision-making during data collection are fully explained in Reilly (1992). Additional notes on researcher effect and data collection are in the Appendix in the back of the dissertation.

Chapter III

The Thai Educational Milieu

Deaf children are first and foremost children. They are subject to the expectations and child-rearing practices of their caregivers. Thus, cultural information is essential to understand a society's response to its children who are deaf. The chapter begins with an overview of the Kingdom of Thailand, its school system and its childrearing practices.

Thailand, with fifty-six million people, is a nation of sharp contrasts between past traditions and rapid modernization. Situated in South-East Asia, the Kingdom of Thailand covers an area of 513,000 square kilometers- nearly the size of France. The past has presented an unbroken state of independence for 700 years in spite of conflicts with neighbors and colonial powers. In their parades and in their minds Thai people hold a flag that honors the key national institutions.

Thailand's national flag, ceremoniously raised each morning in every town and village, is composed of red, white and blue. Outer bands of red representing the nation enclose equal inner bands of white evoking the Buddhist religion. The blue band, occupying the central one-third of the total area, symbolizes the monarchy. The harmony of design expresses the complementary nature of these three pillars of the Thai nation. (*Thailand into the 80's*, p. 132)

Symbols of Buddhism, such as the purity of a lotus flower arising from muck, express the idea of achieving humanity by rising above desire and selfishness. This detachment will bring an end of suffering. Each person's life is their own to live, but people who follow codes of behavior are honored, such as monks. A lay person may strive to follow the minimal set of Ten Precepts which call for Right Thought, Speech and Action. The good Buddhist follows a "middle path" by avoiding extreme and rash behavior.

The king of Thailand is the supreme figure of all Thai people. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, has reigned since 1947. While Thailand (formerly Siam) has been a constitutional monarchy since 1932, this King acts as a vigilant guardian over the stability of the nation. His authority emanates chiefly from the ordinary Thai citizenry who honor the King and his family. He has earned universal respect for his ability to wed traditional and modern ways for equitable national development. A bicameral parliament, prime minister and a large bureaucracy manage state affairs. Authority is centralized, deriving from the capital city, Bangkok. In many Thai institutions, from business to politics to family, the role of charismatic patriarch is prevalent.

Under the pennant of His Majesty the King, Buddhist religion and a military-dominated state, the Thai nation has fostered a strong national identity and organization. This is a highly problematic matter in this diverse nation. Its openness to Western developments and the economic success of the past two decades has dangled alternative visions, along with material goods, in front of the Thai people. Thailand is a nation whose traditional sensibilities, lifestyles and social relationships have been challenged and partly supplanted by values emanating from their new economic path. The authority of state, royalty and religion is intensively used to educate citizens to adopt a way of life that mixes modern and traditional values.

Government education of the public about “right” values is pervasive in everyday life, as much by the enforcement of law as by an ethics-oriented education campaign through the state-run media and public schools.

The basic aim of the Thai government towards all permanent residents in Thailand is to bring about complete assimilation to the Thai way of life and to create a common national--Thai--outlook of all citizens regardless of racial or

cultural origin . . . the greatest instrument to be used to create a sense of nationhood is the education system and the enforcement of Thai language. (Watson, pp. 15-16)

Tradition and utilitarianism are blended in guiding precepts, as seen on a road sign, “Know yourself. Know your work. Know your duty.” National news broadcasts were laced with moral lessons. On September 16, 1991, the afternoon radio news opened with a one-minute lecture on being diligent, doing your duty and following the ways of religion and tradition as the way to develop the nation and the self. The national evening television news on Channel Seven ends with excerpts translated from Pali scriptures. On November 15, 1991, it was “People with forbearance are likable.” In the municipality of Bua, the daily megaphone street broadcast exhorted the population to diligence for the good of home and country. The relationship of individual behavior to its function in the state was clarified (“You should exercise regularly so you can be of service to the nation”). Religious and royal quotations urging perseverance in the cause of progress were inserted into the broadcasts.

The school as a vehicle for teaching social values

The Thai society has an oft-articulated set of expectations for its children. The Thai people state their sense of ideal behavior and thought in ethical and moral codes (called khunatham, sinatham and jirayatham). These terms are used in religious and educational settings. In everyday parlance the terms used are “orderly” (riap roi) and “good-mannered” (mayaraat dii). Thai children are expected to learn these ways and to follow them diligently. A praiseworthy child is obedient, polite and “seen but not heard.” Dress is to be tidy and discreet and the body kept diligently clean. Shoes are removed before entering a domicile. The child serves others willingly and does not expect to be served.

There is a deep concern that a hierarchy of status be visibly maintained. Children should show respect and deference to someone who is older. When passing by a seated adult they must stoop so that their head is lower than that of the adult. When greeting an elder or before receiving a gift, the younger person bows his head and raises his “praying” hands high over his head (called a “wai”). Respect must be shown for the family, the clergy and the monarchy. In turn, the elder or leader has specific responsibility for the younger person’s well-being and in expressing compassion and generosity. As they grow older, Thai children are expected to take care of little children (called awu-so). The most influential example of the patron-subject relationships is seen in the highly ritualized honors accorded the Royal family.

The schools are primary vehicles of transmission of national senses of being Thai. The education of deaf people in Thailand can be better understood by looking at the function of schools in Thai society historically. There are three historical periods noted by Watson (1980): religious schooling, royal initiation of modern education, and the expansion of national schooling.¹¹

I. Religious Education: 13th-19th century

Ethical and civic behavior have been themes of schooling in Thailand since its inception in Buddhist monastery instruction nearly eight hundred years ago. The belief was that:

Learning and educating were a religious act, a form of merit making. Whereas parents gave life, monks imparted a way of life and knowledge which made that life worth living. (Watson, p. 69)

¹¹ The account of general education relies on work by Keith Watson (1980).

Boys only were taught reading, writing, arithmetic and Pali, an ancient Indian language used in prayer. From the 13th-19th centuries the content and purpose of education as moral betterment was practically unchanged.

II. Royal initiative: mid-19th to early 20th century

The royal family of Thailand began to assert state control over education in the 1870s. The West's emphasis on practical lessons, like medicine and engineering, was deemed useful to Thailand by King Mongkut (1851-68), who permitted missionary schools and sent members of the royal family abroad to study. Secular education for both boys and girls in general society was promoted by his son, Chulalongkorn, Rama V (1868-1910). In a break with the past, this King intended that education be a public right: "All children from my own to the poorest should have an equal chance of education." He established a Ministry of Public Instruction, and borrowed curriculum and textbooks. As head of the church, he compelled temples to increase the utility of instruction (Chakrabongse, 1960).

III. Secular public schooling: 20th century

Temple schools were gradually replaced by free-standing institutions, under supervision of provincial officials directly accountable to the central government. The main purposes of education became instilling loyalty to the nation and teaching the skills needed for economic progress by society and individual. In 1898 the Decree on Organization of Provincial Education initiated steady effort at providing free schooling to both sexes throughout the nation. A Compulsory Education Act was passed in 1921, but with exemptions for disabled children until 1980. The number of students went from four million in 1961 to eight million in twenty years. Compulsory schooling has recently been extended to nine years. Boys and girls attend in equal

numbers. Although the government claims universal enrollment up to grade four, in fact disabled children are overlooked in the calculation.

Current educational policy emphasizes the reproduction of traditional Thai ways, blended with a modern, utilitarian outlook. Every National Plan of Education since the first one in 1951 has embraced the goal of teaching children to respect their elders, leaders, and their monarch, to follow religious and cultural customs, and to adhere to conservative codes of dress, speech and action. The 1970 Plan says the state should use education to produce in children a willingness to adhere to the essential elements of the Thai nation's order of life (Section 6, National Plan for Education, 1970). The first goal of the 1977 Education Plan is: "Instill children with respect for the rights and duties of themselves and others, with disciplined conduct, with respect and adherence to the law, religion and principles of morals." The goals of the 6th National Plan (1987-91) and 7th Plan (1992-96) stated that education is a vehicle for building the ability of people to improve the quality of their lives, and to adjust effectively to changing times. The state will undertake these goals by organizing education, religion and cultural activities. Emphasis will be placed on seeing that youth and the populace have morals and proper social behavior.

The rapid changes in values is causing many people to re-emphasize the teaching of traditional ways. There is widespread dismay at the shift of values. Articles regularly appear in the press decrying the increasing rowdiness and violence of youth. The *Khao Siam* newspaper on June 21, 1991, had an article entitled, "Seminars on advancing moral and civic behavior in northern higher education institutions."

Presently there is a rapid development in science and technology . . . The public are practicing different work for the development of their own economy . . . Adults don't have time to train and look after children as in the past.

Children lack knowledge and understanding to carry out their lives in a right and proper way, especially in the areas of moral and civic behavior.

The Minister of Education, Dr. Ko Suwatipanich, has affirmed the intention to use curricular activities to instill traditional values in pupils:

Citizen: “Something that we see everyday is the behavior of our youth. Their display in public places is not appropriate. In keeping with the needs of the labor market today, I am willing to accept the knowledge of the youth but can not accept their ethics and behavior. I’d like to ask you, distinguished Minister, in the organization of education, in the curriculum at every level, I think it’s suitable. But how can we also teach morals (jirayatham)? How can we produce people who have both knowledge and ethics and morals?”

Minister: “The Ministry of Education is sincerely committed to (resolving) this matter. (In Thai: Aw Jai Sai ruang nii). And we have been following up on it. However, it is a sign of the times. This is an international problem that has affected our nation. This is not a small problem. The thing that we are doing now is trying to teach Buddhist ways (sinatham) and morals effectively. And at the same time assure that youth have activities that involve religion, tradition and culture. Also we invite distinguished monks and technical experts from outside to teach. . . . The Dept. of Religious Affairs is increasing the amount of religious instruction. We are strict in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, physical education, and religion which all have relationship to morals and ethics of the students.”¹²

The educational bureaucracy is a conservative element of the Thai society. Providing a climate of discipline and hierarchical order is a high priority of school administrations nationwide. The slogans of military order are posted in prominent places, i.e., “Do your duty. Show discipline. Give obedience.” The military’s code of discipline is mirrored in school activities, including the obligatory Scouts drills.

¹² Interview with Dr. Ko Suwatipanich, Minister of Education, during television show “180 Days of the Government of Anat Panyarachun”, 12 September, 1991.

Current educational administration

The present themes of educational policy in present day Thailand are: (a) expanding services and grade levels; (b) a national curriculum that emphasizes traditional moral/ethical values; (c) utilitarian skills training which serves national economic goals; (d) policy and practice centrally determined, with low public participation.

Thailand's education system is centrally governed. Educational authorities in the capital handle assignment and compensation of personnel and setting of objectives and policies. All logistical, material and human resources are provided by the central government. The curriculum and texts are standard nation-wide. All personnel are assigned by the Ministry of Education, under the supervision of provincial and school-level officers.

The special institutions and the welfare schools are under the authority of the Division of Special Education in the Department of General Education in the Ministry of Education. Under the rubric of "special education," the Thai government provides a system of boarding schools for disabled and "disadvantaged" children, chiefly the offspring of Sino-Tibetan hill tribes. There is a regular exchange of personnel in special education, and the similarity in physical layout, regimen and practices are striking. There is a strong force for educators to adopt uniform methods of administration of the Thai schools. The Ministry of Education has a training program to upgrade and standardize the conduct of school administrators.

The centralization of administration does not equate with uniform educational treatment for all minorities within Thailand. Education is used as a political tool affecting the status of its peoples, i.e., Thai, Chinese, Muslims and Sino-Tibetan hill tribes. For example,

leaders in the early twentieth century perceived its Chinese minority as a threat to indigenous Thai dominance.

After 1932 education was seen as a means of furthering democracy by developing an intelligent and literate electorate. It was also used as a means of fostering a sense of nationalism and absorbing the Chinese more fully into Thai society. . . . The period following the end of the First World War coincided with the growth of a separate Chinese school system and successive governments, fearful of this situation getting out of hand, sought to enforce regulations governing the use of Thai as a medium of instruction, and strict control of the textbooks in use in all schools. (Watson, 1980, p. 2)

Today the education of Sino-Tibetan hill tribes youth within boarding schools continues the tradition of differential treatment of minorities. Since the 1960s Thailand has expanded its model of schooling so that virtually every child now lives within easy distance of a primary school. Yet many hill tribes children are sent to boarding institutions, called "welfare schools." From 1992-96, fifteen new welfare schools are planned with 37% expansion of new pupils.¹³ This is ostensibly done to redress the inability of parents to raise their children due to economic hardship. Yet the children of indigent Thai ethnics are rarely removed from their homes.

Ironically, the economic standing of hill tribes peoples is gauged in Thai national terms. The hill tribes people have long maintained alternative economies, that have not been dependent on Thai currency or marketplace. If traditional measures of wealth are used, such as ownership of livestock and working elephants, a diversity of economic situation is seen within and between the six major hill tribes. Ostensibly, the authorities wish to teach hill tribes children to be successful in the Thai economy. To do this, they would need to discard their ethnicity.

¹³ Executive summary of the Educational, Religious and Cultural Plan #7, Planning Section, Department of General Education, Ministry of Education, February 23, 1991.

Extraordinary efforts are made to inculcate hill tribes children with Thai language and values in the welfare boarding schools. The central dialect of the Thai language is always used. The staff, nearly all Thai, do not know the hill tribes languages. Children have rare contacts with their parents, who have no role in schooling, even if they could make the journey from the hills. Behavioral and dress codes match Thai expectations; native dress is permitted on Fridays. It would be intriguing to ascertain the relationships between the children of different tribes, and to assess the strategies of cooperation and resistance.¹⁴

On the occasion of a regional educators meeting, visitors to the Bua Welfare School were entertained by dramatic troupes of children from each tribal group. The girls' faces had been painted with the bright red lipstick and eye shadow favored by Thai women and traditionally avoided by hill tribes women. The dress, the dance and the music had been stylized to make it more appealing to the Thai. A music teacher explained that hill tribes people have no real music. During her own training at an academy the dances of hill tribes and rural folks were learned as a variant on the Thai style.

While the hill tribes children are to look and act like ideal Thais, they are not allowed the same intellectual opportunities. The curriculum is truncated and simplified because teachers feel duty-bound to educate pupils to fit their position in life. Since few hill tribes children make it into higher education and good jobs, why teach them unnecessary skills? Teachers do not feel it is their duty to promote social change through producing accomplished minority graduates. While their assessment of social attitudes is generally true, the teachers, by their

¹⁴ T. Lomawaima (1994) studied strategies of American-Indian youth at an Oklahoma boarding school in the 1920s. She found that the "youngest boys joined gangs formulated along the lines of tribe and "blood"; older students forged new kinds of inter-ethnic, pan-tribal bonds."

(in)actions as regards instructional standards, assure that graduates of welfare schools will not have the preparation to enter higher education.

The major themes and values of general education pervade the special education schools. The theme of harmony through order is echoed in the landscaping of the grounds. The "good" school has well-groomed grounds with flowers, ponds, waterfalls and varnished tree sculpture. The miniature spirit house is garnished with fresh offerings of fruits, flower and incense. Every natural element is completely subordinated to a design. The pupils are expected to mimic the symmetrical and orderly landscape. They line up in straight rows from shortest to tallest child. Everyone is expected to be properly groomed and neat in a well-pressed uniform, without a hair or a gesture out of place. The ideals of order and spatial harmony are promoted by *Beautiful Gardens: Attractive Schools*, an official publication of the Department of General Education, the agency with jurisdiction over the deaf schools. It is an honor for a school to be chosen to display its physical assets; the three deaf institutions that have been featured in the magazine listed this in their brochures.

The researcher attended a meeting of regional special school heads and the Director of the Special Education Division. The Director was principally concerned with the status of projects to develop and beautify the campuses. He urged the Principal of the Bua School for the Deaf to accelerate its landscaping efforts in preparation for a visit by a member of the royal family. The Principal replied that he had sufficient labor to do the job. Landscaping preoccupied him during 1991; the nearby Welfare School also undertook major projects with student help. While regular Thai students help clean-up their schools, this is secondary to their academics. The students of these special schools worked harder and longer in labors outside the classroom than in scholarly efforts.

Education for the deaf in Thailand¹⁵

Education of the deaf in Thailand is an example of a society's nascent efforts to deal with unsettling human difference via an educational system. Like public schooling, deaf education was initiated by members of the elite class in response to international example. The commitment by King Rama V to equal access for all children inspired the thinking that led to schooling for deaf people fifty years later. Over the past 40 years special education in Thailand has progressed slowly. The value of schooling for disabled children is not yet widely recognized. In 1980 the law was amended to make education compulsory for all children, but because disabled youth were not explicitly mentioned, there has been little shift in public attitudes.

Table 4 estimates the overall numbers of deaf children nationwide and the percentage who are now in school. The table shows that in 1991

Table 4. Prevalence and school enrollment of deaf youth in Thailand

Source of estimate ¹⁶	Nos. deaf children ages 7-12 { % enrolled }	Nos. deaf children ages 7-15 { % enrolled }
1/1000 prevalence estimate of deafness	9,632 { 19% }	14,090 { 16% }
Thai Natl. Statistical Office, 1970	10,161 { 18% }	14, 829 { 15% }

about 18-19% of the deaf children aged 7-12 years and 15-16% of the 13-

¹⁵ For a thorough account of deaf education services, see Reilly, C. & Suvannus, S. (forthcoming).

¹⁶ When no accurate census figures exist for the number of people with early, severe deafness, demographers use a prevalence rate of 1 in 1,000 persons. Thus, Thailand has about 56,000 early-deafened people in 1991. Estimates of the deaf school-age population can be made by applying the deafness prevalence rate to the national school-age population. By dividing current deaf school enrollment into the estimated size of the entire deaf cohort an estimated percentage of deaf children now in school can be made (in brackets in the table). Known survey results on disabled people are in the bottom row and support the estimates.

15 year olds were enrolled in 1991. By comparison, over 99% of hearing Thai children in the 7-12 years old group is enrolled and 33% for the 12-15 year olds (Thai Ministry of Education, 1987).

Unlike in many Western nations, the residential school remains the principal type of schooling for deaf children. Eighty-six percent of Thai hearing-impaired pupils are studying in boarding institutions, as the next table shows. It is a desirable placement, attracting a large and diverse enrollments of youth drawn from across the socio-economic and intellectual spectrum. Six more schools are planned in the upcoming National Development Plan (1992-96). Children who are deaf at birth or within the first four years are sent to the boarding schools for the deaf. They are the subjects of the study and the only group to whom its findings apply. Late-deafened youth are generally sent to schools for the hard of hearing or regular local schools.

Enrollments in Thai schools form a pyramid, with far fewer people in school at the higher levels. In deaf schools the drop-off in

Table 5. School enrollment of Thai hearing-impaired children, 1990-91, pre-primary through secondary levels, by school type

Type of school:	# pupils ^a	# schools	% total enrollment
Special residential	2, 631	9	86
Mainstream in regular school	320	6	11
Mainstreamed in Welfare School	86	4	3
Total enrollment:	3, 037		

^a Figures are drawn from a publication of the Special Education Division. (1990). "Special Education in Thailand." For five schools, revised 1991 enrollments are given.

numbers is greater. The pre-primary has 17% of their enrollment; primary grades 1-6 have 68%; lower secondary (grades 7- 9) is 12%; and

higher secondary (grades 10-12) has only 3%.¹⁷ There is no academic education for the deaf higher than twelfth grade; vocational training is provided in a few programs for disabled people.

All deaf schools accept new pupils aged 6-14 years. The average entry age has dropped to 8 years old. All schools offer nine years of instruction, with plans for all schools for the deaf to offer kindergarten to grade twelve. The ratio of students to teacher is low, at 8:1 for pre-primary and 10:1 for primary. By contrast, regular primary schools have one teacher for 20-25 pupils, depending on region (Thai Government, 1984, p. 265). Boys and girls are accepted without prejudice.

Factors which impede the expansion of deaf education are slight public awareness of available services, parents being reluctant to bring their children to school and schools needing to turn children away due to lack of space and budget. Most people believe that disabilities in their children result from their own wrong deeds (bad karma), either in this life or in the previous cycle of incarnation. By tradition and temperament, Thai people have been noted for their humanitarian outlook. Their sense of responsibility and duty compels them, however, poor they are to shelter disabled children as much as possible from any interference from the outside world (Suwanarat, 1994). Such an attitude makes it difficult for the Government to extend a helping hand to disabled persons. In the rural areas deafness is not considered the most extreme of handicaps. Deaf children can help around the house, work the farm, and look after cattle. People say that even hearing children in the villages do not use their school skills in everyday life, so why trouble the deaf child to go to school? Sending a child to school erases the child's daily labor in farm or shop. Neither can the emotional sacrifice of losing a child to a

¹⁷ Pupils not included here are those enrolled in regular local schools in rural areas; their numbers are unknown. Many deaf adults have stated that parents send them to regular school first and moved them to special education when they failed to learn.

distant dormitory be overlooked. Overall, the boarding school is perceived by many parents as having a higher "cost" than regular schooling. Many families are pleased to get an exemption from schooling for their disabled child, and officials usually comply.

Expectations for the deaf Thai

For ordinary Thai people the loss of hearing in a child is most regretted for its elimination of spoken communication. When a child does not respond to speech like others, the parents are naturally reluctant to give up on the auditory channel. They may take hope at the words from the brochure handed out by the demonstration pre-school for deaf children in Thailand:

Hearing-impaired children should not be left to live their lives in a world of silence. They are not deaf, nor are they mute. Parents and special education teachers can help them to talk, just like anyone with normal hearing.¹⁸

Some parents and teachers make prodigious efforts in the hope that speech will spring forth. For example, the parents of Mr. Wikrom M put him through a series of acupuncture, speech therapy and religious worship during his childhood.¹⁹ In Asia, acupuncture is a treatment for childhood deafness whose believers have the same strong faith in its promise as the proponents of cochlear implants in the West.

The feelings of Thai parents and the general public are complex and varied. Many people accept deafness in children as a fact of life. But most parents want to spare their children the pain of being a social misfit. A prime motivating force behind their education is the

¹⁸ From "A little hearing can go a long way", a handout of La-or Utis Kindergarten, Suan Dusit Teachers' College, Bangkok, Thailand (1991?).

¹⁹ Wikrom told his experiences in a panel discussion at Sri-Nakarinwirot University in 1982, as a representative of deaf children with parents who never gave up the dreams for a cure.

motivation to make the deaf child like others, to avoid abnormality. A founder of a leading pre-school for the deaf said:

Everyone has the right to an education. Everyone wants to be normal. These children too. They don't want to be different, or even look different. That's why some of them put on hearing aids when walking in the street. They are ashamed to sign. It's better for them to speak, even unintelligibly. (Khunying Benja Saengmali)²⁰

A belief held by many is that deaf people have little to contribute to family and society. Deaf people are treated like children all their lives. It is assumed that they can perform only the most menial tasks. The capability of deaf people often surprises their parents and teachers. A father of three fully-grown, working deaf daughters was wide-eyed with disbelief and pride when he heard that his eldest had closed a bank account by herself. Regardless of their accomplishments, returning graduates to the deaf schools are almost always treated as children who never grew up. From 1978-81 the researcher witnessed teachers denigrating the worth of deaf staff. They were considered dependents, who could not make it in the outside world. Besides being applied to real children, the term "child" (dek) is used for unskilled helpers in shops, prostitutes--and deaf people, regardless of age. This construct as a minor undermines their rights to object to the way they are treated.

Since Thai society has not yet evolved examples of individual success by means other than speech and hearing, teachers of the deaf often hold the same views towards deafness as the general public. Even Thai educators who promise to teach speech to the deaf child are less confident of academic potential:

It's natural that every parent wants his children to achieve academic excellence. We remind them to consider the

²⁰ From "A little hearing can go a long way", Op cit.

the researcher has seen deaf children complaining that school is boring because the lessons are not challenging.

The methods by which teachers of the deaf are selected influence the quality of their instruction. While teaching is an honored profession in Thailand, few chose to teach disabled children. Teachers-to-be take a national exam at the end of their bacallaureate training. Those candidates who achieve high scores are assigned to prestigious schools; the low achievers are placed by the Ministry of Education in less desirable sites, like special schools for the disadvantaged and disabled children. If they had been given the choice, many of the teachers at Bua would have chosen to go elsewhere. They take solace in the extra "hardship pay" which they receive for teaching disabled youth (now more than one-quarter of monthly salary). At residential institutions the teachers are provided homes, which accounts for the low turn-over rate.

The teacher candidates assigned to special education are given one month of training in the education of children with sensory and motor disabilities, and are nominally supervised for one year. Needless to say, little can be learned about the issues of childhood deafness in such a short period of time. Increasing numbers of young teachers have earned Masters Degrees in Education and Special Education. However, these programs tend to be oriented to speech and language rehabilitation and lack instruction in the Thai Sign Language. This means that teachers arrive at school unprepared to communicate with their students.

There are some Thai teachers who do recognize the intellectual potential of deaf pupils. While trying to hold high standards, they push against a climate of expected failure. It takes a strong commitment to resist the defeatist culture of the teacher corps in the Thai deaf schools. The researcher observed two teacher trainees trying to learn signs from students. For a few weeks they were open and even eager to learn how to

communicate. Then some inexplicable change occurred in their attitudes. They adopted the typical style of stern and commanding manner, and used only "disciplinary signs" (line-up, shut-up). We can only surmise that these apprentices had been influenced by the general teacher corps outlook on the situation. The communication gap with students is most unfortunate because those few teachers who have recognized the ability of their deaf students have done so through personal relationships with them.

Upon leaving school the deaf graduates have tremendous difficulty in finding work. A 1985 survey of 489 deaf adults found that 49% had no income; a 1981 survey of 238 people found 29% without income, of which 69% are women.²⁵ (The national unemployment rate is 8%.²⁶) Staying in school longer is not helpful in finding work. The 1981 survey shows that 36 percent of those who have completed 7-9 years of schooling are unemployed. Yet only 20% of those with one to six years of schooling were unemployed and 13% of those with no schooling at all. This may be because graduates have higher career expectations that are soon dashed because the training from a special institution is not respected.

When deaf people do find work they often earn less, because of a prevailing attitude that non-speaking people deserve less (and they are less able to protest exploitation). The per capita income for Thailand is US\$ 1192;²⁷ while for working deaf people it is about \$936.²⁸ After farming, the chief occupations are selling, sewing, construction, and mass

²⁵ Figures from *Statistics on deaf adults in Thailand*. National Association for the Deaf in Thailand. (1985). Bangkok, Thailand, and Toosetarat, Suwanna and Reilly, C. (1981). *Facts and figures on members of the Center for Deaf Alumni in Thailand*. Unpublished manuscript..

²⁶ Wright, J. (Ed.). (1990). *The universal almanac*. Kansas City: Andrews & McMeel. National unemployment figures exclude those who are not actively seeking work. The survey for deaf adults counts all jobless people as unemployed. Thus, unemployment rate may be overstated for deaf people.

²⁷ Royal Thai Embassy. (1990). *Economy of Thailand*. Handout. Washington, D.C.

²⁸ Based on self-reported data from 1985 survey. Excludes those who reported no income.

assembly work. Many deaf graduates move to urban areas to seek companionship and work. There is a strong urban drift of the general Thai populace towards Bangkok and smaller cities. Whereas most migrants leave behind cherished roots in family and community, the deaf Thai does not. It is in the streets of Bangkok that deaf Thai people have found a measure of personal freedom through financial venture. There is a busy economy of deaf merchants, employees and suppliers selling handicrafts to tourists. A parallel are the deaf individuals in rural areas who run their own enterprises, like supply stores and animal raising. Deaf people have resorted to entrepreneurship and communal resources to become independent.

The most enduring and cherished reward of urban migration is the formation of a social community by deaf Thais. They use the Bangkok dialect of the Thai Sign Language, which those from upcountry schools can take over a year to learn. Overall the Deaf Thais are not a unified group in terms of ideas or values, as evidenced in intra-clique rivalry. But the signing community alone provides a way for its members to form active and meaningful relations with others, which is largely denied them with hearing-speaking people.

Chapter IV

Interaction among the Students

In this chapter the social interaction among the students at Bua School for the Deaf in 1991 is described. During the twenty-year history of the school the children have developed an array of educational activities by themselves. Their use of creative narrative and participatory groups reveals their ability to devise social gatherings to fulfill their intellectual, social and emotional needs. Their adoption and modification of authoritarian codes of behavior imposed by the school indicates their ability to negotiate complex social demands. Older students tend to become either authoritarian supervisors or leaders of free-time (creative, participatory) activities, which reveals their ambivalence about the values of hearing, adult educators versus their own peer culture.

Sent away and shut in: The isolation of boarding pupils

This section looks at structural conditions of the school which shape the nature of child interaction. In 1991 the Bua School for the Deaf had 376 students in nine grades. Their isolated residence in a school alone gives reason to anticipate that the nature of the students' social lives will be different from that of other Thai children. The discussion addresses four fundamental conditions, namely, physical containment and isolation, detachment from family, limited access to information from the outside world, and alienation from teachers.

Physical containment

Schools for the deaf fall within Goffman's classification as "total institutions established to care for persons felt to be incapable and harmless." Deaf people in Thailand are perceived as incapable not harmful. They tend to be institutionalized because they are unable to fully participate in the process of socialization conveyed by speech. Deaf children are a sub-class created by the Thai society because of the challenge they pose to conventional ways of childrearing. It is because they are considered uneducable in ordinary settings that they are moved to a common confinement.



The student's sign for "always within"

The Bua School for the Deaf is a closed institution allowing the children very limited contact with the outside world. The walled compound sits on the bank of the Ping River across from the city of Bua, the capital of a far-flung province on the Thai-Burmese border. The city is an inviting place of 20,000 people without the rushed pace and traffic of many Thai towns. Its inhabitants are mainly traders and government officials. The town's slow pace and small area seems ideal for an active school-community exchange. But in spirit the deaf school is not a local institution. The wide river separating the town and the school reflects an unbridged social and language gap.

Erving Goffman used the concept of “total institution” to describe agencies whose “encompassing or total character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, water, forests or moors” (Goffman, 1967, p. 4). In five of the nine schools for the deaf the students have negligible outside contact. Bua is the most closed and isolated site. Their physical world is the school grounds, and their social life is amongst fellow students. The containment of students was gauged from the percentage who are boarders, the distance to their family homes, and the amount of contact with local people. Bua's students are drawn from a rural area of mountains and fields encompassing 16 provinces. Nearly all pupils reside in the dorms. During the academic year from May until March they seldom leave the grounds. Trips are taken to town only for services like acute health care. Participation in inter-scholastic events is often foregone by the administration. The students have only rare, superficial contact with townspeople.

Deaf students pose a threat to educators of becoming involved in a harmful incident. Since disabled children are felt incapable of looking after themselves, any accidents are blamed upon the negligence of their caregivers. Incidents leading to death at deaf schools have made the administrators more vigilant about wandering youth. At Bua they fear a repeat incident of drowning in the river; the tale of a lost pupil is part of the disciplinary lore. The students obey the strictures and grimly relate the tale of the drowned pupil (who came back as a ghost to haunt them). The river is off-limits to the students, who watch entire families wade out and frolic on sandbars in the hot season.

Detachment from family

I came back to school a few days early because there's no one I can talk to at home. Here I have my friends and we have lots of things to talk about.

– An older pupil

The school's sway over the children is unrivaled by family. Parents seldom visit their children at school, ostensibly held back by lack of time and money. Many families are engaged in agriculture and other low-paying occupations in far-flung villages. Parents' experience with hearing impairment is so slight and their frustration so great that placing their child in a boarding school seems an act of resignation. Says ex-Principal, Sathaporn Suvunnus, "More than half of the boarders at the dorms of the special schools were neglected by their parents, who stated that they trusted the teachers and placed their children entirely in the hands of the school" (Reilly and Suvunnus, forthcoming). In Thai culture it is the responsibility of the teachers to take sole charge over pupils. Teachers are traditionally respected in Thai society. Ordinary people hesitate to express their opinions about schooling out of a sense of deference. Language, socio-economic levels, and ethnicity sometimes impede relations. Parents have no involvement in operations because there are no elected school boards. Nor do locals have financial strings, since funding is from central coffers. Teachers complain about the lack of parental involvement, and about being blamed for academic failure of unprepared children.

Excluding parent-child relations simplifies the research design, but does not eliminate the influence of home upbringing on the children. The incoming pupils show varying levels of mental acuity, suggesting varied home conditions. On the other hand, the children's participation as family members becomes rare and short-lived events compared to the

ongoing, intense associations with schoolmates. The students' long absences from home help marginalize them in the family. Pupils see their family only during the two-month recess from March to May and a fortnight holiday in October. To the unbridged communication gap is added the unfamiliarity of years lived apart. This is a serious cost of the boarding school placement. Despite great gains in sign language skills by the children, they have no practical way to commune with their non-signing parents.

A mother was dropping her daughter off at the Dok Khoon School for the second semester of 1991. The mother tried to get her parting message across by speaking, gesturing, and tracing words in the dirt. Finally, the mother asked me to interpret, saying, "Tell her I'll be back in one month." Watching my signs, a cluster of nearby girls excitedly chanted in signs, "Next month, next month!" The daughter signed that she understood and she moved close to her mother. Mom met her gaze, looked at me and walked out the gate. The girl joined her fellows and they pranced off into the campus. During eight years in Thailand the researcher frequently saw the frustration, sadness and resignation felt by many deaf people and their families over their unfulfilled relationships. Many graduates of deaf schools have expressed a sense of detachment from their family. Many migrate to cities and never return home to live.

The communication difficulties do not eradicate the emotional bonds. Some children pine for their families. Home visits are often heartfelt events. However, intellectually the hearing parents and their deaf child are able to share little. The children express increasing frustration with the situation as they become more language proficient. Writing is used, but with patchy success. Many youth are reluctant to go home because they cannot share in the small talk that is a basis of

intimacy. They feel left out of family life. They become (again) as if dumb when the daily affairs are orchestrated by speech which they cannot hear.

The home visit is foremost an escape from the routine at school. Going home is a journey that rouses the mind by travel, new sights and ideas. Home visits enliven their social life tremendously, as seen by the animated whirlwind of signing after holidays. "They are very talkative at the beginning of the term. They have a lot of things to talk about," said a teacher. Like travelers, the deaf child takes what they've seen and learned back to their new home: the school. The school supplants the home as the locus of the deaf child's social and intellectual life.

Limited access to information

While at school the children have extremely limited contact with the world outside the walls. They can stay in touch only through intermediary sources, like television, mail,²⁹ print, and the rare visitor who uses sign language.

The television is the most steady link with Thai society. The children avidly study the small, scratchy black and white image on the dorm televisions. They peruse the range of programs, including news reports, soap operas, thrillers, and sports. Without captioning, the children get only a stream of silent visual images.³⁰ With undaunted curiosity they strive to make sense of what they see. Naturally, their interpretations are diverse and often off the mark. Ironically, the isolation exercises their creative powers for they must devise their own scripts for what they see. We have all seen contests that show us a comic strip and challenge us to devise suitable dialogue. These deaf children

²⁹ Mail is often opened by teachers and discarded if inappropriate, i.e., sustaining boy-girl relations.

³⁰ A major upgrade of the facilities since this study was completed has added color televisions to the academic buildings and dining hall, still without captioning.

face such a challenge every time they watch a show or movie (or join hearing people in conversation). A common strategy is to draw upon their collective intellectual resources. This pooling of intellectual resource is a benefit of being schooled together.

Through the dramatic games that they create another kind of plot scripting is done by some students. Said a boy named Patila: "The TVs are unwatchable. They are broken or fuzzy. To heck with that. We put on our masks and find some sticks and play war games."

The appearance of novel objects, curious people, and mass events are potent stimuli of the children's thought and social interaction. The researcher's cameras evoked endless curiosity.³¹ Natural and man-made events periodically impact upon student life. Violent storms and power outages shake up daily life. Airplanes and fireworks overhead draw attention upwards.

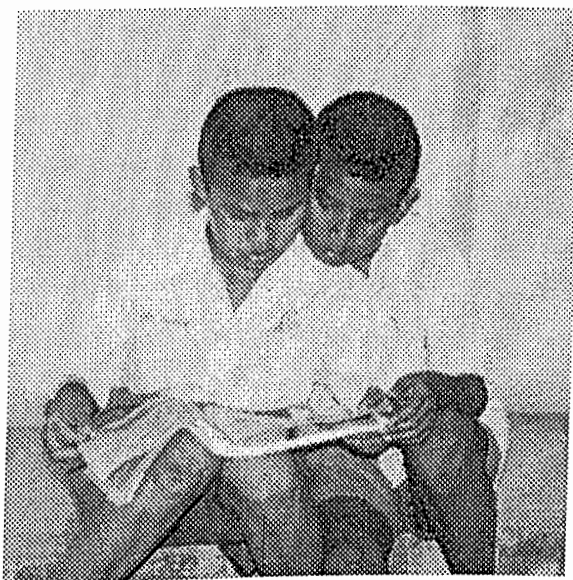


Novel events, like puppy births, trigger speculation

³¹ Remi Clignet drew this category of "novelty" to my attention and noted how a good teacher knows the value of a "surprise" in producing a "teachable moment."

Holidays help connect the students with the nation at large via participation in ceremonies. One night a year the students make a school-wide parade down the steep banks to the river. They carry krathongs, the candle-lit decorations symbolizing the connectedness of all life. Each student pushes a krathong into the water and hopes that it will join the thousand points of light sent from the other bank. The river is known mostly for the gap it opens between them and the town on the other side.

Recourse to books as a source of information is hindered by the children's illiteracy. Newspapers and magazines are sometimes provided in the library, but most youth look at the easy words and pictures.



Cartoon books are the most popular, and available, texts

Most books are locked away for safekeeping--an odd practice in the face of widespread illiteracy. Cartoon books are popular, since meaning can be extracted without knowing the words. Most pupils do not understand the official texts they carry to class daily, nor what they write in their copybooks. Occasionally they use schoolbooks as a source of information, as noted in my field notes:

Two boys were hunched over a notebook with a sketch of the inside of a tooth. They had copied it from the blackboard during a "Life Experience" class. One of the boys had a toothache. The boys were trying to figure out the reason for the pain by looking at their sketch of the tooth's anatomy.

Personal mail is highly valued by older children, many of whom correspond with family and friends. It is telling that personalized texts like letters are more meaningful than textbooks. Thai deaf students rarely achieve functional literacy (Bunyanuson, Tammasaeng, & Phuripricha, 1988). Nevertheless, since reading and writing is their only contact with loved ones, some older students are avid readers and writers of material that affects them personally.³²

Visitors are a welcome sight, especially if they use a sign language. A few deaf adults, such as staff members and alumni, sustain a slim thread of contact with the Thai deaf community. The benefits of adult sign language models are largely denied the pupils in Bua. Visitors who sign are queried relentlessly. The Western researcher was used as a source on the Gulf War. A visitor, Owen Wrigley, observed that kids at Bua were using him to check whether or not the movie heroes Rambo and Terminator were real or not: "Is what they do true?" The youngest children's style with visitors revealed their isolation. If a stranger showed physical affection the "reward" was endless hugs and perpetual tag-along by a band of young ones. This was atypical for Thai youth, who are reserved and formal towards adults. Shadowing of visitors is seen at many Thai deaf schools, but they are most persistent at far-flung Bua School.

Outsiders who cannot use a sign language were far less interesting to the children. Most visitors were adult officials, parents, and charity-

³² Harry Wolcott warned about "overlooking that there was intentional instruction in the school- the great trap for fieldworkers who stop recording when the lesson starts!" (personal communication, January 1, 1995). Clearly, these students do learn in their classes, especially after content is explained to them by clever peers. The extent of formal learning was likely understated in this study.

givers. They engaged the children with smiles at best and seldom had the inclination and ability to converse. Many visitors shared a general attitude in Thailand that deaf people who are unable to speak are mentally incompetent. Little wonder that the children responded by showing little interest in such visitors. Towards hearing youth of their own age they were more hopeful and assertive about opening contact. This motivation to reach out to their hearing peers is strong enough to subdue their apprehension about using writing as a tool of communication. Ironically, when the school permits interaction with outside youth, it is with children who are in the "special education" category like the deaf children.

Deaf and hill tribes children share little in terms of upbringing and language. To the deaf child, school is a finding of a fulfilling and meaningful way of life, of enculturation into a visual society, albeit it of children. They leave behind dysfunctional family relationships. To the hill tribes child, the boarding school is about ethnic cleansing, a disenculturation from family ways and language in favor of Thai. The deaf, the hill tribes and other "disadvantaged" youth are joined within the "special education" category. The deaf and hill tribes youth are "together" by virtue of the common administrative framework which structures their schooling.

Propinquity and curiosity overcame difference in the meetings between hill tribes and deaf children, during games between the nearby Welfare School and the Deaf School. A brave deaf girl initiated a written conversation with a hill tribes girl (see the photo on next page). Oblivious to the hubbub around them, they showed an unflagging concentration on each other for hours, surrounded by a flock of eager deaf pupils craning their necks to read each word. Embarrassment about

their poor written Thai skills was suspended, as the deaf girls pooled their skills in choosing and spelling Thai words.

Using Thai writing, a hill tribes girl (center) and deaf students discuss life



Encounters with hearing-speaking people provided a motivation for deaf children to practice their writing. In these encounters, they relied upon a technique of non-competitive, group collaboration. Their isolation lifestyle heightens their desire to reach out to hearing peers, but denies them much opportunity to do so.

Alienation from teachers

We deaf were mostly on our own, on our own. If somebody broke a bone, then a teacher would help. Or some serious problem. Most of the time we did things by ourselves. (She holds a hand up to block her side vision.) They didn't even see what was going on with us.

– Pornthip Wannuwinn on her school days

As a whole, the relationships with their teachers compel the students at Bua School to be self-reliant. Lacking easy rapport with caregivers, the children turned towards each other to satisfy their need

for human contact. In relinquishing control of the after-hours activities, the teachers provided students with a great degree of privacy and social "space." Several teachers acknowledged that they recognized the strong peer instruction that was taking place during free-time, which they supported. At the same time, there is a serious communication gap between hearing teachers and deaf students at Bua School. This hinders academic instruction to a great degree. In discussing this situation, the point is not to criticize, but to describe the nature of social relationships between teachers and deaf children, as part of the school conditions.

There is a wide communication gap between the teachers and students in the boarding schools for the deaf because they share no common language. The teachers are most comfortable using spoken and written Thai. But the students have not naturally acquired Thai due to their early deafness. The students are being instructed in a language which they have begun to learn only upon entering school. Newcomers are nearly languageless, which makes instruction an impossible task for first grade teachers. While older children were striving to read and to write, most were unable to understand the written lessons.

Within three years the youngsters learn Thai Sign Language from their peers. The Thai Sign Language is used throughout the country by deaf people, with regional variations. It has a vocabulary and grammar that is distinct from the Thai spoken language. But the teachers have little training in the national sign language, except for what they pick up from their students. Instruction in signs is not widely available. Teachers have adequate opportunity to learn Thai Sign, since they live in the same compound with deaf youngsters. But few teachers strive to use the language as it is used by deaf people. The two editions of The Thai Sign Language Dictionary (1986, 1990) sit unused in locked bookcases. Twelve year-old Patipol gave his opinion:

Rschr: Which teachers are good at conversing with students?

Patipol: I haven't seen any.

Rschr: Aren't there any who really talk back-and-forth?

Patipol: We deaf talk back-and-forth (converse). All the teachers talk about is, "What's your mother and father do?" and "Where's your home?" They're all lousy (signers).

A male teacher complained, "Why have the student teachers been assigned to the secondary level? These trainees can't use sign language. Heck, teachers who are here twenty or thirty years don't yet know signs." While few hearing people use the Thai Sign Language proficiently, more are coming to believe that signing is not a shameful, animal-like behavior. In several Thai schools for the deaf, there are a few individuals who help bridge the gap. The rare teachers who learns signs well is relied upon as an interpreter. Pupils who lose their hearing later are pushed by their peers to be a go-between with hearing people. But Bua School has practically no individuals who are both willing and able to act as a language bridge.

The stymied interaction between teacher and student underlies the failure of classroom instruction. Individual teachers have considerable latitude in choosing communication methods. The Ministry of Education has been supportive of initiatives using different approaches. Most Thai administrators and teachers prefer the oral/aural method. Teachers found that they are not able to make their students understand their lessons, nor to complete the instructional objectives. The result was that students could not pass the school-leaving examinations. The teachers' response was to use whatever methods that might make their instruction effective and efficient. Today most would agree with the words of Kamala Krairiksh from 1955:

All educators of the Deaf accept the value of speech training, but at the same time they found out that a number of deaf students cannot entirely benefit by this kind of instruction. . . .

It is human to make man happy, therefore, manual language should be allowed for the Thai deaf.

Because each teacher uses their own unique blend of signing and speech, there is a wide variety in communicative behavior. In general, most teachers communicate by speech punctuated with a few sign (sign-supported speech). This approach suffers from the unavoidable difficulties of trying to produce a spoken language manually, as described in Chapter I. When they need a sign, the teachers will invent it or ask a child what to use. The invented signs often violate principles of sign formation in natural sign languages (Battison, 1978). Over time these signs change radically, since they do not have roots in a language community. This approach puts a great burden on the children to understand the incomplete and idiosyncratic gestures of different teachers. Deaf children say that they have great difficulty understanding the signing of their teachers.

In this "hallucinogenic communicative environment" there is no consistent display of any language. The caregivers speak without making sense because they constantly change what, when and how they gesture. Some teachers imitate the children's signs, while others force compliance to their own inventions. A single concept may be referred to by several shifting labels. There were four different signs in use at Bua for the term "fruit." The confusion is compounded by those teachers whom their colleagues snippily refer to as "active." Laliwan is an "active" teacher of the third grade. She rarely cancels classes, feels a sense of duty to instruct, works hard to reach learning objectives, and hopes for the success of their pupils. The spirit in her classroom is good, with a lot of humorous exchanges. There is motivation to communicate on both sides. Such teachers should be praised and encouraged.

But “active” teachers meddle with the communicative environment. An “active” teacher may confuse the children’s language learning by requiring an esoteric assortment of invented signs, arranged in the grammar of spoken language. Laliwan insists that pupils pay close attention to her and speak the words along with signs. While the students recite signs, the teacher often points to its equivalent in Thai writing (or so it is thought). At Dok Khoon School a teacher asked his students to tell him the sign for the word “village chief.” Being unable to understand that written Thai word, they wrongly gave him the sign for “military general.” The teacher then had the students recite a sentence using that incorrect sign, as he pointed to the words one-by-one.

By focusing on the mechanics of signing in exact word order, the meaning is often slighted. The teacher seems to assume that by imitating the alien forms, and with explanations only in those unknown terms, the child will reach understanding of how Thai language works. It is assumed that meanings can only be conveyed through the national language. Yet the teachers underestimate the deaf children’s knowledge, since they do not pay attention to their signing during after-hours. If the teacher suppresses the informal conversations among classmates in the classroom, they lose the opportunity to see how deaf children figure out meanings collectively.

In a second grade lesson on hand-washing, the teacher wrote a Thai sentence on the board, “I am going to wash my hands.” She had the children recite it word-for-word with invented signs. These were all new signs for the children, leading the teacher to exclaim that they did not understand the meaning. After forty minutes of copying and reciting the sentence, the class was sent to wash their hands. The researcher asked a girl where they were going. She replied via a single sign, which meant, “Wash-my-hands.” This sign, used among deaf people, had not been used

during the lesson. It appears that the student had indeed grasped the meaning of the lesson and translated it into her language. If the teacher had recognized that her students had a capacity to make sense via an efficient language, she could have foregone the laborious drilling and moved onto other topics.

A teacher can forge an open relationship with students, even before fluency in signs. Ms. Pimonporn at Kulaab said hesitantly that she sometimes spends class time chatting with her pupils.

One day I sat with the girls and we discussed the problems of women in Thailand. We didn't even open the book. I didn't do any teaching. We just chatted. When it came time for lunch they didn't want to go eat. They said they wanted to stay and keep talking.

One of this teacher's girls said, "She listens." When asked to clarify this, she continued, "Pimonporn listens to us. We can have a dialogue with her. It's not always her talking and not saying anything." This teacher did not use Thai Sign well but she had a desire to have dialogue with her students. Unfortunately, this is a rare situation at Bua. The typical teacher learns sufficient signs to maintain discipline. Teachers display socio-linguistic behaviors (impolite interruptions, outrageous gestures) that lead students to conclude that teachers care little for them as individuals. Echoing a frequent complaint, one deaf pupil said, "The teachers don't really talk to us. They tell us what to do but don't listen to us. It's not a real conversation." Prapapon, a fourth grader, said, "Teachers are lazy to sign. They don't talk to us. With deaf people there's back-and-forth dialogue. But with hearing people there's not."

This may reflect upon the teachers' approach to instruction as transmission of obligatory information. Nipapon said, "Most teachers just teach, teach, teach." She made the sign for "teach" with a bored

facial expression and wandering eye gaze, to show the didactiveness and lack of eye contact seen in many instructors. She continued,

In the first grade it is a little better, the teachers take some interest in the pupils. But for the third grades and up, when there are more pupils per class, the teachers become oblivious to their pupils. Everyone is a blur. They just keep moving through and the teachers just keep teaching without knowing who they are teaching. No one really cares enough to teach deaf people seriously.

The sense of alienation felt by students is indicated by their switching to different kinds of language during interactions with teachers and their tendency to rely upon other students almost exclusively. That people change their language usage in language contact situations is well-established by sociolinguistic research. Muysken (1984) noted that possible outcomes include third-language creation through pidginization or creolization, dialect shift, code-switching, and foreigner talk. Shifts of usage have been identified in cases of sign language contact in the United States by Lucas and Valli (1989) and Woodward (1973), among others. At Bua School, the older deaf children often changed their style of language when trying to make teachers understand them. The situation was similar to contact with a foreigner who doesn't speak the same language. They made their signs simply and slowly, with a lot of repetition and pantomime. Expecting not to be understood, the youth stuck to basic topics when conversing with hearing teachers. Ironically, this accommodating behavior helped teachers confirm their belief that deaf people were not capable of using language in a sophisticated way.

Teachers reduced their encounters with students to the bare minimum. The teachers were at hand only during official hours, except for the skeleton duty staff that watched the front gate and dorms after-hours. Classroom hours were shortened; there was a two-week period of

no instruction at the beginning and end of the term. (The truncation of classes is a chronic problem in most Thai schools for the deaf.) Although the researcher did not initiate the inquiries, teachers at Bua and Dok Khoon complained at length about the failure of their colleagues to hold class. It made the work of dedicated teachers more difficult because the youth became accustomed to low expectations. Peer pressure and frustration usually silences the whistle-blowers. Said teacher P: "When I arrived I used to speak up a lot in meetings (about absenteeism). But the Assistant Principal doesn't like those who speak up. He wants everybody just to listen. So I just gave up." It is noteworthy that teachers face the same kind of didactic, non-participatory model of communication that they impose upon their students. In turn, the older students impose this style on youngsters, as will be discussed later. A memo in the office showed that the Ministry is concerned:

It has been reported that sometimes teachers do not greet pupils who greet them. Teachers should return the greeting of pupils who greet them when they come to school. This will make them feel good. The same holds for boarding pupils. (Memo by Director of Special Education, 18 Jan., 1991)

Whether teachers see their students as individuals may be indicated by whether or not a teacher knows the child's informal sign-name. Knowing the sign-name is a first step towards recognition of the child's own social world; many complained that the teachers did not know their name signs. Yet four secondary teachers pooled their knowledge to recall the sign-names of eight of ten seniors, (who had been enrolled for over ten years). It was surprising to see how much teachers knew (or thought they knew) about their students' personality.

Around the nation a few teachers of the deaf have become trusted and even beloved; they are often remembered and visited by their ex-pupils years later. Twenty years later, Nipapon Reilly fondly recalls the

single teacher who set high standards and believed that she could learn. Becoming a beloved teacher is not reliant upon being a fluent signer. To earn this status the pupil must sense that the teacher truly cares for them and is willing to try and make accommodations, especially by using signs used by the children. No teacher at Bua School is held in such esteem.

When the teacher is deaf themselves, the children naturally feel an affinity with them. A member of the very first class of students at the new Dok Khoon School in 1969 said:

The deaf teachers were amazing to us. They made bold signs and expressive faces. We watched them with rapture. The hearing teachers sat meekly and unsure of how to act, and we had little to do with them. The deaf teachers engaged us, talked to us. The deaf teachers taught and oversaw the dormitory. Everyone watched them, to learn signs and other things. They had ideas and things to talk about. It was great! Since I was only 11 or 12 years old, I didn't really get to know (she names the deaf teachers). The older class, like 17 or 18 years old, were especially close to the deaf teachers. (Nipapon Reilly, June, 1990)

Deaf adults had important teaching roles in the early years of all Thai schools for the deaf. This practice dates from the 1950s, under the tutelage of Mrs. Kamala Krairiksh. Deaf adults were relied upon for teaching of younger pupils and in helping to establish new schools, like Bua. In the first ten years at some schools as many as 25% of the teaching staff were deaf people. They "seeded" the linguistic growth of these institutions by introducing the Thai Sign Language. Using deaf teachers was an interim strategy until the development of a certification system for teachers of the deaf. The obstacles to certification by a deaf person are daunting, including their poor academic preparation (in these very schools) and lack of signed interpretation in higher education. Bua School had only one deaf instructor, a man who worked against difficult odds to become one of two deaf people to earn teaching credentials. He

held himself apart from the deaf community and the students in the hope of being accepted by the hearing teachers (which they never did). While most of the twenty-odd deaf staff in Thailand have no official status, their influence is diminished but not forgotten:

The headmaster decided that deaf teachers were a hassle and could teach the kids some things they shouldn't know. So they were all transferred out. This was like a candle blown out. Just like a candle, the bright people were gone. The spirit of that oldest group was lost. (In Thai- mot kamlang jai) But they started to initiate their own ideas and to hold their own discussions. And we continued to use signs the deaf teachers had taught us. (Nipapon Reilly)

It seems that the deaf children have been transmitting the Thai Sign Language from cohort-to-cohort without benefit of an adult community of language users. This unusual situation of child-child language transmission and cultural reproduction is overlooked by educators.

School structure and openings to interact

By its control of time and space, the school influences which pupils associate with whom and when. The day is a series of obligatory events held at precisely the same time and in the same place. In general Thai schools have a spirit of regimentation; with its pupils in residence there is an extended reach into all of their daily activities. The day is filled with adult-controlled activities that are central to the organization of the day, namely, assemblies, meals, and class-time.

The time schedule, displayed prominently on a signboard, is the absolute arbiter of the day's opportunities for interaction. What time it is determines what people are wearing, where they are, and who they are with. The schedule is followed so precisely that observing the dress and location of the children relieves the visitor of the need to consult a timepiece. The repetition of these activities day-by-day forms a predictable reference point for students and teachers alike. People decide to undertake or forego actions according to the remaining time until the end or beginning of major items on the schedule. All activities of the children are bound by the time schedule.

The spatial arrangement of the grounds mirrors the three major social structures: school administration, student life and the teachers' village. The buildings are laid in three areas along a dirt lane. Inside the main gate is a cluster of academic and administrative buildings centered around the flagpole. The landscaped gardens and ponds are off-limits to students. The dirt road turns to the right and along this stretch lies the living areas of the students, comprising seven dormitories under shade trees. The dorms are long, faded bunkhouses on stilts. The open air space below is a communal space, frequently filled with residents, where laundry is hung, and meetings, rehearsals and games are conducted. A

dining hall, ballfield, vegetable plots and animal pens border the living area. The third stretch of the U-shaped road marks the private domain of teachers and their families. They live in modest and rent-free open-air houses; their permanency is shown by the high number who have made home improvements, such as central air conditioners and animal pens. In many ways this is an inner village. Teachers and their families come and go on their motorbikes as they wish. After-hours, teachers' relations with students are largely limited to petty trade in goods and services, like laundering and cooked food. The family members of the teachers hardly associate with the students.

On paper there is no domain of time or space over which the child is sovereign. Every affair of every child has a proper time and place, even "free time." The children must spend their schooldays in the public areas. The dormitory is off-bounds during the day, except for the bed-ridden. A dutiful pupil has only one choice of location at all times; most shuffle from spot to spot without prompting. A few scofflaws are usually wandering around the campus, usually too young to know better or too senior to care.

Through the schedule and rules regarding association and confinement, the educators impose a powerful framework on the deaf students' opportunities for interaction with each other.

"Toe the line in the morning"

The morning is the most important time for adult display of disciplinary standards and commitment to educational purpose. On a school day the preparations begin at dawn, when the children awaken themselves. The pupils cold-wash in the tin bathhouses besides the concrete cisterns. The girls don white tops, navy skirts and plastic black shoes. The boys wear white shirts with brown shorts, socks and sneakers.

The girls' uniforms are impeccably ironed and carefully worn; the boys' are neatly tucked-in, at best. The older students are responsible for timely and proper presentation of the student body. They inspect the uniforms of youngsters and ensure their orderly procession to the canteen. The dorm heads and deputies exact standards of behavior dating from their own childhood experience. The judgments of teachers and rival dorm heads during these public occasions are taken seriously. An unruly group draws criticism; a consistently tight formation earns a good reputation.

At the dining hall the older students demand straight and silent rows. Access to the food is denied until they are satisfied, then they raise their arm or switch to allow the youngsters to file inside. The provision of food is an official act. The wall in the open-air hall is dominated by a signboard with rules. Images of royalty, religion and state--the three sides of the Thai national triangle are affixed behind the serving tables.

Each child takes a tray and moves in line to the serving tables. Holding their tin tray out, each pupil receives a scoop of rice, meat and sweets from the huge pots. They return to the tables, sit and wait for approval to eat. Big white arrows painted on the floor point the proper route to the benches. Boys and girls are segregated in rows that stretch over 25 meters long.

The adults make their first appearance of the day in the form of the duty teacher, who raises her arms over her head and waits for attention. Children nudge each other until everyone lifts their arms over their heads. The assembly is silenced, since they rely upon their arms and hands to communicate via signs. Everybody waits without protest. The teacher may take the opportunity to give a speech on good behavior or order the children to speak and sign the names of the foods.³³

³³ The association of speech with food is partly supported by a belief that deaf kids can only learn language when it deals with fundamental activities of life. Hungry children will comply with

Food is rarely used as a reward or its denial as punishment, except in the pre-meal line-ups. Food is a gift to be appreciated and is often pointed to by teachers as a principal benefit of attendance and as fair "wage" for student labor around the grounds. At her discretion the duty teacher drops her arm and the meal begins. The rows of supplicants become clusters of chatting comrades. The teacher becomes mute, alone in a sea of waving hands which she doesn't understand. The younger children dig devotedly into their food. The older children resume their interrupted conversations, which they punctuate with eating.

Meal-time is an activity which contains the children physically without restriction on socializing. At times like these, the circles which children form reveal their social organization both by whom they include and exclude. The oldest students have formed a dining community at the end of the hall, by having strategically seated themselves to facilitate easy communication among friends, members of the same social rank and with the opposite gender. A few who can afford to buy their food show up just for the social interaction. The elementary children sit with dorm-mates, but are restricted to same-sex tables. The newcomers sit in rows as they are commanded, unable to watch the elders. For them alone the meal-time is for eating. At the end each student files past troughs of water and washes their tray.

The students gather in the dusty flat area in front of the flagpole. In every school in the nation, the day is officially opened at eight o'clock by a flag-raising ceremony, the playing of the national anthem and a Buddhist prayer. Everyone must be respectful and at attention. At Bua School the children snap to military formation while the flag is raised and the unheard song plays. Announcements are mixed in with

distasteful demands, like having to speak, at meal time. Johnson & Erting (1989) discuss a similar American routine.

exhortations to diligence, duty and propriety. Most of the teachers do not dare to address an assembly. Most readily admit their incompetence in the national sign language. Their primary concern is being needled by colleagues, who smirk or suspect the ambitions of volunteers. Bua lacks teachers who have both competence in the sign language and courage to use it unabashedly. Bua's only deaf teacher has declined a public role, for he yearns to be accepted as one of the regular teachers.

At other times the teachers are glad to have older pupils handle the podium duties. But morning is the apex of control by these bureaucrats over their charges. Today the duty falls to the Administrator-in-Charge-of-Supervision. His signing is exceedingly slow and imprecise. But the topics are well-known to the children: an upcoming visit from a dignitary requires extra preparations and best behavior. The dismissal of the assembly and the start of the class day brings a sharp drop-off in adult control and initiative. Adult attention to the official schedule at Bua is often lax. The pupils drift towards the classrooms without assurances that a teacher will be present. Enforcement of attendance at lessons depends on the individual teacher, but no one seems to hold teachers' themselves accountable for their absences. Children of all ages complained of boredom during canceled classes. The older pupils, who tend to show commitment to lessons, expressed feelings of frustration at teachers' absences. More teachers in the higher grades take instruction seriously, heartened by easier discipline and rapport.

The older children are often called to work duties during class hours. A regular minority of teachers seldom hold classes. Many classes start late and dismiss early. The usual lesson is a short lecture followed by long copying of words from the blackboard. Then the children are expected to entertain themselves with the only rule being "stay close, stay quiet." So immediate is the emergence of youthful initiatives that it

seems as if adults are just interrupting an ongoing scene. They devise a variety of social activities within the confines of the open-air hallways, including storytelling and games. Pupils modify the strictures on place, time and association with sharp awareness of the adult sense of propriety. After all, this is the school's day.

After-hours activities

At the end of the official school day the teachers relinquish their claim upon the students without hesitation. These bureaucrats' sense of obligation does not extend outside civil service hours (8 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday-Friday). Oversight responsibility for the pupils during off-hours falls to rotating duty teachers and unmarried teachers who live in the dorms. Practically, children and adults have very little to do with each other after-hours. In the dorm--the children's "home"--the older youth are the homemakers with near-total responsibility for child-rearing and upkeep. A description of a typical evening provides an introduction to the child's activities outside the classroom. The aim is to highlight the dialectic of authoritarian and creative activities carried out by the students themselves.

Released from the classroom at 3 p.m., the pupils re-join their friends. The path back to the dormitories takes them past the sweet shop, run for profit by the teachers' cooperative. Many youngsters stop to buy a cool drink. This is the final transaction with adults until morning. A duty teacher may occasionally pop in, but the night belongs to the children. Dress style is a clear sign of the shift in foci of control between teacher and student. The discreet uniform of the school day has been stowed away in favor of tee-shirts, shorts and flip-flop sandals. Poverty has put many youngsters in faded and ill-fitting hand-outs. But no one cares

about the younger children's dress, least of all themselves. They are free to ramble and run as they please.

For senior students, the free-time is a chance to display their looks and tastes to their peers. Most girls over the age of ten make extra efforts in their appearance, wearing crisply ironed blouses and putting bows in their hair. Lads cherish sporty T-shirts, although capable sneakers are their real (and rare) treasure, since it enhances their ball-playing. The norms of the institution and current Thai fashion are influential; the dress tends to be largely conservative and discreet, with a dash of flair and color. Fragrance of body is highly valued by older youth.

The end of the day brings a flurry of heavy chores to older pupils, such as hauling supplies, tending gardens or scrubbing clothes. At half past four the grip of authority begins to tighten again as supertime nears. Older pupils drift in nonchalantly, only mildly interested in the proceedings, unless they are obligated to organize them. Their deputies, fifth to seventh graders, handle the mundane supervisory chores. In turn, they use younger runners to call residents back to the dorms. Minute-by-minute the screws tighten, until lines form by the seven dorms. They arrange themselves by shortest to tallest individual. The newcomers are pulled into place. Enforced imitation of others is the dominant form of peer instruction.

The march to supper along the dusty lane leading from the dorms is a walking line-up. The younger children must walk packed together with their arms crossed to prevent talking. The older pupils meander behind at their own pace. At the canteen there are more drills, especially among the girls, whose leaders value their dorm's public image. Every mealtime features a similar routine and mutual cooperation of seniors and teachers in impressing discipline. To get their food the children

must perform satisfactorily for their elders. The cool of the evening beckons the children to rush through supper and onto the playing fields.

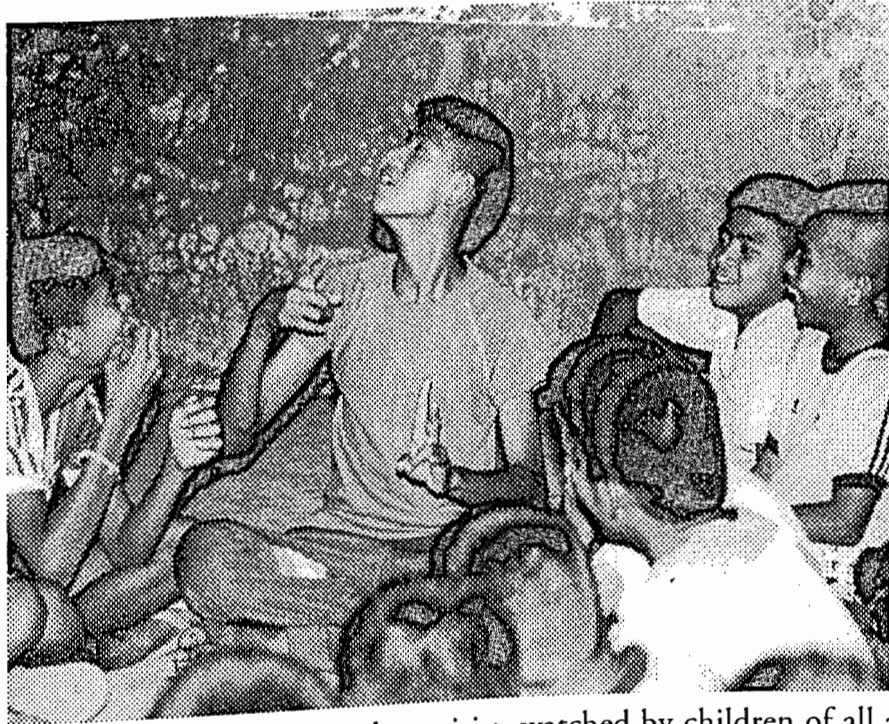
Until dusk, the boys and girls of all ages are free to associate as they wish. Signing deaf children are physically and communicatively unhindered in sports and games. On the left of the playground is a group of five hop-scotching girls. They are demonstrating technique for the benefit of a few smaller girls. This is unusual, since most gaming events are open only to students with equal knowledge of rules and approximate skills. Nearby the boys have formed three soccer games by skill level. The big boys have the big field and the best ball. The junior players are smashing around in a crammed sand pitch. While these boys hope to move up to the big field, only a rare talent will move ahead in the orderly succession of age groups. Thirdly, the little and the lesser players kick a wobbly green ball around on the hard volleyball court. They learn by playing with novices and by watching the elders.

In the bleachers sits a cluster of older girls. They stop signing when approached and pause to look around to assure that they are not being spied upon. Girls vigorously defend the privacy of their intimate groups, even to the point of expelling members who violate the trust. It is difficult for outsiders to learn about these private groups. This study acknowledges the critical role of these friendships in childhood but does not deal directly with them.

Boys and girls are permitted to mingle. Forays by tiny boys into the girls' areas lead to wild chase, not dialogue. The matched skills of pre-adolescent boy and girl produces challenges and displays of bravado. Occasionally a boy jumps hop-scotch or a girl rolls her marbles in the boys' circle. Senior boys and girls sit and talk together, but always in groups. There were rumors of sexual activity within and between the genders, which could occur during the laxity of adults in the evenings.

But the children assert their own sense of propriety on each other, which is often quite conservative. A tug-of-war was nearly scuttled because of the taboo on touching the opposite gender. Since they had no long rope they had one team member grip the short length and the other members gripping the waist of the person in front of them, like a human chain. Then they realized that girls and boys aren't supposed to touch. They held an animated discussion and tried different ways. Finally they got the idea of gripping teammates' clothing and on they tugged.

On a concrete slab against a backstop sits a storyteller named Winai, a lanky teenage boy, watched by a dozen youngsters. (See photo.) His cheeky satire about people in the institution has everyone in stitches.



Winai at Bua School is a popular satirist, watched by children of all ages.

Like the other master storytellers, he has a handful of protégés and admirers, whom he orders to attend performances. More than most storytelling, his are truly public gatherings and open to all. Boys and girls are welcome to come and go as they please, and they do.

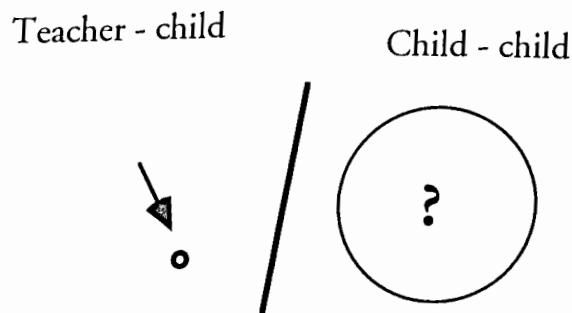
The composition of the audience of each storyteller is set according to ability to understand, gender and social status. By their practices of including and excluding individuals, the children open and close learning opportunities. These activities are described below.

As the pupils squeeze out the final minutes of play in the light of dusk, the dorm leaders send their runners to call them to line-up. The evening regimen has begun. The children go to the dormitory, their home away from home. The agenda of institution and the urge for a home life meet under the roof of the dorm. Bathing is followed by a morals lesson and a free-chat period before lights-out. In the absence of participating adults, older pupils are charged with the care of younger pupils and oversee the line-up, clean-up of the dorm, a disciplinary lecture and prayer and the awakening at dawn tomorrow.

Educational activities created by students

The linguistic and social gap between hearing teachers and deaf pupils in Thailand produced an isolated student body with abundant opportunity for interaction. The research proposal stated that little meaningful exchange was going on between teachers and pupils, "as if they lived in separate worlds." This circumstance supported the attention solely on the social relations among children, as rare examples when they could communicate visually without hindrance. Accordingly, the scope of the study was limited to child interactions and no data collection was planned on teacher-child relations. The next illustration shows the initial conception of the social relationships in the school.

Initial assumption about school interaction



To build the "social base" that Whyte in Learning from the Field called an essential first step, I initiated the study with a broad sweep of the daily school life and visited all classes, dorms, and activities. The early findings supported the initial assumptions. School life was bifurcated into a formal and an informal domain clearly separated by time, site and leader. See Table 6. The periods were easily distinguishable by the clothing: uniforms during school affairs and loose fitting shorts and tees during after-hours. Teachers asserted their control and involvement only during the classroom hours. After hours the students were largely left to

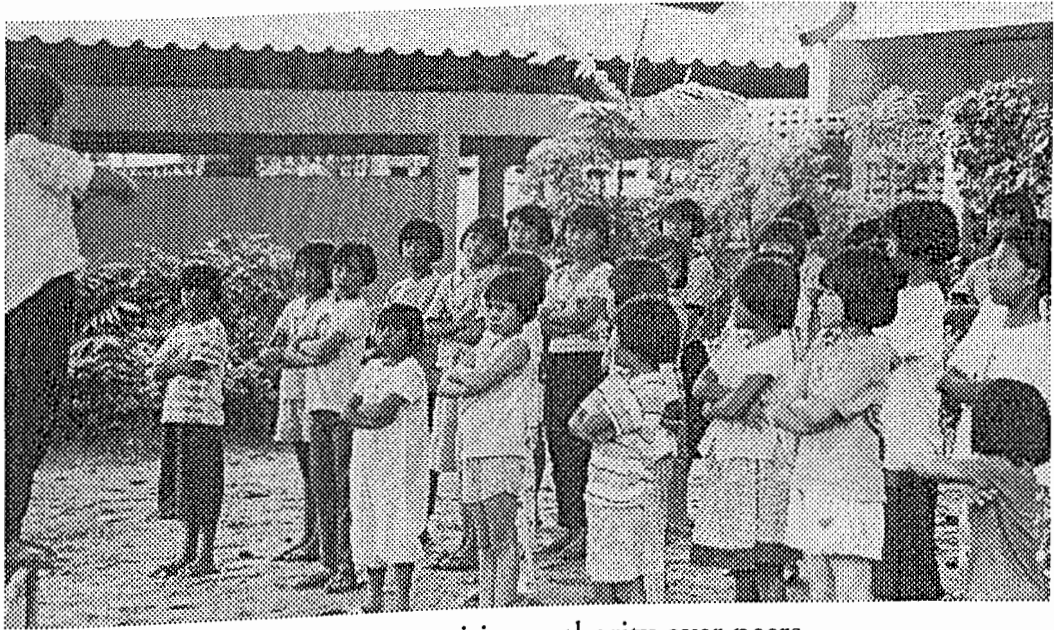
Table 6. Division of schedule into formal and informal aspects

Features:	Formal	Informal
Participants:	Teachers with students	Student body alone
Site:	Classrooms & assembly areas	Dorms & playgrounds
Time:	8 a.m. - 3 p.m. on weekdays	Before breakfast and after 3 p.m. on weekdays, All day and night on weekends.
Leaders:	Teachers	Older pupils

their own devices, with minimal supervision. During the free-time (informal domain) I had expected to find typically child-like responses to the relaxation of authority--playing games, conversing and doing whatever children do befitting their age and gender. After all, the binding force of families were far away, the teachers were off-duty, and there was a great number of peers at hand.

An unexpected and puzzling observation was quickly made: the free-time hours were dominated by authoritarian activities created by the pupils themselves. Where play had promised to be paramount, there was instead youth frozen in line-ups, drilling in formation and watching didactic lectures, even when no adults were in evidence. The seniors ordered the youngsters about like in a boot camp. The evening regimen in the dorms was lengthy and strict. Typically there was a line-up at 7 p.m. downstairs during which the students did arm-control drills as long as the dorm head wished. Before bed there were dorm meetings with strident, repetitive lectures emphasizing propriety and cleanliness. Some bizarre acts were seen, such as enforced recitation and echoing (chorus of the deaf, truly) and mass self-punishments. Displays of power were

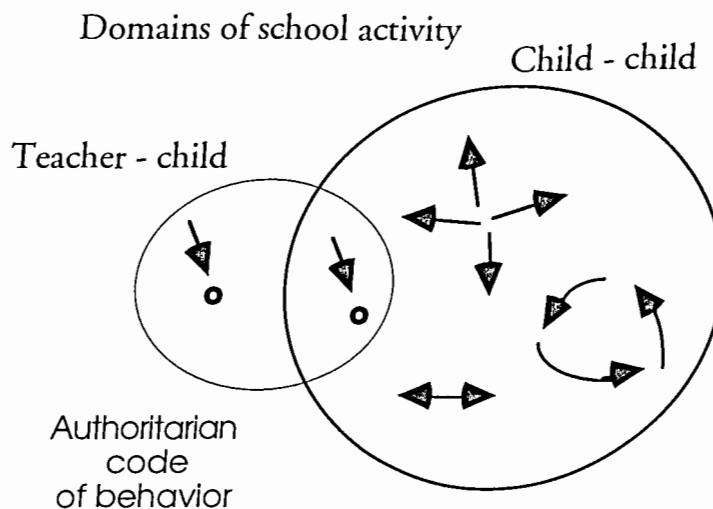
reinforced by the wearing of militaristic garb. Demeaning statements about the younger children's intellect were common.



Children exercising authority over peers

The teachers' strategy of delegating authority to older students successfully extended the adult sense of order into the private time and places of the youth. There were striking similarities between teacher-dominated and peer-dominated activities. The assumption of separate adult-child worlds was shattered. The error of two initial assumptions is now recognized: (1) that the children were learning little from their teachers and; (2) informal interactions among peers would be devoid of influence from the school climate. This early discovery in the field compelled a re-thinking of the assumed model of human relations within the school. The data confirmed Gerald Grant's statement in The World We Created at Hamilton High (1988, p. 7): "Every school can be seen as a network of authority relations shaped by cultural influences, an external policy matrix, family and social-class factors, and the moral and intellectual authority of faculty and staff." The revised illustration below more accurately portrays the patterns of communication in the school.

Revised scheme of interaction in the school



While segregating the deaf children from normal social experience, the school transmitted society's norms to its borders by its climate, discipline and the students themselves. Not only were the deaf children learning adult norms--a skillful feat given the circumstances--but they had become proxy socializing agents. Older youth were integrally involved as actors in the transmission of norms to younger students. The surprise here was that deaf children learned anything at all from the hearing adults. Jules Henry (1976b) wrote about the strong innate propensity of human beings to learn many things at once (polyphasic learning). The extent of learning through vision alone may be a useful lesson about how socialization occurs and the relative role of the sensory channels.

When this extension of imposed authority was discovered it showed that the formal-informal distinction was useless for predicting the nature of the social interaction. While the daily routine was divided cleanly into school-hours and after-hours periods, the nature of interaction could not be predicted based upon the time, site or actors

present (adults with children, children with children). This realization served as a verification of the original impetus to do first-hand, extended observation. Studies which assume that a given set of interactional relationships exists among actors in all schools are "contaminated by ecological fallacies since they confuse the structural properties of the aggregates with the psychological repertoire of their subparts" (Clignet, p. 333).

The implications for the field work were clear. Since the aim was to understand all acts of teaching and learning among children, the scope of the data collection was widened to encompass authoritarian activities, including some focused study of teacher-children relations. The research questions were applied to both the authoritarian and the voluntary free-time activities created by the youth. The dualistic construction of student life became a subject of inquiry, especially how the demands of authority co-existed alongside the indomitable urge to social creativity.

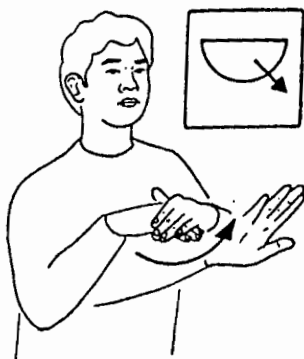
A dialectic of imposed authority and creative expression shaped the educational experience of the students. The norms of authority and free-time activities constitute a complex set of rights and responsibilities about daily life in the school. Becoming familiar with this body of normative knowledge was the student's first major learning task. Perhaps closed institutions are intrinsically more complicated than ordinary childrearing settings because there is so little separation between the sets of actors, times and spaces, thus attenuating the clues about expected roles. Boarding students must master a repertoire of skills to cope in their environment. These deaf children are able to move between the official activities and their own informal diversions with alacrity. The complexity of this learning needs to be appreciated.

An illustrative example of how the students apply norms to different situations is seen in their approach to school boundaries. This

section is called "Negotiating the Boundaries." Not only do the youth grasp the difference between the official Ministry rules and the tacit, more lax agreements with teachers, they create and enforce their own laws. Their variable application of these norms to individual students serves as an introduction to the later discussion on social status.

Negotiating the boundaries

Many older pupils wish to partake in the life of the town. They hanker for new sights, smells, and tastes, as found in the bustling farmers market. Since the staff do not arrange town excursions, the pupils resort to their own devices. The Thai schools for the deaf have a tradition of porous boundaries. The gates are rarely barred; the walls have gaps. Leaving the school without permission is referred to by the children as "escape." An "escape" includes a quick run to the corner shop for sweets, a late-night trip to the cinema in town, and running away from school. The children use this sign:



The Thai sign for 'sneak out' or 'slip out'

Only those adventures which endanger life or limb of the venturesome child are unanimously opposed by adults. Most educators are tolerant of jaunts into town during the daytime by children whom they deem to be sensible. By differential treatments the teachers acknowledge that their charges are individuals who have varying levels of capability and judgment. They also demonstrate their own flexible

interpretation of central Ministry regulations. This informal policy, interpreted and enforced by senior students, is the operative "border law." At its root is a Thai belief system about the hierarchy of age and gender in terms of personal freedom.

In short, girls and newcomers ("know-nothings") are much more confined and regulated than older boys. Total physical confinement is a basic condition of the newcomers. Even a five-minute sojourn earns those deemed "too-young" a stern reprimand and even a mild caning. Every responsible eye, including older students, cooperates in their confinement and in their intensive instruction about rules. For most students the inevitable increase in age brings a gain in linguistic skill and normative awareness and, thereby, increased status and mobility. After a few years the supervision is lightened. The "just-old-enoughs" may walk a few meters outside the gates and buy sweets, but go no further.

Girls can never escape their subordinate position relative to boys. The divergence in treatment and standards of behavior between boys and girls becomes evident once youth have moved out of the newcomer status. In Thailand, while girls are felt to be vulnerable, speechless girls are assumed to be prime sexual victims. Thai adult deaf women report many assaults to their confidants.³⁴ Deaf girls are warned endlessly from an early age to stay inside the school and to beware of inappropriate advances by a male. The concept of vigilance to thwart a faceless menace is taught unceasingly in many forums. Most pertinent to this study is the self-instruction among girls. As will be detailed later, every girl grows up seeing normative messages repeated nightly during long-winded lectures by elder girls. Girls are exhorted to conform to conservative standards of dress and behavior. They are encouraged to report on each

³⁴ Based on information garnered during my long work experience in the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand and my marriage into a Thai family with three deaf daughters.

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cause trouble for teachers. The relaxation of rules is concurrent with a pupil's assuming supervisory authority on behalf of teachers. The reward is a limited right to re-join the community outside the walls. Since seniors run the dorms, they interpret and modify rights of escape as they see fit and decide if and how to mete out punishment for violations. The usual form among girls is criticism in public gatherings. Girls are taught to care deeply about how they are judged by their fellows and teachers. Head boys usually overlook escapes, unless by the youngest members. Like the girls, they conduct discipline according to the expectations held for their gender. They are very strict about matters that concern their own quality of life, such as the cleanliness of the bath house.

Sometimes they exert control over school boundaries as a way to demonstrate their power. In an after-hours meeting of Boys 4 dorm,³⁶ those youth who had left the school without permission were called to the front of the bunkroom. More than half of the fifty residents eventually voluntarily stepped forward or were identified by others. Their "crimes" were denounced with great flair by the dorm head, a ninth grade boy. He paused melodramatically to ponder punishment. Without explanation he paired each offender with another about the same size. One-by-one they were handed a stick and told to administer beatings to each other. The scene was handled in a whimsical way like a game whose rules were being invented as it went along. The first boy whipped his partner on the buttocks and then they reversed positions. The number of strokes was determined whimsically on a case-by-case basis by the dorm head. This ritual of mock-punishment embodies the spirit of "boundary law" as a matter of status enforcement.

Running away from school is an inadmissible form of escape to teachers and peer supervisors. The older students and deaf aides punish

³⁶ Observed on June 6, 1991.

runaways, partly because they themselves are held accountable. The public chastisement of a runaway was videotaped at Dok Khoon.³⁷

Mrs. T, a deaf aide, stood in the playground and held the pre-adolescent boy by the arm. She pushed kids away so that our video camera got a clear view. Mrs. T exclaimed, "You know, you must stay inside. We love you. Stop running away. Enough already." In a melodramatic aside to the researcher, Mrs. T lamented: "This boy always runs away. Makes me regretful." Older boys stood around like a choir of vigilantes echoing her rebukes. Again she demanded of the boy, "Do you know? Stop running away. Stay in." He looked down sheepishly. She shook him gently. To the camera Mrs. T said: "Sheesh. He's run away six times!" She pushed the boy away with a defeated look. An older boy held up fingers and ticked off the names of runaways. Mrs. T recited her own list of escapees; they were different people.

This vignette suggests differing definitions of a serious escape--and that perhaps even a deaf adult doesn't learn of some incidents.

Most deaf students at Bua accept their captivity in school without protest. Only those who are closest to life outside, i.e., the new pupils and the near-graduates, express anxiety about being inside. The newcomer feels wrenched from the arms of mother and tossed into a cruel and unfathomable place. Some newcomers cry day and night, but mother does not return. Youth who themselves entered only a few years ago often are extremely kind and soothing to the newcomer, who can only be communicated with through pantomime. When the tears have dried, the soothing manner becomes commanding; the slightly older pupils take charge for monitoring the newcomers. Ten years later the school is home and familiar, and they face a return to family and society. How much colder the hearth looks now, where there are few who can communicate with them. They may sense that their best years of human

³⁷ Videotape, Jan. 1990, ctr. #02557, tape 1 KK.. These encounters hint of the vigilantism described by Jules Henry (1976a, p. 170). He describes classrooms where teachers support children's intra-group criticism as exhibiting a "Witch Hunt Syndrome."

fraternity are behind them. Many migrate to the big cities and form deaf cliques. Meanwhile, for the majority of pupils, the school is the center of life. The labor is lighter and the food more abundant than at some homes. They have others with whom to speak. "I'm lonely among hearing people" is a commonly expressed feeling. Many hasten back to the school after holiday because "there is no one to talk to at home."

This sense of the institution as the proper place to be stands in sharp contrast to the feelings of children who are institutionalized due to their ethnicity. Mydu Indian children in Northern California took great risks to escape from the boarding schools (Dobkins, 1994). In Oklahoma, native American children displayed a variety of feelings toward the Chilocco boarding school, from escape to forbearance and even appreciation of the place (Lomawaima, 1994). William Stokoe wrote about a set of papers on the "boarding school experience":

. . . a major difference was most salient. In an alien culture, that of the school, the Native American children wanted to leave (for life on the reservation, restricted as that was) so desperately that they would risk their lives. But . . . for Deaf children—at least in those that allow scope for children to interact in their own sign language—the children were and are reluctant to leave when their school years are over, and even to leave their companions during vacation periods and visit home where no one uses their language. (1995, p. 86)

The deaf students have accepted being inside as a normal and moral situation. Minor escapades are a rite of status, but a real escape is not normal. The few youth who run away are considered to be maladjusted by their fellows. To runaway is to turn away from camaraderie and shared understanding with others. Most students at Bua School find this an undesirable course of action, which accounts for the rarity of runaway escapes. Yet there are some deaf children who wish to be elsewhere than locked away in the school.

A social hierarchy of the mind

At Bua School, a child's intellectual and linguistic condition is a key to their status in the student body, and thus to their opportunity to engage in its interactions. Social status is a complex concept used by the children to structure their everyday relations with each other. Status determines which activities the child will be privileged to join and the nature of their participation (role). At its root are the children's ongoing assessments about the intellectual condition and linguistic skills of each other. Age, gender and personality also influence status assignments.

This is not a full explication of the students' social organization. The scope has been narrowed to the intersection of an individual's cognitive skills (including languages) and social status. This is an attempt to suggest a theoretical perspective on the case using available data, the prior experience of the researcher and his assistant, and interviews with deaf people. The process of intellectual and social growth by specific children was not directly studied. Still, a typical "learning pathway" is suggested, including how children are treated educationally and intellectually at each status level. Particular attention has been given to the cognitive breakthroughs upon which promotion to the higher status level depends.

Pupils at Bua School have created a three-tier social organization as illustrated in Table 7. Every pupil is ranked in the hierarchy as either a newcomer, regular member, or senior.

Table 7. Major social groups of deaf Thai children

Status level	Years in school	Grade level	Physical age
Seniors	8-10	7-9	15-19
Regulars	4-7	3-6	9-14
Newcomers	1-3	1-2	7-13 yrs.

The school's delegation of authority to older youth bolsters the relationship between age and social status. Higher age brings greater rights and responsibilities to older students. Younger students are disadvantaged by their nascent learning of language, smaller size, and lack of experience in the school regimen. In general, the greater the gap in social status, the rarer and more authoritarian are face-to-face encounters between the oldest and the youngest children. Seniors only talk to newcomers when they must, and often chase youngsters away from their conversational circles. During dorm meetings, the heads tend to step in only after deputies have reduced the lively mass to a docile, subdued line-up. Such "distant" encounters tend to use didactic and restricted language.

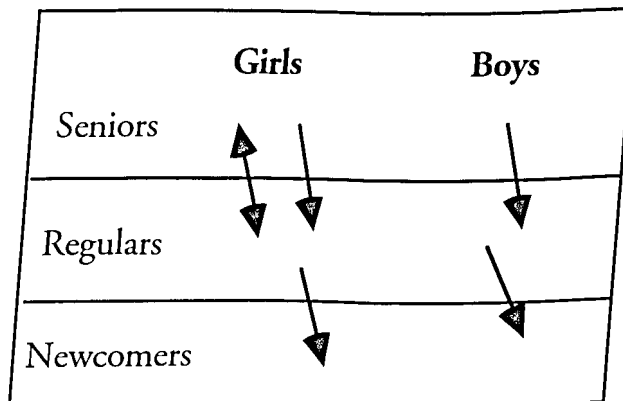
When interactions do occur between members of different social groups it tends to be between adjacent levels, that is, seniors with regular students and regulars with newcomers. In authoritarian settings, seniors and deputies confer together about disciplinary strategies. The deputies will then order the youngest group about during a task. As well, most storytellers are just a few years older than their audience.

The social organization serves a useful role in promoting rich interactions among children within each status level. Children are "kept in their place" and their associations are turned inwards to their peers. From the perspective of the youth's social organization, each status level is a class of children who share common intellectual and physical characteristics. However, by looking at the individuals within each level, their diversity in intellectual, linguistic and experiential domains becomes evident. Because each level contains children with a range of ages, elaborate and two-way interaction are often carried on between children who have moderately different experience and skills. This is a key advantage. This intra-group diversity seems to provide teaching and

learning opportunities that help children acquire the skills needed to move to a higher status level.

The pattern of limited interaction between children at different status levels was well-illustrated during a Scouts exhibition. The older boys built working models of field apparatus, like water wheels and pulleys, which they displayed on tables under the trees. This fixed location allowed placement of an unmanned videotape camera to capture the comments of the curious student body. This written summary was made from the videotape:

The public display drew children of all ages. There was very little interaction between children of different age groups. Clusters of children wandered up to an exhibit of model stick buildings. Usually only one age group surrounded a display at a time. When there was a mixed group, they seldom talked to each other. Rare cross-age interaction was often one-way from older to younger child. Only the girls engaged in dialogue between different ages: middle and elders, as in the diagram.



Observer comment: While the children were free to associate with each other, they usually interacted with those about their age.

The downward direction of communication mirrors the patterns of interaction seen between older and younger Thai people in formal settings. Younger people are expected to remain silent unless asked to respond.

There seem to be clear markers of passage between status levels for all children. These can be seen as thresholds of skill in language and intellectual areas that the children judge to be important. Thus, each of the three status levels has a corresponding intellectual state of its individual members. The terms that the children themselves use are "Know-nothing," "Becoming mindful" and "to be smart." They place those who have mental limitations in a fourth category which they call "numbskulls." A brief discussion of these states of mind, or, rather, transitions of mind, is given below. This will demonstrate the intellectual basis of status distinctions among the students, and how this fundamentally shapes their learning experience.

“Know-nothing”

Older pupils refer to new pupils as “know-nothings,” literally “mind know-not.” The sign, made on the head, refers to both their linguistic and cognitive development.

The Thai sign for “know-nothing”



A “know-nothing” in the eyes of the older students is someone who has little or no language, lacks reasoning skills, and is ignorant of school procedures. All deaf children now enrolled in the Thai schools studied have hearing parents and have been isolated from sign language.³⁸ A few have slight spoken language ability, which fellow students disregard because it has no function in their informal life.³⁹ A small minority of newcomers are surprisingly communicative, alert and curious. Yet many seem dazed, hapless and younger than their age, perhaps due to the stultifying effects of poverty in which many are raised. Despite this

³⁸ There is only one known deaf student who had deaf parents since the schools opened in 1953. Children from deaf families often learn sign language fluently at home and have a distinct advantage in communication and academic readiness over children from non-signing families.

³⁹ In a deaf school where most students commute daily across a big city they may value speaking and hearing among peers more highly than at isolated Bua. This is the researcher's impression from three years in an urban school for the deaf, where students had regular contact with hearing people.

diversity all newcomers are treated together as a class that is utterly ignorant and dependent.

Youth who had recently entered the “regular” status themselves validated the notion of a discernible pre-linguistic period. The researcher was unable to make a group of fourth graders understand his question: “How old were you when you entered school?” A boy named Prem conducted the query on my behalf by asking, “Back when you knew-nothing, when you first came to school, how old were you?”⁴⁰ Four of his peers were able to answer the question without much hesitation.

Older pupils understand that the newcomers are in a period of adaptation--to the lifestyle of the institution, being away from home, and the sign language. Having passed through this stage themselves, the older students know that it takes time before the condition passes. This expectation of upward growth is an implicit recognition that it is the conditions of home life that are the cause of this condition. Older deaf youth have their own ideas about how to raise understanding in young deaf children, and their “theories” of education are seen in their treatments during free-time periods.

The first public act by older students towards the newcomer is to give them a personal name in the sign language. Shortly after school opened, two newcomers were observed signing their new names to each other. Based on their physical attributes, one was tagged as “bad-eye” and the other as “hair-parted.” They seemed proud of their new names, which they repeated again and again. Naming marks the beginning of individual identity within the student body. In fact, there is more differentiation of each individual during sign-naming than in the spoken names. Among the four hundred there are several students with the spoken name “Maliwan” or “Prasit.” Even though each child’s name

⁴⁰ Interview with grade 5 at Tak School, 10/5/91.

is stitched on their uniform pocket, this is used only by adults. It is the older students who assure that each child has a unique sign-name, which facilitates student community. The assignment of a name is an important ritual because it signals the entry of a new member.

Newcomers were treated like objects, and made to “act in undifferentiated unison” (one of Henry’s categories). From the first day they are integrated into the regimen of drills and duties, being prodded and pointed into place. Emphasis was placed on the protocols of lining up, eating and hygiene.

Deputies turn private affairs like bathing into disciplinary lessons.

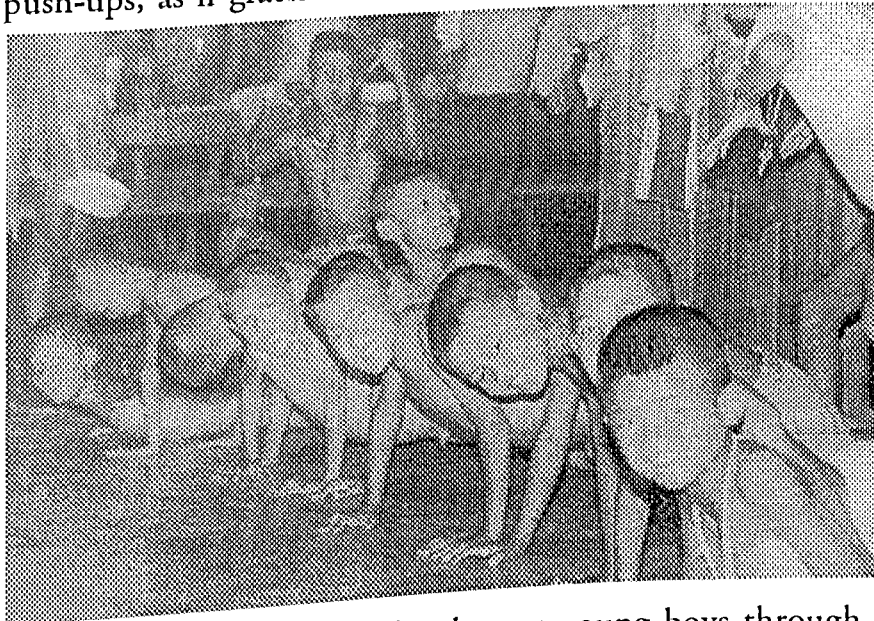


They were didactically taught what they needed to know within concrete settings, and no more. This may be a rough attempt to provide a “scaffold” for learning, which would be in line with cognitive theory by Vygotsky (Berk, 1994). The lessons were repeated endlessly in simple language. Pupils just a few years older handled training, still being watched over by senior pupils. Side-by-side with more experienced children, the newcomers learned concept and language by watching and by participating.

Peers and teachers are assertively shaping the range of possible experience of the young children and girls. The classification of youth as dependent reduces their opportunities for dialogic interaction. It seems ironic that those who have the most to learn are those for whom

communication is most restricted. The treatment seemed overly restrictive. Yet the repetitive activities with matching vocabulary quickly produced a new responsiveness to communication in most of the children. Clignet has written, "assimilation also enhances familiarity effects and accordingly accelerates the appropriate extraction of the critical visual or verbal features of the task" (Clignet, 1981, p. 338). The new students first recognize their names and the signs referring to regular activities, like bathing, eating and line-up. For the first time the child was understanding and, possibly, using language. This is a breakthrough derived from simple participation in highly structured activities and unvarying accessible language usage.

The youngest children managed to find a little fun in the most arbitrary and restrictive strictures. This "grin-and-bear-it" philosophy is seen in the rural Thai populace. Boys were seen grinning ear to ear while doing push-ups, as if grateful for attention of any kind. One little tyrant



had a series of "water tortures" that he put young boys through at bath time. They bore his brutality with stoic courage. The facial expressions of a few boys seemed to show a feeling of appreciation for being there. Perhaps it is a feeling of satisfaction at being treated like everyone else.

Deaf children are often treated differently from their siblings at home: either being over-protected or neglected. The strong bonds among members of each cohort in the deaf school may derive from sharing of intense, shared experience.

While anticipating steady language gains by newcomers, older pupils are not willing role models of elaborate language and two-way dialogue. During free-time the newcomers are ignored, giving them time to learn at their own pace. They are excluded from participation in older children's activities. Consequently, the "know-nothings" form a group among themselves based on shared exclusion and common treatment. The newcomers watch a lot, say little, and wander freely, trying to make contact with other people.



Unexpectedly, this exclusion together provides them a communicative environment that supports learning at their level. The class of "know-nothings" includes both newcomers and students who have been around as long as three years. Newcomers are thus compelled to close association with other children who are a year or two ahead of them in terms of sign language acquisition. These comrades are capable

of providing language and knowledge within the newcomers' "zone of proximal development." The slight variance in age seems to produce motivated, mutual accommodation between "teacher" and learner. Thus, the intellectual banishment together engenders mutual teaching and learning among the "know-nothings."

During the rare instances when older pupils act as mentors for younger children they seem to adopt a specific manner of communication. The videotape of the Scouts exhibition contains an example:

0 32 05 An excellent example of mentoring. "Older Boy" is in 2nd grade. "New Boy" is a newcomer. The two boys tour the exhibit together; Older Boy always has his arm around New Boy or a grip on his wrist. Older Boy points out things and makes comments. He uses simple signs in short phrases. He doesn't expect an answer; New Boy never says anything. It seems to be a gentle relationship. The two boys come up beside a boy named Prem (4th grade) and crouch down to examine the models. Older Boy speaks to Prem using much more rapid signing than when he signs to New Boy. Older Boy says to New Boy, "Look there. Very thoughtful. Very clever, really, really." He escorts New Boy away. Older Boy and New Boy arrive at a table with a model of a watch tower. Older Boy demonstrates how men climb to the top by making the sign for "climbing" on the miniature ladder. Suddenly New Boy slips away from Old Boy to move beside an older youth who immediately threatens New Boy with a raised arm, "Go away! You're disturbing me." New Boy returns to the side of cordial Older Boy. Observer Comment: Older Boy makes statements and demonstrations that require no reply from New Boy.

The precise impact of guided assistance in sign language development was not studied here, but the research assistant and other deaf adults felt that it led to precocity in favored youngsters.⁴¹ Such mentorship in the creative and participatory mode is nowhere more evident than in the authoritarian settings. The processes of teaching-

⁴¹ See a supporting example in videotape 1, #03642.

learning among younger students is used by senior youth to their advantage in supervision. Older pupils communicate with newcomers via slightly more advanced children, i.e., first and second graders, perhaps saying: "It's time to eat, go round them up." Questions about a newcomer are directed to a slightly older pupil. A dorm supervisor held a newcomer by the shoulder and asked a nearby child, "Where are her socks?" who retorted, "She threw them away!" Their deputies, usually in fifth and sixth grade, are capable and motivated to make the necessary conceptual and communicative "translations."

Becoming “mindful”

In first grade we know-nothing, in second grade we still know-nothing, then in third grade we start to become able to think.

– a girl in fifth grade at Bua School for the Deaf

Within three years most pupils have moved out of the newcomer status into a “regular” status. A series of internal gains in language skills and cognitive awareness by individuals has occurred prior to recognition by elders. Exposed chiefly to restricted codes of language (Bernstein, 1964), the newcomers gradually developed abstract and extended forms of language. In their own ways, the “know-nothings” acquire knowledge about the sign language, the norms of behavior, and the rules of games. An early display of language competence is telling the name signs of peers. Jesada, a nine-year old, was shy and had a club foot, which left him ostracized. Yet he named two dozen fellows from photos. Unbeknownst to his fellows he had learned basic knowledge for dorm life.

The graduation to a higher status level is not under the control of the individual, but instead is a communal recognition of their intellectual and linguistic gains. They are then said to be “mindful”:



The sign is made slowly to indicate the process of learning. Alternatively, reference is made to their functional signing ability, using

a sign that is literally “able-to-sign”. The idea is that the child is now “able to think and to converse.” Asked to describe their intellectual history, Nipapon, Supoj and Supapon each spoke of initially “knowing nothing”, then a slow learning period, the dawn of understanding, and finally feeling comfortable in conversations by fourth grade (meaning five years or more after they enrolled). Supoj recalled “watching and remembering more and more until, ah-hah, the spark of understanding.” He made the final sign with his head thrown back and his mouth open. Others used the signs which translate as “sign, knowledge got-better”, which is made with a slow motion to represent slow increase in skills. A boy named Patipol recalled his early years:

Rschr.: How long did it take you to “become mindful.”

Patipol: A few years, like second grade.

Rschr.: You mean that you didn’t understand the signs when you were in first grade?

Patipol: Yes, I didn’t know. I knew only speaking then. I didn’t know the teachers or anybody. I went home in tears.

Rschr.: Speaking?

Patipol: Yes, I had hearing which was cut-off later, when water got into my ears.

Rschr.: And gradually you learned sign and by second grade you understood a little bit and gradually improved?

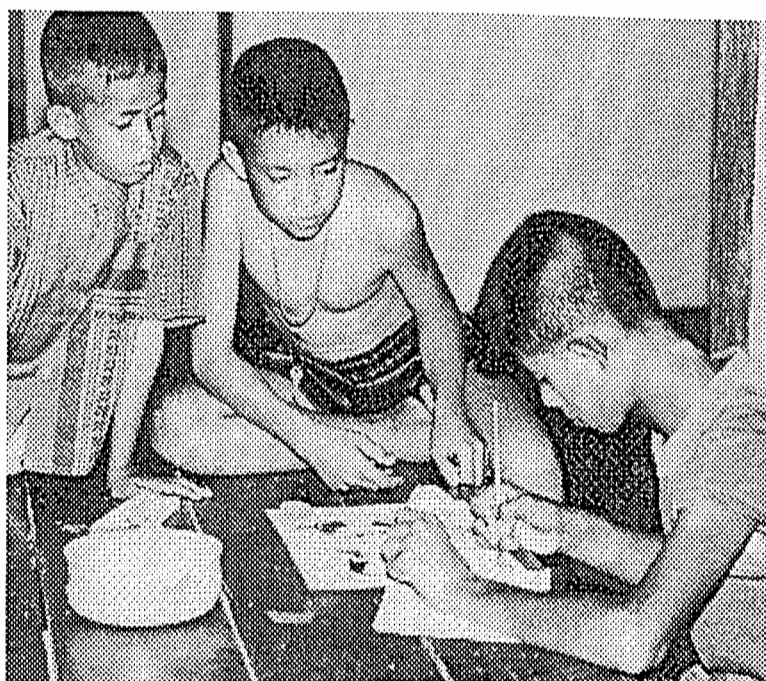
Patipol: Yes, that’s right, I tolerated it. The teacher taught me signs like “chicken” and “monkey.” In second grade I knew a little. I began to watch the older signers. In third grade I began to converse in signs. By fourth grade I could sign fluently. I was able to defend myself in sign.

Rschr.: Well, what did it mean to “become mindful”?

Patipol: I watched signs of older pupils in dialogue and took it in (“learn-through-the-eyes”) and signed privately among my intimate friends. Then I began to sign publicly.

The last sentence by Patipol states the basic strategies of child-child learning: the watching of older children and practicing with peers.

Whether in games, stories or drills, the younger student simply watches, without any accommodation made by the presenter, who ignore the newcomer or chase them away. There are rare and cherished individuals who like to teach youngsters. Sometimes these are subtle accommodations. The next photo shows how Winai subtly made his cartoon drawing inviting to young observers. He chose a public site, fielded inquiries, let them look at his sketchbook, and provided a clear view of his strokes.



Watching skilled peers is a common form of cooperative learning

Once a child earns the “regular” status, they are given access to more activities. It is at this level that the children most intensively engage in creative narrative, a type of interaction that is described later. They yearn to use their new fluency to receive connected, elaborate information, be it true or make-believe. They continue to be subject to the discipline of older youth. Because these “regulars” can understand instructions, they are the chief providers of labor and service to older pupils and teachers. They assume the rights and responsibilities of membership in both the student social organization and the Thai official

school culture. The “regular” group is quite diverse, comprising a swath of childhood from about age ten to fourteen years old, and including barely proficient signers to fluent, institutionally-savvy pupils. The life of a regular student is complicated by its own internal hierarchy by age and by the strictures and attractions to association with the opposite gender. The children carefully choose members of their storytelling, conversational circles and games. Supapon spoke of being denied access to the very best story circles until she had “reached the upper level.”

Additional distinctions which the children make among themselves are not explained here. These involve personality (assertiveness brings respect), gender (boys valued over girls) and physical prowess. For example, the boys place high value on self-assertion, a personality trait, as a basis for moving beyond mere “regular” status to a position of respect. Patipol explained how he became “an equal” in the eyes of fellow youth.

Rschr.: Back when you were little did you get picked upon or intimidated by older pupils?

Patipol: Yes, I was picked upon until I could sign back. You must be able to reply. I watched movies and got some ideas. One time I said, “Go take the orange medicine.” That was thought real funny, it spread all over the school. [Comment: While I was unable to grasp the humor, it is clear that P’s gibe helped earn him a reputation as one who should not be a target of derision.]

Rschr.: How much bigger were the children who picked on you.

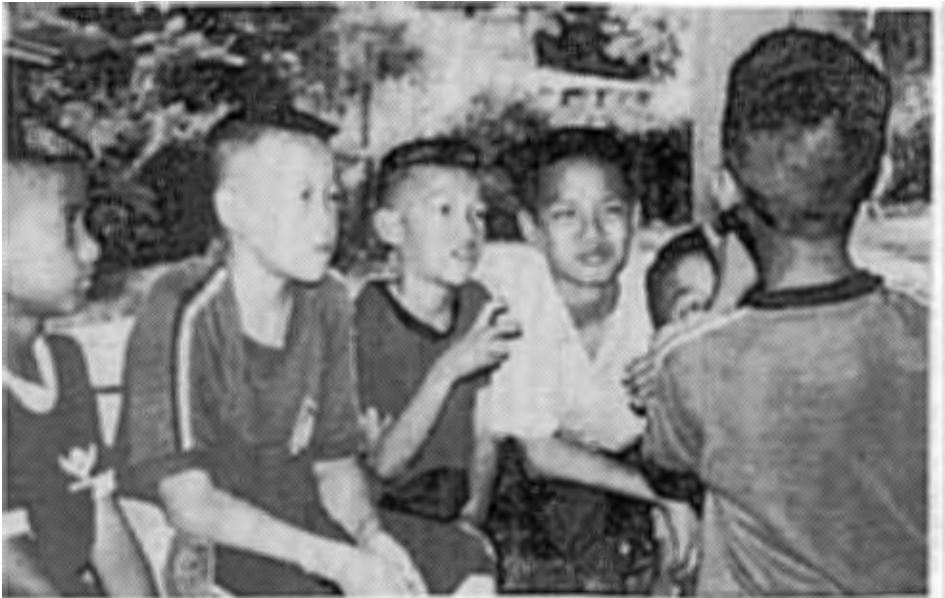
Patipol: There were some fifth graders. You have to be able to sign something to get them to step back and leave you alone. When you come back at them they think, “Hmm, leave him alone.”

The child’s access to such enhanced social participation within the school is based upon their achievement of a “mindful” state.

Being “Smart”

At the pinnacle of the social hierarchy of the mind are those whom the students call “smart.” While the sign is made at the head (an index at the forehead rapidly changes to a ‘thumbs-up’ handshape), the term is not entirely synonymous with intelligence. The common attributes of “smart” youth were ability to grasp and convey ideas well, and the daring personality to do so in public. After Winai finished a satiric tale some of his audience enthusiastically came up to him and made the “smart” sign right on his head. Patipol bubbled on about how his friend could repair mechanical devices. In practical terms, the “smart” child is an outstanding member of a group.

“Smart” is in the eye of the beholder. That is, groups of boys and girls at the regular and senior status level variously bestow the term on those with whom they associate. As their cohort ages, they often retain their respected position, even into adulthood. Some, but not all, “smart”



All eyes are on the “smart” boy in this circle of friends students achieve notoriety within the larger gender or dorm group, and even the whole student body. Considerations of age and gender are often

suspended when a child is identified as “smart.” On numerous occasions, the older students pointed out precocious youngsters who had impressed them.

The youth value mental ability in many forms, using the sign “smart” for the few youth who excel in academic skills.⁴² Given the choice, they will bestow authority upon those who do well in the official realm of knowledge. At Kulaab and Dok Khoon Schools only academically successful youth won the student elections. Pornthip Wannuwinn of Dok Khoon recalled:

Rschr: Would someone who ever flunked be a head?

Pornthip: Not that I know of. . . . They picked who they liked, who wasn't lazy . . .

Rschr: Suppose there was an older pupil who was an orderly person, who wasn't lazy, and who had a good heart. Would the children pick that person if they failed repeatedly ?

Pornthip: No, they had to be smart.

Those who have played the academic game well are allowed to mediate between the school and the student body. When girls do well academically, and have a tolerant personality, they can do well in student elections. In 1991 the students elected a girl as President against the wishes of teachers, who thought a boy would better maintain tough discipline. But the students favor intelligent and good-mannered official leaders, even if it contradicts adult gender expectations.

Outside the realm of academics and supervision, the “smart” children are often at the center of public student gatherings. In these creative and participatory settings, they are alternatively described as “signs-well”. These highly articulate “sign masters” function as

⁴² “He’s smart, really smart!”, exclaimed a group of younger girls at Khon Kaen upon seeing the researcher using a sign language. They were too far away to judge the content, so it may have been their recognition of someone who broke out of the “muteness” of most non-signing visitors.

storytellers, broadcasters and interpreters. Sign masters are creators and sources of knowledge in an institutional life that has little stimulation. Whether explaining or fabricating, they are imaginative and rely on colorful language and verbal twists. Some sign masters are chiefly entertainers, while others are broadcasters and interpreters of information. Above all, they are natural teachers who help make experience meaningful for their fellow students. They talk about happenings outside the institution and of the intrigues of life. Their interpretations of speech from the screen help youngsters understand the actions of talking people. They create new signs that nurture the conceptual and vocabulary growth of the younger pupils.



The sign master is central to the intellectual development of deaf youth in Bua School. There is evidence of this in other Thai deaf schools. The craft of signmastery has been passed down over generations of deaf schoolchildren as an honored practice. And its contributions are remembered into adulthood. Kampol Suwanarat (personal communication, 1993) recalled a sign master named Thongchai Sanitphan when in the first cohort of Thailand's deaf students in the 1950s:

Kampol: Thongchai would sit and we'd gather around and watch him. He could sign about anything. We had no meaning. Thongchai did. We had no way to sign anything. He did, for every concept, sign-by-sign. Sure, we could sign the

regular things but Thongchai was extraordinary. Amazing. He showed us signs like we had never seen before. He opened my mind and threw things in. I have never forgotten what he did for me. I am sorry he moved away. My eyes miss him.

Rschr: What do you mean?

Kampol: Out-of-sight, it's a real loss. When we graduated from Sethsatian School, the Principal, Kamala, sent him to School to teach. She had noticed that he was always surrounded by people who always watched him. He could talk to everyone, old and young people. I can't do that! Thongchai would make his signing easier for young ones and encourage them to sign.

Rschr: Is he taken care of now because he was a true teacher? (Thongchai has gone blind.)

Kampol: Yes, yes. I, too, go and visit him and take him around. We are grateful for him opening our minds and throwing many things in. It was only him. We can't talk to hearing people. There was only Thongchai.

Children who were deemed "smart" because of their sign mastery were rarely top students. Teachers often perceived these students as frivolous or immature. Winai was a skilled satirist and popular among children of all ages. Yet he was uninspired by the drudgery of the classroom and mocked the inarticulate signing of his teachers. Consequently, he failed two upper grades. Most pupils were held back for one or two years; these early failures were considered normal. But those who failed an upper grade were never allowed to forget it. The boys in the graduating class teased Winai about being left behind. He didn't mind at all, since he was a much-respected creative leader and fretted that the outside world held no such opportunities. Nowhere was the difference between the fulfillment provided by student life in the residential school and the communicative void in the mainstream more starkly delineated than in the dilemma of the smart deaf child.

“Numbskull”

Mentally deficient youth are denied ascendancy to regular standing in the student body. The class of social outcasts include the mentally handicapped and those who never escape the retarding effects of years of communicative deprivation at home. To this group of children, the older students apply the sign “weak-headed” or “numbskull” (alternative translation is “pea-brain”).



To be ignorant, unlearned, unintelligent

The older students had an astute ability to discern the difference between a child who was in transition and one who was not learning at a normal rate. Intellectual incompetence is treated like an age reduction, with a diminishment of respect. For example, when the top 75 children were away for ten days during the games, A third grader was chosen for leadership of Boys Dorm 4, although he was younger than many of his charges. Jum interviewed him (Boy D below). Pointing at an 18 year old boy who was still in first grade, she asked if he was a dorm head:

Boy D: He helps. He helps collect clothing. During free-time, he watches, he's good, he watches, and gathers people, and things. [The boy on right says “helps.”]

Jum: Why is he not a Head?

Boy D: He flunked grade 1. He's not yet out of grade one. He is a "know-nothing". He's a failure (thumb-down). [He grins for a long time.] Failure. [The boy on the right says that the Big Boy "Can't get ahead in school." Boy D tells him to desist.] Let it go. Don't be ambitious. To each his own. We don't want to make him embarrassed. Be careful. [Boy on right repeats that Big Boy has failed and hasn't improved.]⁴³

These slow youngsters are often harassed and ridiculed by their fellows, both boys and girls. (Several brutal incidents evoked the scene from the W. Goldman's novel *Lord of the Flies* where the marooned boys smash the fat boy's glasses.) Their "victimization" is a key example of how the student hierarchy is built upon assessments of cognitive capability. To the researcher's knowledge, all of the victimized youth had a mental handicap. There was an albino boy at Dok Khoon School who might have been a target of antagonism. Yet he was a youth supervisor and was respected for his mind. There were two teenage boys who were so small that they stood at the front of the line with the little boys. Yet both were clever and could "talk-the-talk" of their age group. While they were shoved about, they nonetheless were treated as near-equals. The students might have taken advantage of "different" youth, such as those who are gay, physically handicapped, or deformed. Such children were sometimes singled out, but were spared the unceasing degradation reserved for the dimwitted child. The classification as a "numbskull" is a status assignment based on properties of the mind alone. Neither age, size, gender, or personality make a difference if the child is lacking mental acuity.

⁴³ Tape 1, #0:30:00

The topic now shifts to elucidating the nature of interaction among the students. The data is presented in two major sections as follows: (a) Free-time Activities and (b) Patterns of Authority by Students. Descriptions of the role of the sign masters are given in Free-time Activities. Full data was collected on seven of the thirteen sign masters at Bua School, including three boys (Natapong, Thanthep, Winai) and four girls (Pachri, Panumat, Supapon, Nipapon). A full data set includes two interviews, videotapes of their performances, interviews with audience members and background data. A budding storyteller at the primary level, Chawalee, was partially studied. Information was collected about seven individuals from Dok Khoon and Kulaab Schools. The chapter will conclude with a discussion about the relationship of authority to creativity in the children's construction of their social experience.

Free-time Activities

The free-time domain comprises a panoply of complex interaction by children aged seven to nineteen years old. Free-time activities are distinguished by the voluntary nature of participation and by the absence of imposed authority. The transformation to free-time was as if the spontaneous expression of the children, held in rigid form, had suddenly unfrozen and flowed into its natural channels. "Free-time" may be a misleading term if by emphasizing the absence of authority it suggests a state of disorder and purposelessness. The after-hours activities have discernible forms and significant function(s) in intellectual experience. Each gathering had a specific norm of conduct, which participants accepted voluntarily.

The free-time activities have been grouped under headings according to their most salient property. The first heading is "creative narratives," which are characterized by monologic gatherings (although

communication occurs between participants). The second heading is “participatory gatherings,” which exhibit more back-and-forth dialogue. These are further delineated into three types of each:

Creative narratives

- Storytelling
- Broadcasting
- Interpreting

Participatory gatherings

- Conversational circles
- Verbal dueling
- Games and Sports

While categorization is useful for discussion, the schema is not intended to obscure the nuances and the diversity of interaction within a category. The writer has tried to convey the variation within each type and to choose illustrative examples of boys and girls of different ages. For example, the form of two interactions may look similar yet have very different functions in the children’s intellectual experience. To some participants the act of “verbal dueling” is chiefly a way to earn status, to others it is for flirtation or humor, and to still others it is an occasion for vocabulary growth. This study gives primacy to how children perceive their social gatherings. In so doing, the hope is to reveal as much as possible about the intellectual, social and emotional motivations that lead to their creation of these gatherings.

Creative narratives

They hunger for stories and ask me to sign. Sometimes they are depressed (deflated-of-emotion). It works both ways. Sometimes I am hanging around, sleeping, thinking and I get the urge to tell a story. So we get together.

– Ms. Pachri Rinnasak⁴⁴

The students showed a persistent drive to create narratives told in sign language. The languageless condition in which these children had been living at home denied them full understanding. Now, isolated together with the tool of sign language, they assembled the fragments into extended accounts. Their efforts at creative narrative is an indication of the strength of their desire to make sense of what is going on around them.

Creative narratives were classified under the headings: storytelling, broadcasting, and interpreting. The key functions and forms (manner of communication) are noted in the table.

Table 8. Overview of creative narrative among deaf children

Narrative in:	Cognitive function	Social function	Form <i>(from Henry, 1976b)</i>
Storytelling	Sign and concept modeling & learning, enrich understanding	Relieves boredom, marks groups	Creative dramatization tailored to the audience
Broadcasting & interpreting	Requires grasping a framework of new information	Fuels debate; Provides shared reference	By telling and by watching

⁴⁴ Interview on 10-6-91, tape 10, #1666.

Storytelling

A community of Leprechauns without a crock of gold is a blighted and merciless community.

– James Stephens, *Irish Fairy Tales*

So persistent was storytelling at Bua that it seemed many youth viewed the day as a continuous narrative, interrupted by officialdom. Telling stories is a pastime of many ordinary youth of different ages. Snippets of tales filled interludes between authoritarian activities. The pre-teen boys were always geared up with a motorcycle chase or a shoot 'em up war scene. In the morning, the girls re-told memorable scenes from the past evening's television program. Narrative vignettes were woven into the daily chat among friends. This broad participation in creative expression was a backdrop to the more expansive performances by a few practiced storytellers.

Full-blown storytelling was held after-hours and on weekends. The typical gathering comprised six to eight youth, with a range between three and twenty people. Ruth Sawyer wrote in The Way of Storytelling about a period in children's lives she called their "listening-years." The regular audience of the storytellers at Bua School were between ten and thirteen years old. Boys and girls in their "watching years" would patiently sit and watch a well-told story for over thirty minutes. They hungered for narrative. This age group was markedly disinterested in the classroom scene. They escaped the drudgery of lessons by their back-channel banter and slipping outside to chat. From their classroom behavior, the conclusion would be that they had inadequate or poorly developed powers of concentration. Yet they showed a singular ability to attend to detailed and lengthy monologue by their peers.

Children a few years younger did not share this passion for storytelling because their nascent sign skills precluded sufficient

understanding. The oldest children preferred conversational circles. Said Miss Pachri, “The oldest girls aren’t interested in my storytelling. They have their own groups.”

Both boys and girls showed a sense of story-making as a notable mental accomplishment that had social worth, but their idea of inclusion differed. Girls made storytelling a private affair, open only to other girls and, frequently, only to intimates. Since they gathered inside the dorms it took five months to identify girl storytellers. The boys saw storytelling as a public show to be performed in open areas, such as the bleachers. This may relate to their preferred topics. Girls were fascinated by tales of romance and personal relations. The boys wanted action adventures of war, science fiction and martial arts. Ghost stories had universal appeal, partly because they gave insights on ghosts said to inhabit the trees on campus. Intriguingly, the other local topic, satirical quips on teachers, was equally popular to both boys and girls.

Each story was a distinctive blend of recollection and creativity. Storytellers drew many of their ideas from movies and television programs. A few storytellers preferred to devise original stories, such as Jirapon at Dok Khooon who titillated her audience with tales of meeting a Thai movie star. Most tellers followed the sequence of existing plots, yet even they performed creative acts. Given little and asked to go far, the deaf story-teller needed to rely on imagination to bridge the gaps of meaning between bare visual images on the screen. Each made different choices about which scenes to portray and the level of detail.

The expert storytellers ranged in age from thirteen to seventeen years old. These individuals had no exceptional background that nurtured their skills. Of the seven storytellers, none of their parents used sign language. Three of the youth had deaf siblings, but they were all younger, except for Panumat. She had two older deaf siblings who had

never been to school and used no sign language. The socio-economic status of their families was mostly lower-class with high school education at best. These children did not benefit from an upbringing in a deaf family. Rather, they worked to acquire a skill.

The storytellers themselves referred to an urge to narrate which emerged into public only after years of observation and practice: "I watched these older signers starting in grade 3-4 and by grade six I tried it myself. I could sign myself and people started coming to watch me. Neat! I had learned how to sign" (Miss Jiraphon, Dok Khoon School). The storyteller named Natapong said, "I started to watch (others sign) at age 14, then I started signing at 17." This "breakthrough" is from ordinary sign fluency to oratorical skill. The climb to storyteller is the highest step in a path of learning. By thirteen, a deaf child had been learning the sign language for five years, if enrolled at the average age of eight years old. It is a remarkable feat to move so rapidly from a state of near languagelessness to public presentation.

The audience members were one to three years younger than the storytellers. This small age gap between interlocutors represents a general finding about interaction in this student body. Whether in stories, conversation or disciplined settings, the student body directed their interpersonal communication so that it rarely traversed a wide age gap. Peer-peer contacts were predominant. Only on rare occasions did a senior pupil address a very young child directly.

The most successful storytellers used a manner of communication that was crisp, clear and detailed. A boy named Surached told us, "When someone is a skillful signer, he's funny and clever, and people watch him and learn from him." Signs were chosen for maximum visual impact, meaning that the teller emphasized the more visually appealing and action-oriented parts of a story. Freezing of all motion and holding signs

for an extended period was used to focus attention. The bodies of audience members were sometimes physically touched and used as elements in the story (see the next photo). This added an element of participation to the story. Innovation in sign articulation was common. Nearby material objects became props. Physical demonstration and mimetic elements abound. Said Woraphoj, "Natapong acts out the martial arts scenes. He scares me . . . one time he even climbed up on the rafters to show a climbing scene" (Interview, July 11, 1991). The signing space was expanded, such as using their bodies, or referring to the natural shape of its parts as a metaphor for shapes of an object in the story. When it was necessary to point to something outside the area, in one strategy the storyteller would first explain the idea, point and look at the object himself, and then after a suitable time, tap them all to re-gain their attention, and elaborate on the meaning.

Thanthep uses the body of an audience member as a prop in a story. His imagination is highly admired.



The function of storytelling to children depended upon their experience with its language, content and prior exposure to the narrative. They gave their reasons for attending story performances:

- To overcome boredom. “We thirst for narrative, for news.”
- Needed someone to explain (the show, the movie).
- Wanted to know the story (which I hadn’t seen yet).
- “Relieving heavy hearts” (dispelling low spirits by socializing).

The child’s prior exposure to the narrative made a difference in its perceived benefit. The audience had to make sense of the story, if they wished to follow it. If a child had already seen the film or television program, they had a memory with which to judge the signed version. With the original in mind, the child got a lesson in interpretation. Watching the excerpt might evoke memories of missing scenes. When the vocabulary used was new to a given child, then the story might serve as a language lesson. For example, the youngest storyteller, eleven-year old Miss Chawalee, told stories to peers who had been at school for three years. The stories benefited their language development more than for older children. In most cases the children in the audience had not seen the film. For them the signing conjured up fresh thoughts and images. The movie “Terminator II” was very popular at this time. Natapong, who could sign 28 films upon request, told us that the younger boys kept asking him to “tell us again.” Variety was essential and the most popular tellers had a repertoire of narratives in memory.

A profile of a storyteller named Natapong and his audiences is given below to convey the nature of a story session.

Natapong is a one-boy picture show

Almost every evening Natapong told exciting adventure stories to a circle of rapt boys. Natapong was a quiet, seventeen-year old boy. To his audience of boys under age fourteen, Natapong was a one-man cinema, relating in colorful detail action-packed plots from start to finish. His scene-by-scene renditions of films were seamless narratives, rich in detail.

"I have twenty-eight different movies in my head" (Interview with Natapong, Sept. 11, 1991). Each monologue takes at least thirty minutes to one hour. The members of his audience competed and clamored to see their favorite story. Natapong was usually agreeable to requests. Conceptually the themes were simple: "Bad guys are on the loose- they must be stopped- here comes the hero." The movies about super heroes and martial arts warriors were his forte. These topics might seem to have little to offer children's intellectual development. But these topics got their full attention. Even a monologue about rogue ghosts provided a vehicle for the modeling of new concepts, vocabulary and constructions. Natapong was an educative entertainer.

When asked "what do youngsters learn from storytelling?", Natapong replied that they are entertained and made to laugh, which exercises their sense of humor; they become excited [signed: heart-beats-quickly], and they learn things they didn't know.

For those learning the sign language he was a model of new vocabulary and oratorical technique. Following is an excerpt of his performance of a movie called "Predator." It is longer than usual in order to show the complexity of his language.

The evening grew darker and darker. On the [jungle] ground the grim-faced man writhed silently in pain. A black soldier with bullet belts across his chest patrolled the area, alert and with his heavy weapon ready. A figure flitted past a tree. A beam of light appeared, then another, and the beams began to rotate and pulsate in a twisting pattern. The luminous creature stood there, currents of energy running like waves over its body. It eyed the patrol of men with contempt. With a sharp motion the beast pulled off its right hand. On the inside rim along the base was a series of holes. Finger-like protrusions were covered by a sheath. The creature braced its body and slammed the device downwards. Rockets shot out of the holes at tremendous speed, coursing through the jungle and exploding everything in the way. {He signs a series of fantastic explosions, fireballs and booms.} Patterns of energy gyrated

over the creature's arms. The men were riddled with projectiles and their bodies flung away end-over-end. Nothing stood in the way of this torrent of awesome destruction. With a crisp gesture the creature ceased fire, purveying the scene. It snapped its hand back in the forearm, flexing the fingers until secure and began to stalk ominously through the jungle . . .

– from a tale by Natapong Siriphan⁴⁵

Natapong was often surrounded by a cluster of boys, some of them half his age. The most victimized and handicapped children sought him out in extraordinary numbers. The affection they felt for him was seen in their easy touching and relaxed manner. It is rare for older students to show such sincere interest in youngsters. Natapong was not overtly warm, but he was approachable and protective. Fraternizing with younger children was seen to be a sign of maladjustment or immaturity by teachers and older students. Among his peers Natapong was an outsider, as was any boy who cared little for sports competition. Natapong had no ambitions or role as an authority figure. He dealt no punishment, so he was rarely asked to supervise. Natapong was considered odd by all but the younger boys, who adored him. By crossing the age-barrier, Natapong highlighted the need for affectionate attention that many younger students felt.

Natapong was an excellent model of how to use the Thai Sign Language in a grammatical and colorful manner. His pace was measured and the signs were clearly articulated. His crisp transitions from scene-to-scene mirrored the fast pace of the genre and maintained the attention of his audience. By varying the production of signs, facial expressions and body shifts, Natapong conveyed a wide range of meanings. For example, the basic sign for “explosion” was modified to specify its duration and impact. By watching, his audience received lessons in how to make precise

⁴⁵ Tape 1,1:25:56-1:27:55.

distinctions in meaning. The stories contained concepts that are often unknown to the young children. One of Natapong's regular audience, a twelve-year old boy named Patipol, recalled some new ideas he had seen: "Levitation. The story was about a sleeping man levitating up into the air. Wow, I didn't know that happened."

Because the plots were simple, even the newly signing youngsters benefited. They loved to hear the same story time and time again, a necessity for language learning. Some youngsters imitated the master signer. In the excerpt above a small boy sitting to Natapong's left gleefully and precisely copied his colorful vocabulary describing the explosions. This imitative kind of learning was displayed by children with rudimentary to advanced sign skills.

Storytelling time was sacred time. When asked when he would tell his next story, Natapong refused to be specific saying, "When it's time." The spirit of the moment had to be right. Natapong let his audience choose the story, but he chose the time, holding back his full renditions until there was no threat of interruption. Natapong often turned down this researcher's direct requests to schedule his performances. His response echoes Ruth Sawyer (1942) on a storyteller's sense of place and timing of telling.

Stories were year-round with Johanna; yet she had the strong instinct for "telling-time"; either the time was ripe for a story or it was not. She was as true in this as nature herself, who can tell without failing snow-drop-time, robin-time, ripe-strawberry-time. . . . She saw to it that the telling never sank into the commonplace. I think Johanna wore her pride in the story . . .

At Bua School, the storyteller and the audience escaped together to another place and time in their minds. They shared a sense of anticipation about the course of the performance. Stories had to be told from beginning to end. Interruptions jeopardized the spirit of the gathering. An unfinished story was a devalued event, agreed both tellers

and audience. The official schedule was an invader of creative narrative. Natapong waited until the coincidence of high audience demand and an undisturbed block of free-time. Without assurances that he would be able to complete it he refused to tell a story. The girls told their stories after the final demands of the evening agenda, when everyone was shut in the dorm, bathed and ready for bed.

Once the storytellers began they brooked no interruptions from the audience. The girl storytellers demanded attention from their audience, even striking them when they looked away. Once Natapong began, he defended his domain. Our camera was unwelcome competition, and he commanded, "Watch me, watch me." The monologic and restrictive nature of his storytelling is typical. The telling of stories is a cultural tradition of Deaf communities around the world, with its origins in the school peer groups. They view the act of storytelling as a Deaf cultural asset and as a vehicle to show the richness of their sign language. This popularity indicates a deep-felt need by deaf people for extended narration in an accessible language. At the same time, participation by the audience is minimal. For children who are learning the sign language, a more interactive approach to storytelling may be more helpful.⁴⁶ Feedback helps the storyteller determine the level of understanding by the audience and to find a suitable level, register (style) and rate of language.

The teachers at Bua did not recognize either the importance of storytelling nor the expressive powers of the skilled storytellers. The researcher asked four teachers to discuss seven Bua storytellers as to personality, academic level, ability and standing in the student body. No teacher mentioned the word storytelling or their role as creative leaders. They acknowledged the wit and intelligence of a few. Of Thanthep a

⁴⁶ Lynne Erting introduced me to literature on interactive storytelling and neo-Vygotskian studies.

teacher said, "He's smart, but tries to get by without working using techniques such as using younger pupils." His teachers admired Natapong's good humor, but called him immature because he associated with younger boys. Said Mrs. Ratana, "He likes to dream during class time" but she noted, "He is diligent and dependable." Of four secondary teachers only one knew Natapong's sign-name. Yet the boy was one of the most imaginative and beloved members of the student body.

It is, in the main, spiritual experience which makes storytellers.

– Ruth Sawyer in *The Way of Storytelling*, p. 20.

A profile of Miss Pachri is an illustration of sensitive children who helped create a private, reflective mind-space in the institution. Pachri Rinnasak, a thirteen-year old girl, tells tales of the heart. While the boys talked of heroes at war, the girls often talked of romance and the pursuit of happiness against difficult odds. Miss Pachri was one of the youngest full-fledged storytellers. She was shy and soft-spoken with a lilting style. Pachri is an example of a storyteller who was motivated by an inner need to express herself. She had recently suffered a grave loss with the slaying of her father and grandfather. She poignantly expressed her feelings about being the daughter of a leading political family in her village and then suffering a humbling loss of status and income. Her demeanor and stories resonated with her deep sense of loss and sadness.

She created opportunities to raise basic issues about human relationships, such as why people love and hate. Her topics were narrow, centering on the personal relationships of people in families, at school and among friends. She took great care to describe the reactions of each character, what people say to each other and how they say it. Her own sensitivity to others' feelings was evident in her constant references to feelings and personal relations. Through her heartfelt creations she

brought others along a journey that went beyond the surface of daily goings on. These gatherings seemed an intimate conference for mulling over matters of the heart that concerned Pachri and the group. Her audience was mostly girls her own age or a little older in her dorm. She tried to fill a void in her life and those of like-minded peers. The teacher's assessments of personality did not any acknowledge the sign master's importance in the student body. Of Pachri it was said, "She's a good sport . . . is generous with her friends and children. . . She likes to chat." Yet the teachers overlooked the depth of heartfelt expression which she regularly shared with her peers.

Transmission of storytelling skills

The transient nature of a student body demands a never-ending process of transmitting knowledge from generation-to-generation of school children. Among the storytellers who have not been highlighted, a noteworthy point is their stated motivation to teach youngsters. Two youth (Wilaiwan and Thanthep) stated that they saw themselves as teachers. Said Thanthep, "I was taught signs like this. I like to teach." Overall a handful of seniors expressed interest in teaching youngsters. These children were more influential than the small numbers suggests, because youngsters flocked to these rare, sympathetic elders.

The role of the storyteller and storytelling is so valued by the Bua pupils that they take conscious measures to ensure its continuation. Creative leaders have a clear notion that they are descendants of a line. All seven of the sign masters recalled the name of one or more graduates to whom they felt indebted as models. Miss Nu Jaa was cited repeatedly as the inspiration of many girl signers. Pachri said, "She was very short, but a great signer." The researcher queried Pachri about Nu Jaa's role:

I was delighted to watch the sign. I learned from it (took-in-through-the-eyes) and began to practice myself. . . . I really

liked to have these stories about problems, about life. I'd watch these things, I didn't know about these things, I didn't know what was going on here, but I started to watch it and was delighted to see it. And finally we would do it everyday until lineup time.

The leaving of such key individuals motivated followers to "take the stage." Nu Jaa quit school apparently due to harassment from a student supervisor. "We told her she must come back to school, that we needed her," said Pachri. Three girls, Suphanee, Nipapon and Pachri stated that they reluctantly took up storytelling because "someone had to do it" in the absence of Nu Jaa.

Almost every sign master identified protégés who were being trained as replacements. Pachri had a loyal follower named Wipa who watched her every move as a way of learning to becoming a storyteller. We spoke with a twelve-year old boy named Pichet and asked him why he watched Natapong the storyteller.

Pichet: He pulls me over to watch him.

Rschr: In the future would you like to sign like him?

Pichet: Yes, I'm trying to remember the stories about martial arts. When he leaves, I'll sign-in-public. Now two boys always ask me to tell martial arts stories. It's embarrassing . . . but I tell the stories.

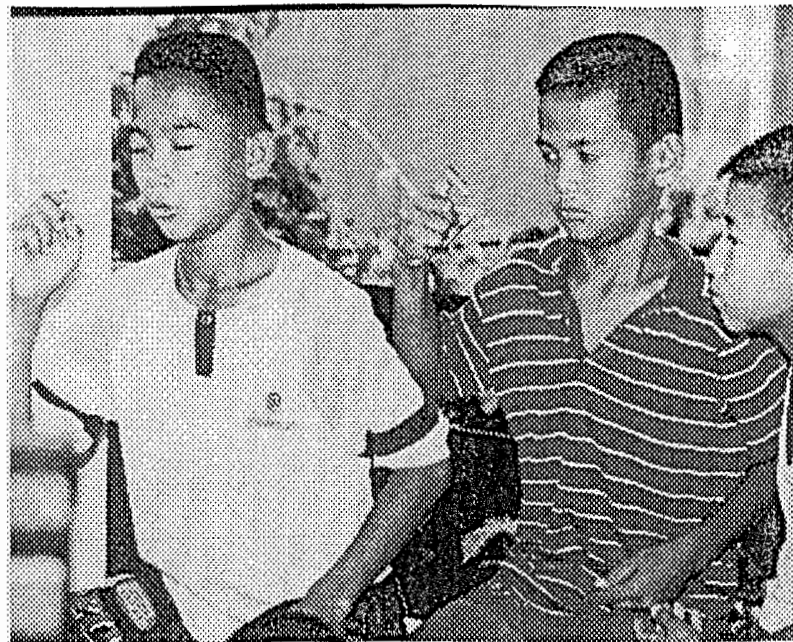
Actually, Natapong did not think highly of Pichet's potential, and did not encourage him. But Pichet was motivated to earn a position of honor. Both boys felt that someone must take over the role of storyteller. Most storytellers were proud of their protégés and insisted upon their attendance at performances.

Skill in storytelling was spread within the cohort by watching, imitation and apprenticeships. We never saw a single instance of a sign master giving instruction about the craft of public signing. Nipapon said, "Children don't explicitly teach younger ones how to tell stories. A few

just dare to sign the stories when the elders graduate. It's a matter of being daring and uninhibited that makes you a storyteller." The audience members told us of their admiration for those who "dared" to make public presentations and their own fear in doing so. The mix of personality and social opportunity that are available in a large school like Bua gave the students their first experience in shaping a public persona.

Aspiring tellers gained their skills through hard work. Practice among peers was a key training ground. Many students of different ages told narrative vignettes in private circles. This kind of rehearsal technique was used for gaining skill in games and sports, too.

Younger boys were observed imitating the storyteller sign-by-sign. In the excerpt above a small boy sitting to Natapong's left gleefully copied his "explosions." In the photograph below, the boy on the right is mirroring Thanthep's rendition of Terminator II.



Taking a position besides a signer has two advantages: (a) the cognitive load is reduced because there is no need to reverse the sign, as when seen from the front and; (b) being in front of an audience is a way to become accustomed to performance. Occasionally an older boy chased

away a mimic but imitation was regularly seen among gatherings of boys 10-12 years old at Bua and Kulaab Schools. This task demanded full concentration on the details of the rapid gestures. They had no way of knowing the script, since no two tellings are precisely identical. The act of mimicry relies upon recognizing the signs and their derivative forms (emphatic, aspectual) quickly. The mimics are exemplars of full attention, perception and recitation.

Broadcasting

I tell the boys all about the world soccer news. I read the magazines and stay up late, me and D., to watch the European game broadcast. I have to hang on to stay awake, when everyone else is asleep. Then in the morning I tell them all about it.

– Thanthep, Boys Dorm 3

Thanthep is a town crier bringing news to an isolated village of children. A deputy called him, “A signer for the masses.” He, and his like-minded peers, are sign masters who excel in accurate renderings of real world events. Broadcasting is similar in form to storytelling. These are usually circumscribed affairs, tailored for specific audiences. Occasionally these become open and public events. The cognitive demands for the tellers are similar, requiring grasp of detail and an interesting, eye-catching style. The audience and the sign master differed in age by only a few years, as is the case with nearly all free-time gatherings. Finally, broadcasting has broad roots in the popular pastime of news exchange among peers.

The primary source of material was the uncaptioned images on the television and cinema screen. From this silent stream they surmised spoken meanings, hypothesized relationships between actors and figured out conjoined events. They made sense of the patchy visual clues conveyed via the media. In some ways, the broadcaster had a greater

challenge than the storyteller. They had to be accurate to earn a reputation for trustworthiness. Like Speakers Corner in London's Hyde Park, many of the narrative gatherings looked much the same: a fervent individual intensively expounding to listeners. However, if the audience is asked why they attend, sharp distinctions appear. Some are seen as fabricators, who spin an entertaining tale. Some are respected for their verity. The truth-sayers were not supposed to "make things up." The children are astute at verifying what they are told, and of dismissing those who "don't know" or pretend to know. A broadcaster did not want to be tagged with the negative sign:



A sign used to expose someone who presented conjecture as fact.

Hence, the motivation to attain an honored role within the student body compelled the broadcaster to garner precise details. These youth were particularly resourceful and proactive in acquiring and understanding information. The broadcaster watched news programs, pored over magazines and queried whomever might have information, including teachers. This pursuit of knowledge heightened the development of their interpretive and communicative skills. The need for information increased the value of print materials in their minds and lessened the fear of reading. Thanthep pored over soccer magazines and pulled out names, scores and plans for upcoming matches. His expertise as a player and his recollections of watching televised matches was a body

of knowledge about the subject, the world of soccer. This helped him to recognize words that he was seeking.

Broadcasting is driven by the curiosity of the students for new information. In some circumstances, broadcasting takes a question-and-answer form. Bua sent 75 students to a sports competition. The remaining students were curious about the outcomes. On the returning bus, Thanthep said, "The others will still be awake waiting. They'll probably flock to me. This is the way it was when older boys went to Kulaab for games. They were mobbed by curious kids." When the bus arrived late at night, all but the youngest were indeed awake with questions ready. The researcher left the grounds to retrieve the video camera, intending to record the dissemination of new information. However, during the thirty minute interim everyone had already been told the overall standings, the scores of the soccer match and the awards won by each student. In every dorm children huddled around the athletes. By the time the camera was set up in a boys dorm, they were on to more refined questions, including accounts of the trip home and whom they had met.

This trip was a major source of ideas. The youngsters cherished several new hand games. A few older youth began to correspond with new found friends at other deaf schools. The older boys, impressed with the skill of their competitors, engaged in grueling practices and strategy sessions. The world had become bigger because there was more about which to talk and think. Just a week before the sports games, a student had explained the lull in creative narrative: "Wait until we come back after the fall break. We have nothing to more to say. We're flat. When we come back from the vacation we'll have lots of new things to talk about."

The deaf boarding student who can bridge both the physical and communicative isolation and convey information to the peer group gains status by virtue of providing intellectual satisfaction.

Interpreting

Deaf children must interpret the world themselves, for seldom does it speak their language. The incorporation of new information depended on their ability to figure out what is going on from the available visual clues. These may be likened to the skills and intuitive sense that people rely upon when traveling in a country where they do not speak the language. The circumstances at Bua require students to reach out, grasp and figure out the very sparse clues to meaning. While watching television they have only the non-verbal cues given by speaking people and uncaptioned media images. From teachers they get incomplete and unstable signing. Written materials are potentially excellent sources of information but many of the students are unable or unwilling to read for meaning.⁴⁷

Fathoming each kind requires the application of specific problem-solving strategies. Clearly, the deaf students acquire a repertoire of analytic skills as they grow up in the school. The young deaf newcomer at Bua is said to "become aware" partly when they begin to display critical abilities to grasp what is going on. One contributing factor in developing visual analysis is the support provided by older children as "interpreters." The older students used their critical faculties of "making sense" to help explain the glimpsed world in terms that the youngsters could grasp.

Interpreting by deaf students was seen at Bua, Dok Khoon and Kulaab Schools. A simple form was often observed among the girls in

⁴⁷ A few students do read regularly for meaning. Finding out their motivation would be useful to increasing interest generally among the student body.

the dorms while watching television. An older girl would sit near the screen so the audience did not need to divert its eyes. By signing comments during the program, they provided support for the children's own mental process of figuring things out. Long stretches would pass without comment. This may have been because the interpreters felt that the visual clues were sufficient for understanding. It would be intriguing to study their choices. The interpreters themselves were demonstrating an ability to rapidly process visual cues and make a judgment about its meaning. We may approximate this task by turning down the sound on our television and trying to figure it out.

Interpreting was common among boys at Dok Khoon School, where the public TV is high up on the wall in the mess hall. A table had been drawn up underneath. We saw a parade of boys take turns competing to interpret films. One evening four boys, much younger than typical, climbed up during a war movie, as pictured below. Three of them seemed awestruck as they realized the task of interpreting the film. Two of them just watched the TV and the last one watched the audience.



The fourth boy excitedly acted out the battle scenes, interrupted by his exclamations, "I know this part. I've seen it, next he'll drive the tank up

and over." Stage interpreting appeared for the first time at Bua School in 1993 after televisions were installed in the public areas.⁴⁸

Like the other forms of creative narrative, interpreting has its roots in simpler, broad-based activity of the student body. In class, students often help each other figure out what the teacher is signing or writing. Books are often read together by two people, who make small talk about what they think it means. In a myriad of ways the children help each other discern meaning. Individuals grow in interpretive skill over time, and the students' valuation of this intellectual growth is reflected in their social hierarchy.

⁴⁸ Thanks to Nipapon Reilly and Owen Wrigley for observations made during their 1994 visit.

Participatory gatherings

These gatherings are at their core a display of participation among youth. The egalitarian spirit of the exchanges works against dominance by any individual, such as in the creative narratives. There are three types discussed in this section, conversational circles, verbal dueling, and games and sports. In these three types, participants share similar skill in language, wit, and technique of the play, respectively. The large size of the student body allows for many gatherings at different levels. The variety keeps humor and thrill abob on the surface of the day. The properties of the participatory activities are summarized in the table.

	Cognitive function	Social function	Form <i>(from Henry, 1976b)</i>
Participation in:			
Conversational circles	Better understanding	Intimacy, status marker	By group discussion, problem-solving
Verbal dueling	Quickness of wit, exercise of vocabulary	To establish status	By use of humor & banter, By ego- deflation
Games & sports	Judgment	Status	By doing in play

The rest of this section is devoted to in-depth descriptions and examples of the participatory gatherings among youth.

Conversational circles

Because we are isolated, when we are together we sign a lot. We are just takers-in of information most of the time. So we really are eager to express ourselves when we are together. In the dorms we older children were on our own and would sit in a circle and sign and sign and sign.

– Nipapon Reilly

Conversational circles are used by the students to learn knowledge and to practice social and linguistic norms in a participatory manner. These circles are pervasive gatherings among all youth who have achieved proficiency in the sign language, principally those who have been at school for more than three years. These circles reveal two features of child interaction and learning. First, conversational rapport chiefly occurs only among children at the same level of the social-intellectual hierarchy. Second, a conversational circle is an efficacious site of learning, because its members are all within a narrow range of linguistic and intellectual ability.

When given the chance, the student body breaks into a great number of small groups, ranging in size from three to eight people. Larger gatherings tend to break into smaller circles, or to become a monologic form, like when a storyteller takes center stage. Nipapon Reilly recalled that a pair of conversants (dyad) is the basis of many circles. “Many times circles form around two people talking. After awhile people drop out until the original two people are left, who often continue the discussion doggedly. People with this commitment are needed to keep the circle going.” If true, this reminds us that the core purpose of the circles is conversation between people.

These circles are formed only by individuals who are at near-parity in language, knowledge and topical interest. In Girls Dorm 1, when instructed to “get in your story circles” by the dorm head, the girls formed at least six circles, as seen in the next photograph. Age, gender

and being a member of the same classroom or dorm are important factors considered by the children in forming their circles. Circle members are



usually all boys or all girls, although seniors do use this form for cross-gender association. The ages of members are almost always within a range of three years.

The overriding consideration for circle membership is the child's intellectual and linguistic capability. A member of a circle will be "smart, like me." This judgment says as much about the assessor as it does about the person being assessed. To call someone "smart" in this context is to recognize them as someone who shares a similar grasp of the vernacular language and the knowledge of the environment. "They have something to say to you. Interesting things. They can be challenged, making for good back-and-forth banter" (Nipapon Reilly). By selecting members based on common linguistic and intellectual skills, the function of the gathering determines its structure. The circles are for equitable and rapid rapport, and including people without the requisite skills would alter the nature of the interaction.

In their group formation the children reveal their “social hierarchy of the mind.” The age and grade designations are less important than the underlying assessments of language and intellectual readiness. This is shown in cases where age is disregarded. A precocious youngster may be permitted to join a group, albeit like a mascot. Rarely, such individuals take a leading role, such as Miss Chawalee the storyteller, who is younger than most of her audience. Older students who are mentally incapable or immature are intentionally excluded. In the session shown in the previous photo, two circles of younger girls crudely rejected dim-witted dorm mates who were much older.⁴⁹ (One of the outcast girls can be seen sitting alone in the center.) Girls seemed to be more exclusionary than boys as regards the composition of gatherings. However, some boys had a tendency to harass and even brutalize “slow” youngsters. The exclusionary treatment of mentally-slow children is ironic in light of the fact that every one has to walk a path from mental and linguistic ignorance.

The circles serve multiple functions in the children’s learning. Chiefly, the circles help the deaf students interpret their experience. Nipapon Reilly recalled that as a young child without sign language she learned silently, unable to discuss things with her non-signing parents. She was never given any explanation of where she was being taken or why something happened. After she learned signs at school, her knowledge was shared with her friends back at school. She recalled long nights sitting in the dorm under a bare bulb talking with friends. In no other setting had she been able to talk about family life, about being deaf and the future. The availability of an arena of free expression leads to heightened motivation to improve facility with the (sign) language. In many circles a single child attempted to dominate the conversation.

⁴⁹ Tape 7.

Engaging in debate is a new challenge for the deaf children raised in speaking homes. The spirited competition “for the floor” provided good exercise in the mechanisms of turn-taking. Cognitively, the circles are used as a way to solve problems by pooling intellectual resources. Rutherford (1985) and Maxwell (1990) reported how deaf people in the United States construct a narrative communally, with each person adding the bits they can recall for a truly educational exchange. The researcher observed Thai deaf groups involved in “collective pondering.” An example occurred among some boys trying to figure out the inner workings of a video camera:

Boy A: What does that machine do?

Boy B: It captures signing and other things.

A: You mean it can record sign and talking?

B: Yes, gets it all.

C: How’s it work? (They all ponder the camera).

D: It pulls in through the front there and collects.

B: The strip runs over a cylinder with holes down the side (meaning ‘film sprockets’ ?).

A: Hmm. He nods affirmatively.⁵⁰

The older children are keenly interested in outside affairs. They tried to make sense of the disjointed information available to them. For example, the U.S. - Iraq war had ended several months before the researcher arrived. Via a communal process of making sense, the older boys had pieced together a theory about the conflict by watching television news (without captions), puzzling over newspapers, and querying teachers. They pooled their cumulative knowledge on a subject in a spirited repartee. Since they could not understand the spoken words, they added their own interpretation to images and moving pictures. The

⁵⁰ Tape KK 1 # 01614.

members of the group chipped in with suggestions about who was who and what they were saying. In other words, the students did not abandon their interest in the absence of information. They closed the gaps, until something more convincing was seen. They took the bits, weaved them into elaborate renditions and defended their version in animated debates. Understandably their interpretations of what they saw often did not match the spoken script. Yet they showed an unflagging readiness to engage in collective pursuit of understanding the outside world.

Even during free-time, the school influenced the composition and, thereby, the function of conversational circles. The students' social interactions with each other were divided into two kinds: groupings imposed by the school and natural youth groups. School groupings are herein defined as systematic and repetitive gatherings during which students do not control the membership, purpose or duration. Each student is involuntarily included in at least four school groupings, namely, as a pupil in a classroom, a resident of a dormitory, a participant in gender-specific activities, and a member of the student body. By enforced participation in school groupings, each with a fixed membership and standard of behavior, adults complicate the social experience of the children. The child gets exposure to people with whom they might not naturally associate and learns about exclusion and strictures due to age and gender.

Every child was a member of multiple circles, the membership being drawn only from the population made available for interaction at a given time. These strictures made a difference in the perceived function of the circle to the individual members. When absolute free-choice was given, the natural groupings that formed were principally friendship circles. These circles placed a high regard on trust and intimacy. By the creation of a private and intimate domain, the

friendship circles were places where inner thoughts and feelings were shared with others, perhaps for the first time. Many older elementary girls felt strongly that to reveal inner-knowledge to outsiders was an act of betrayal and cause for ejection from the group.

The circles derived from school gatherings, like among dorm and class mates, lacked the element of absolute trust and intimacy among its members. It could be speculated that these groups, with their broader mix of age and personality, have more resources of knowledge. The friendship circles abound in depth of rapport. Further study is needed if it is desirable to distinguish more deeply between the different kind of circles, and the impact of school structure.

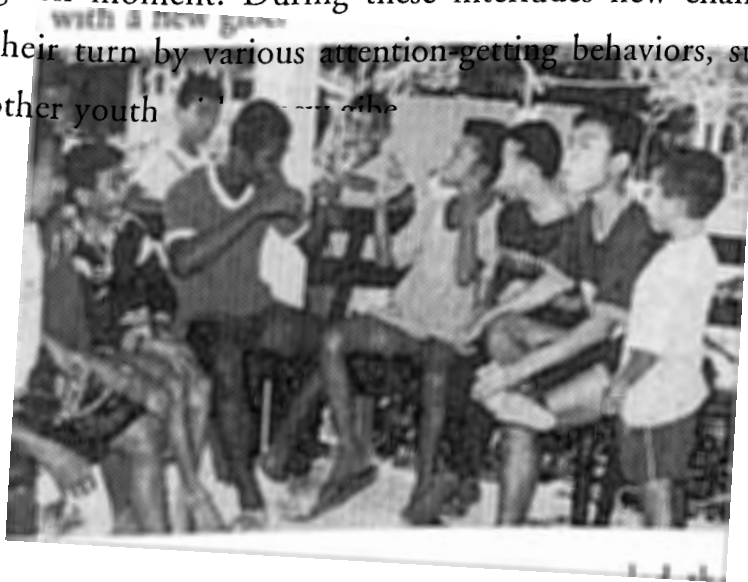
Multiple memberships in natural and school groups provides every Bua student social resources to draw upon (and to help create) as they need. Concurrently, this involves them in learning complex and varied norms of participation.

Verbal dueling

A gathering for the purpose of "verbal dueling" is an opportunity for display of panache and wit. Each squibber tries to say something more outrageous and clever than the person before them. The rapid and competitive nature of the improvisation assured that only those who are at near-parity in sign skills participated. These scenes of oneupsmanship were seen solely among boys aged twelve to seventeen years old (at both Bua and Kulaab Schools). Girls and younger children enjoyed watching these events, which added to the spectacle.

While appearing to be free-wheeling banter, verbal dueling was a highly structured event. The conversation was always carried on between two people. The pair directed their comments exclusively at each other, sometimes for as long as twenty minutes. Once someone began a joke,

the other would watch and bide his time, the way a jazz band pauses during one player's riff. After a skillful insult, everyone would laugh. The spirit of good humor never fell ill under the competition. The audience made clear by their chatter who held the upper hand at any given moment. During these interludes new challengers would signal their turn by various attention-getting behaviors, such as upstaging the other youth



During verbal dueling the participants suspended the prevailing norms about what is and is not "proper" topic for discussion. Most of the topics would be considered impolite by the students in normal conversations. From research fieldnotes came this entry:

I came upon two fourth-grade boys standing outside their room. Class had been dismissed early. Prem and his friend were gleefully trading insults. They talked of green excrement that propels the house into space; of machines that poke you in the genitals; and of opening a series of smaller and smaller doors until you get bonked in the head.
(8/29/91)

The sexual, slap-stick, and scatological bent of the banter seemed to be a key attraction of the event for the boys. By their humorous response to outré statements they showed their internalized sense of norms about what is and is not proper. Humor was an outlet for ideas that ran counter

to the discreet, passive behavior that the official setting demanded. (The video camera also evoked uninhibited display of forbidden curses and sexual gestures.)

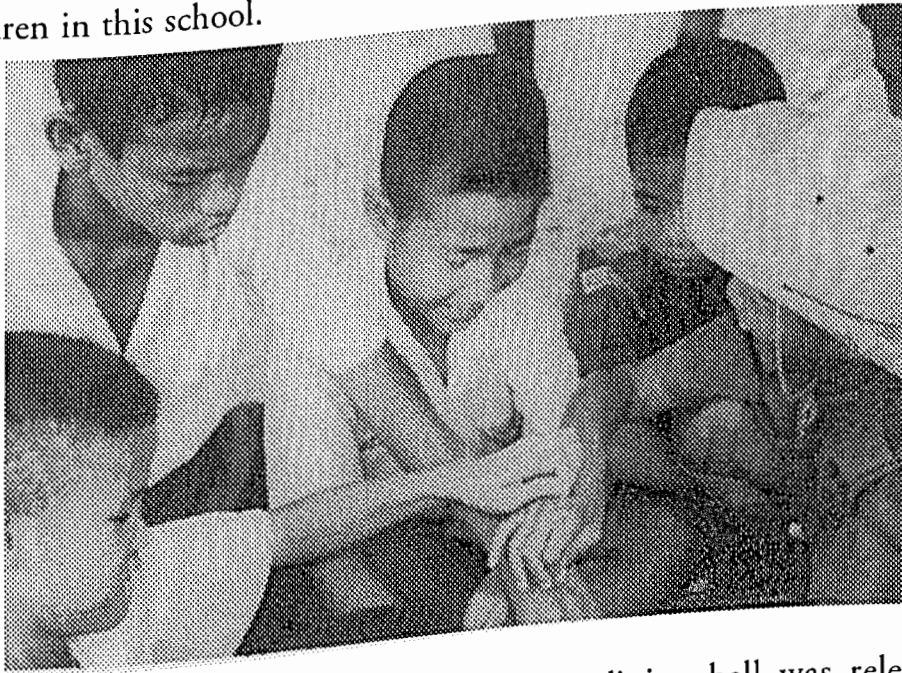
For those that violated norms of proper conversation, the children themselves had a special term, that is roughly translated as "indiscreet loud-mouth." It is similar to the compound that translates as "speaks-a-lot." The facial expression accompanying the sign told the individual's perspective on "indiscreet" remarks. In some instances, some youngsters used the sign with the intent to admonish violators of conversational norms. For example, the sign was used to chide fellow youth who were indiscreet in their words and who barged into a conversation without knowing the topic. Mostly it was girls who enforced a sense of propriety.

In other instances, the sign was used to praise someone who had disregarded norms of polite conversation. For example, the sign was frequently made by boy members of the audience for satirical storytellers like Winai, and verbal dueling circles, who were poking fun at teachers and peers. Boys seemed to enjoy breaking rules about proper usage, while the girls were more likely to criticize indiscretions.

The students responded to conversational norms in varied ways, ranging from acceptance to rejection. The important point is that they each had an opportunity to experience the dilemmas that any individual faces while living in a community. The enrollment of a large student body created a valuable learning ground for norms of expression, and consequences for disregarding them.

Games and sports

Games and sports are a vehicle of expression involving use of knowledge (rules), a sense of judgment, and physical coordination. As such, games-playing can reveal much about a child's abilities. The emphasis here is in how deaf children managed to learn, follow and teach the sets of rules involved in their recreations. Gaming and sports is a way to discuss how students adopt knowledge from the outside world and to recognize their capacity to make revisions to enable full participation and enjoyment. The youth's social hierarchy of inclusion and exclusion according to an individual's level of accomplishment, both physical and intellectual, is clearly illuminated in the sporting arena. Finally, athletics is a singular example of full-bodied relationships between teachers and children in this school.



Active play on the field next to the dining hall was relentless during free-time. After meals most pupils hastened to organize themselves and play until the sky was dark. The weekends afforded a luxurious stretch of moving amongst varied recreations. When they could not play, the younger children amused themselves with board

games and hand tricks while the older boys talked about sports. While competition was often fierce, many activities seemed to be appreciated for the sense of camaraderie. At first glance, a bout of kung-fu fighting among first-graders appeared aggressive. This idea was rejected after observing their reciprocity in taking pratfalls and their bonding as a group afterwards. There were many diversions created spontaneously that offer a chance to touch and hold friends. Girls about age nine to ten years old liked to carry each other around on their backs, which was often rewarded by a tumble together onto the grass.

The children exhibited a singular joy in playing a game that “looks right.” Their favorites were hopscotch, ball games of all kinds and hand games requiring manual dexterity. As with their television programs, the children favor games that comprise sequences with visible evidence of cause and effect. A ball and its impact can always be seen, as can the movement of feet on the squares. Everything that happens is in the clear and open. This is in contrast to a contest like chess, in which most of the “action” is within a player’s internal mental construct. This is not to infer that the games at Bua were simple-minded. Without reading, the older students have discovered and internalized hidden rules. The researcher was given detailed and consistent explanations of rules for marbles, rubber band shootouts, volleyball, soccer, and board and hand games. This was a display of their ability to recall a large corpus of abstract concepts, including “exceptions to the rule.” The recall and performance of these rules required a good grasp of basic numeracy.

The children readily adopted ideas from the outside. Games were a favorite import. This study was unable to explore the basis of the youth’s selection. It can only be speculated that they choose games from Thai youthdom that were interesting to a deaf person. Data was collected on the nature of imported games. The deaf children made systematic and

subtle modifications to games that they borrow from hearing people. Naturally, they translated the game-talk into the language of signs, which has its own set of pragmatic conventions, such as turn-taking. Games were modified by the children to permit full visual access by all players. The game was almost always played in a circle with all players at the same height. The chant that accompanied jump roping was foregone because signing while jumping is difficult. The picking of teams was done in a visual "shoot-out" of "scissors, paper and stone." A variant used is performed rapidly while circling each other, as in two bound dancers. This is an act of re-creation in a different sense.

The most ready source of playful ideas was fellow deaf youth, usually met at athletic events. Their games were already in a visual modality and were adopted precisely. An element of visual surprise earned a game a place in the deaf children's repertoire. Upon their return to the school after the sports competition for disabled in Lampang, the children introduced a new prank-game. A person holds his arms straight out and asks another person to hold their arms out, so that all four arms are parallel. Then the person challenges his "mark" to close her eyes and to move her arms back-and-forth repeatedly so as not to touch his arms. After awhile the unsuspecting player opens her eyes to find that everyone has left the area, leaving her pointlessly waving her arms. The appeal is in the shock felt when the eyes do not see what is anticipated. Most people are delighted with the trick but never volunteer to play the dupe again. Yet boys and girls at Bua aged 8-11 years old found such delight in the moment of surprise that they played it again and again on themselves. The same visual appeal is found in what are considered by deaf adults to be "good deaf jokes." Clearly these students have a sense about the properties that make an activity fulfilling for them, and a skill in making suitable modifications.

Their invented games frequently invoke the sense of touch (which has an unheralded role in the lives of deaf signers, from vibration to touch). The younger children played a game in which someone jabs the nape of your neck and you try and guess what finger they used. Sometimes a series of fingerspelled handshapes is made on the back. "Scissors, paper and stone" was performed with a mutual rocking of the whole body back and forth, which linked the pair, as in dance.

The transmission of gaming knowledge is chiefly by watching and practicing with peers of a similar skill level. Games and sports are an arena where even the newcomers can watch. Here is an unhindered look-and-learn time, with something at every level. The researcher only saw one instance of teaching sports skills (girls in hopscotch). Grasp of the rules was generally implied if one joined a game.

The chief way of learning was by playing together in groups of approximately the same skill level. That is, they broke into several groups according to their proficiency. Only the high numbers of students available make it possible for most if not all of the youth to find a satisfying and beneficial play group. This study did not document this learning relationship in games, but it seems members of each group or team are all in the same "zone of proximal development" or ZPD (Vygotsky 1978, Rogoff 1990). The ZPD concept refers to skills that can be performed with the guidance of an older person. The composition of these play groups was children with a range of skills, due to varying age and experience. In a group of people with similar skill levels, the average player will be more skilled than many, to whom they may teach something by their example. And they will be less capable than many, from whom they can learn. Said soccer player Thanthep, "I was kicked out of the little boys soccer game. They said I was too good. So now I play with the big boys."

This arrangement makes pedagogical sense. These children have developed a self-sustaining process of learning a large body of shifting knowledge, by forming useful groups. They clearly learn effectively from each other. By the age of ten, most pupils are competent in their favorite games and are familiar with the variety available in their age group and gym classes.

The relations between teachers and pupils during athletics are more normal than in any other activity. Teachers demand hard work and the students willingly respond. The student athletes, both boys and girls, receive supportive coaching from the male teachers, who are athletes themselves. Sports is an arena where people without much shared language can form an effective collaboration. The system of deaf education in Thailand does not produce the reflected honor that teachers earn when a former pupil succeeds in life. In sports, teachers are gratified to find an area in which their pupils succeed.

The youths' own activities contribute to their success in this area. These youth come at least halfway towards the teacher by acquiring knowledge during their play together. The shared sense of rules between teacher and child allows them to proceed rapidly to the actual playing and to more effective instruction. The coach may assume they are instructing "from scratch" while the children may instead be using the lesson to extract tips to expand their knowledge of the sport. Said Thanthep of learning soccer, "I wasn't taught when I was small. I practiced on my own and when I got older Teacher Pachon taught me more." Sports and games are just one of the domains in which the deaf students acquire substantial knowledge on their own, and use it in instructional activities.

Patterns of Authority by Students

Peer education seems most prominent at all cultural levels in the area of conformity to cultural standards. In preliterate and peasant societies, the peer group is a major force against delinquency. In contemporary society, the peer group seems split on this issue; it is a major support of rebellion against parents (and hence of the cultural standards they represent), while at the same time, it does use its power to assist conformity to accepted adult standards of morality. (Hollingshead, 1949, in Henry, p. 130)

In the Thai schools for the deaf, older students have a major role in discipline. At Bua School the older students are effectively in charge of elementary students during 68% of the waking hours.⁵¹ Order and discipline within Thai schools is usually enforced by the teachers. But the general sentiment of the teachers of the deaf is that, "We are inferior to children in signing, so that teachers have to use older pupils in instruction and control." The younger boys failed to do a Scouts drill properly. A teacher complained that the arrangement to divide the older and the younger boys during Scouts created these problems because the younger boys did not know what to do and were difficult to teach. He said, "If the older boys were with them there would be no problem." At Dok Khoon School for the Deaf, different age groups were put in separate dorms. This experiment failed, reported a teacher, because "by themselves, the youngsters did nothing but fight." Older students were relied upon to transmit and enforce the adult sense of order.

Older students have had a role in discipline since the inception of Thai education of the deaf in the 1950s. Kampol Suwanarat, a member of the very first class of Thai deaf children recalls,

⁵¹ Figuring a basis of 16 waking hours per day x 7 days per week minus adult supervision during seven class hours for 5 schooldays. Thus, 77/112 or 68 % of waking hours under student supervision.

It started back with Khunying Kamala (the first headmistress of the first deaf school). For example, I recall one time she saw a child standing on the swing. She didn't think it was proper, so she told me to go over and beat the child. I went over to the child and said that Kamala doesn't like what you are doing and I'm sorry but she told me to do this. I hit the child three times on the rear-end with a stick.⁵²

In the photo, a classmate calls the first grade to line-up. The teacher at right is making the same sign. The typical mixture of older and younger children in a class takes on new meaning when the teachers use the bigger youth as enforcers.

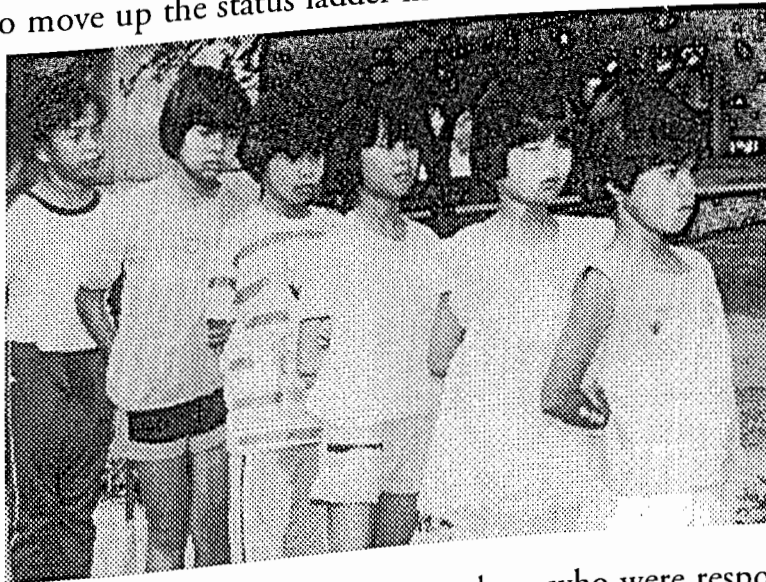


The extension of school behavioral norms into the free-time period had profound influence in the children's conduct towards each other and association patterns. Chiefly, the authoritarian activities inserted involuntary compliance into a free-time period. It is when the children exercised authority over other children that the term "asylum" came to mind. Strong physical subordination reduced the liberty of the children to communicate with each other. The subjects surrendered total control over their bodies (enforced line-ups and lock-step drills), their eyes (during meditation) and their verbal expressions (arms held in positions precluding communication). In so doing they were rendered powerless to

⁵² Kampol Suwanarat, personal communication, May, 1992.

act, to communicate and even to look. To restrict the use of hands and eyes of a deaf child is like binding the mouth and ears of a hearing child. It seemed bizarre that such a stricture was being imposed by children who themselves had long been deprived of communication opportunities.

Talk about servitude can lead the reader to misunderstand the spirit of the youth as being heavy and oppressed. Their morale was generally high. Discipline was tempered by restraint born out of a sense of empathy. Yet resistance was met with firm repetition of the command intimidation, and even force. When the older children barked instructions at younger children, they usually complied. Thai children are trained to acquiesce to authority. Students did complain about the use of force by a few teachers and students and the endless physical yard work.⁵³ Yet in general the pupils accepted their situation stoically, while aspiring to move up the status ladder in the student body.



Teachers chose as proxy supervisors those who were responsible and trustworthy. They had to be able to understand the teacher and translate their messages to the youngsters. (Thereby, the teachers implicitly acknowledged their linguistic repertoire.) They had to be able to control

⁵³ We saw angry outbursts, but not in front of teachers. Rather, students dropped out for paid labor.

the youngsters. The teacher in Boys Dorm 4 said, "Only fierce-looking boys will be obeyed." The same criteria held for girls, encouraging those with a domineering personality. Finally, the potential student supervisor had to do satisfactorily in school, which meant no grade failures in the upper years and good behavior in the classroom. The important role that students themselves played in the emergence of a supervisory elite will not be described.

Assuming power was not a voluntary or popular situation for most seniors. Having recently escaped from the restricted ranks themselves, the seniors were chiefly concerned with finding ways to expand their liberty and avenues of expression. They conversed together late at night on the open porches after the youngsters were asleep. Staking out the prime dorm areas (lockers and beds) allowed them to achieve semi-privacy. Some wore very stylish or rakish clothing. The conduct of discipline itself was an outlet of self-expression for elders, some of whom enjoyed pitting "their" kids against those under the care of peers. Gripes about the burdens of duty were commonly heard from seniors. They would rather have been free to do their own socializing. Yet seniors were inescapably involved as proxy supervisors from the sixth grade upwards. Numbering only 10% of the enrollment and spread across seven dorms, secondary pupils (grades 7-9) were needed to oversee the daily regimen and work details. The delegation by teachers of their responsibility was the principal external force in the seniors' social outlook.

The purpose of authoritarian activities was transmission of school norms. Said Prathum, a student leader at Chiang Mai: "When I was small I was taught the proper ways. I saw it the whole time growing up. Now I pass it on to the new ones who don't know." The rationale for discipline held by teachers and their proxy pupil leaders were similar: to prevent chaos and mishaps, for which they might be held accountable. A

“good” activity was structured, orderly and restrictive. The older pupils in general concurred that youngsters needed firm discipline and a clear sense of order. Said Winai, an eighth-grader: “Youngsters need a strong hand to set them straight and teach them right. That’s how we learned and that’s proper. Otherwise life here is chaotic.” Girl dorm leaders vied with each other to run the strictest dorm. The role of the older pupils was seen clearly when they were away for ten days during the sports competition. Another sense of order emerged--the hierarchy of the fittest. Friendship groups became more visible. Excessive control by deputies was unchecked and acts of vandalism occurred (normally absent). On two occasions group terror of mentally slow boys was witnessed.

The elder youth were motivated by a desire to maintain a measure of cleanliness and rationality within the dorm, which is after all their home. They have learned this Thai cultural value well. Personal hygiene and neatness was a ubiquitous topic of dorm meetings. The older children embodied their values by scrupulously maintaining their personal appearance. The older the child, the neater and more aromatic. The harshest discipline was dealt by them in matters which involved soiling of communal areas. The Head of Boys Dorm 4 savagely beat a group of young boys who had climbed into the tanks from which bathing water was drawn. No one protested his violence. Offenses like escapes from the school, which posed a real threat to the youngsters themselves, were treated in a lighter manner. Thus, the elder pupils transmitted their sense of values to youngsters.

In implementing their approach to education, the older youth drew upon (a) the models of behavior provided by their teachers and (b) recollections from their upbringing.

Models of teacher behavior

The form of the authoritarian activities was heavily borrowed from teachers. The use of intermediaries, the vocal drills, the delegation of labor and the attitudes towards discipline are four examples. First, intermediaries or deputies were almost always used to convey orders between the highest and the lowest rank. Teachers gave orders to the seniors who conveyed them to younger pupils. The student dorm heads appointed deputies to oversee the work details, and enforce discipline. When a meeting was called, the deputies in turn called upon runners a few years younger than themselves to gather the masses. During the day the rankings were visible in different colored armbands worn with the Scouts uniform.

Teachers sometimes urged pupils to recite words during control-rituals, like before the start of meals ("name this food") and in line-up ("rah, rah school" cheers). Most of the children cannot speak at all intelligibly, nor can they hear what is being uttered by their peers. The youth supervisors used the identical drill during pre-meal drills. The head and the deputies shouted an unintelligible phrase and the fifty-odd youngsters responded with an utterance which matched the original only in volume level. No one understood anything--but that is not the point. These were rituals of control that reinforced the authority of the older students. It is odd, because speech has almost no intrinsic meaning or benefit to the deaf children. But the authoritarian activities were not derived from the deaf culture.

The third example of common style is the delegation of labor. Older youth complained about the burden of supervision and that teachers were passing on their responsibility. Yet they responded similarly. The pupils must plant and tend a vegetable garden for agriculture class. Nipapon observed:

The teacher has told them that they must sell 300 Baht of produce to earn an 'A' in the class. A girl who is a dorm head called over seven smaller girls and ordered them to work her personal plot. . . . It's the same as the teachers do with the older pupils. The teachers pass work to the big students who pass it on to the youngsters.

This tendency of older students to exploit the labor of younger students was well known among educators of the deaf. The Principal of Kulaab School for the Deaf, who was formerly at Bua School, stated:

To use elders in controlling younger ones relieves some of the burden. But sometimes they can be excessive, can force younger ones to do their will. (He mimes grabbing a shirt collar.) 'Give me the money and don't tell the teacher.' (Interview, September 19, 1991)

Mr. Keng reformed the student organization to involve older students directly in daily affairs: At its core, this reform shifts the old pattern of delegation to seniors into bureaucratic terms: "Older students disseminate the lessons and help the teachers with implementing." For assemblies and meals, the student body is organized into color groups, in a team-building approach borrowed from the Scouts. These groups have boys and girls of all ages, which makes it akin to an extended family. Instructionally, student leaders were involved in regular planning of vocational classes and special events ("We train the elder pupils to be spreaders of information to younger pupils"). Finally, they have dorm oversight responsibilities. Discipline is more in line with adult standards: seniors may not strike or punish a student, but must report incidents.

The impact of this extension of the scope of student authority has changed the nature of free-time at Kulaab School, which had a lifeless free-time, as if the students awaited their orders. The creative aspect of their lives had been subjugated to their involvement in the business of formal education. They had internalized adult values. When he was shown photographs of Bua School's free-time, Prathum

exclaimed that the situation ("poor kids getting dirty") at Bua was shameful. He believed that such free-wheeling play was a sign of their relatively lower status and worth.⁵⁴

A feature of Bua School was the great latitude given seniors in childrearing. The affairs of older youth were not closely monitored by teachers. This led to empowerment of a few children with an abusive personality. The chief qualification for the deputy job was ferocity for boys and firmness of manner for girls. Dorm heads conferred about whether a child "has what it takes" to control youngsters. Just as teachers gave the senior youth considerable latitude of control, so did the seniors give their deputies free rein. Some abuse was so excessive as to raise an ethical question for the researcher:

Besides a water cistern near Boys Dorm One a row of young boys is being led through their bath by a fierce-looking deputy. (He's in third grade.) Holding a fresh switch above his head, this "bathmaster," bullies his charges through the steps of cleansing. Each boy steps forward to receive a dollop of shampoo. It drips down their faces and stings their eyes but they aren't allowed to wipe it off. They stand at rigid attention, forbidden even to swat off mosquitoes. The bathmaster takes his time, strutting around, making muscle-man poses. He kicks a boy, who doesn't flinch, and slaps a few faces. It looks like a prison camp. On his next pass, he rubs each of their heads into a lather. He makes them crouch and violently flings scoops of water at them. A few whimper in ineffectual protest.

This kind of abuse was rare. One violent dorm head was swiftly demoted by the administration, possibly due to the researcher's report. The key issue is the attitude towards discipline, which is a fourth area where seniors seem to mirror adult strategies. Most teachers believe that effective normative learning occurs in a climate of "firm tolerance."

⁵⁴ Mr. Keng became Principal of Bua School in 1992 and implemented the color scheme. During a visit in 1994 Nipapon Reilly saw no major change in student relations.

That is, children will learn proper behavior if expectations are repetitively stated. Within these limits adults must be tolerant of children's errors, even while absolute authority rests with them. It is felt that adults must be good role models for children and demonstrate desirable traits.

A minority of teachers prefer a more proactive role. To them the child learns best when physical punishment is applied, via strokes to the backside from a green switch. The trend towards "sparing the rod" in Thai education is incomplete. At Bua, the differing approach to normative instruction was perfectly split along gender lines. A handful of male teachers used force against pupils, which they frequently used during militaristic activities like Scouts.

The corps of student supervisors displayed the same mix of attitudes towards discipline. The distinctions between the genders were maintained. Girl supervisors, like female teachers, relied on verbal means, repeating lessons endlessly and punishing by scolding. A small number of boys resorted to force. They seemed to precisely imitate the styles of the male teachers whom they feared. A favorite topic of conversation was how to choose a painful (flexible) switch.

The non-violent teachers, although in a vast majority, ignored the few who actively persisted in using force. They declined to raise their voice in protest, although they complained in off-duty settings. Like teachers, when a student supervisor saw a peer using physical force, they would turn a blind eye. Nopadol, the head of Dorm 1, was visibly upset when asked about the beatings of boys in Dorm 4. But he declined to interfere since it was the domain of another boy, albeit a junior who would have heeded his advice. In this, the teachers and students were indeed models of tolerance.

Teachers were bound by a code of ethics and regulations for civil servants. For example, the regulations specify that a teacher may not use a switch that exceeds 7 mm in diameter. No such administrative controls are operative in child circles. Older pupils used whatever is handy to manage their charges, sometimes a length of bamboo or a broom handle. These instruments looked more like cudgels than switches. Yet, despite appearances, the force of these sticks was rarely applied. The majority of youth were restrained by the norms of the student body. In cases of excessive and repeated use of force by an individual student supervisor, resentment and resistance grew.

A ubiquitous prop in the hands of teachers and student supervisors of all disciplinary persuasions, the switch had acquired symbolic value. It was a pointer, a regulator of movement, and a threat by being lifted overhead or mentioned (“You’ll get the stick if you don’t listen.”) When used, a few light strokes on the buttocks was typical. The school uniform absorbed most of the blow; the pain is in the shame. Most often it was the teachers who paid attention to the design of their switch, and wore it like a ceremonial sword.

Recollections of their upbringing

The children tapped their memories and collective folklore as a source for their approach to normative instruction. Peer supervisors explained that they drew inspiration from the style of those students who raised them. A dictatorial boy named Pol in the mid-1980s was said to have single-handedly forged the practice of extreme control over young pupils. The prevalence of military forms (Scouts, obedience training) in Thai schools suggest that there were external influences. But the children, working with what they know, attributed changes in the school climate to the influence of key individuals. Of Pol they say, “Before him it was easy-going here. He was strong. Everybody was scared

of him, even the teachers. He hit a teacher once!" They have generated their own historical theories about how things became the way they are now, drawn from what is most visible and real to them.

Recollections of the disciplinary style under which this leading cohort was raised seemed a mythic standard against which they measured their own actions. In interviews the same story was given again and again. Pol was a near-rabid disciplinarian who

In the middle of the night would smash a log into the floorboards beneath the dormitory along the entire length of the bunkroom. We'd all be jolted awake. He'd keep slamming the log until everybody was up. Then he'd march us out into the field to do laps without shoes. We'd run forever then come back and do push-ups. All because he said we were lazy. (Supoj, Tape 1)

A girl dorm head had copied the despotic style. Most present leaders felt this was too severe but justified. They felt that standards of discipline had eroded; Winai stated it as, "Before good, now lazy."

The children did not exercise authority in a purely conformist manner. They modified, created and ignored rules of the adults. In other words, these deaf children were not passive recipients of institutional messages. There was an active interpretation and modification of school norms. These variations are important to elucidate because they suggest how older pupils have a different "theory" about how youngsters learn (and should be taught).

For example, older students were often stricter and more restrictive in disciplining than teachers. Both relied upon the "line-up" as the basic restrictive form, requiring line-ups before every activity, including entering the classrooms. The excessive use of line-ups was being curbed by the Special Education Division: "We have heard that sometimes training is done while the pupils are standing in line at the

flagpole. Instruction should only be given in the classroom.” (Memo to the Principals of deaf schools, 1/18/91)

Older pupils, on the other hand, were under no administrative strictures. The line-ups under their charge were lengthy and strict subjugation of the youngsters’ physical mobility. To stop signing, various commands were given to gain control of the children’s arms. The forms of arm-control included drills such as holding arms over their heads, putting arms on the back of the person in front, keeping arms at the side of the body, crossing arms on the chest, or arms folded behind. No expression, besides facial, was possible as long as the arms of the audience were bound. Literally they were made mute, as if their mouth had been gagged. In these settings there was no chance at participation in a dialogue.

Ironically, group vocalization was a common form of required response in these settings. The children were forced to watch only the youth leader as deputies walked along the rows commanding, “Look at her.” The key difference is that the normal back-channel chatter among students was eliminated. This served an important function in helping students figure out teachers’ signing, besides providing relief from a boring situation. Older students purged this informal outlet of expression, which they saw as competition to full attention. When they chose to, the seniors could silence and suppress communicative urges of youngsters better than any adult attempt.

The relation of authority to creative initiative

The interplay of participatory, creative activities and authoritarian periods shaped the children's social experiences with each other.

The aim of this concluding data section is to look at the relationship of authority to free-time initiative among children. This issue emerged late in the data collection and was addressed through videotaped interviews of student leaders. Both supervisors and sign masters were queried about their recollections as youngsters, asked to estimate the worth of the "other" type of student leader, and to rate dorms by prevalence of authority and storytelling. Younger students were asked for their perceptions of current leaders. See the Interview, part 2, in the Appendix. This section summarizes key findings.

In general, the students accepted that the free-time activities were subordinate to the schedule and its overseers. The children usually fit their free-time affairs into the routine, avoiding direct conflict when the time came to reassert authority. At times there was resistance during the shift of modes, on the part of leaders in relinquishing their hold and by the group. Yet most generally accepted that there was a time and a place for everything. This high degree of conformity at all age levels is complicated by the subtle ways children used to loosen the grip of the schedule. Older students ambled to the mess hall in a straggly manner, perhaps just to socialize (can lead a horse to water, but . . .) Children who felt they deserved to be at a top status level darted out of line and mock-challenged the seniors. When authority slackened the free-time gatherings immediately popped up, scaled to fit the constraints (boys carrying games in their pockets, snippets of stories told while walking).

Yet these are efforts to stretch the established framework of rights and responsibilities accorded by the social organization, rather than

challenge its legitimacy. The older students, whether supervisors or creative leaders, agreed that maintenance of an orderly regimen and punctual schedule was inherently right. Even Winai, the defiant satirist, believed that “discipline is necessary and right.” The predictable movement of children of different ages enabled everyone to eke out a niche for their own activities.

The degree of authority exercised in a setting strongly affected the nature of free-time interaction among the students. As authority increased, the spatial arrangements shifted (to line-up), allowing visual contact only with the leader. Participation in dialogue was restricted to a question-response form. The topics became grounded in the concrete and mundane. The sign master or any communicative child was silenced. The dampening effect of authority had a detectable effect on the overall vitality and diversity of interaction with fixed social groupings of the school. This was seen clearly from the situations in each dorm. The senior leaders were asked to rank each dorm in terms of amount of exerted authority and storytelling. Girls Dorm 3 was ranked the strictest, and had two storytellers, Supapon and Pachri.

In short, the interactive stratification of the students means that younger children can be treated very strictly, and storytelling can still be abundant at the higher social levels. The study would have benefited from interviews of younger pupils to see if their nascent storytelling and conversational circles are being suppressed by strong supervisors. The researchers felt that Girls Dorm Two was most authoritarian, and there were no storytellers. The only creative signer subjugated her creative urges to the demands of child care. Miss Waewtaa zealously embraced her disciplinary duties as deputy dorm head, and pushed storytelling to the back of her social repertoire. A memorable moment was seeing all fifty girls of Dorm 2 sleeping in a straight row on the concrete floor under

the stilts of the dorm on a Sunday afternoon. While the other 350 students frolicked, Waewtaa had decided that sleep was what her dorm needed. However, it seems that it is the extension of authority outside its ordinary bounds, rather than the strictness per se, that determines how much latitude children have to freely socialize.

The tension between an ideology of conformity and of creative initiative was most evident at the level of the seniors. The assumption of responsibility for child-rearing was not a voluntary or popular situation. The price of power was the obligation to forever view student life from the perspective of a supervisor. The senior was an agent of the school, and was held responsible for the misdeeds of youngsters. This meant being always alert to clues from the teachers about expectations, keeping one eye on the clock to meet schedule, and facing tough decisions about how to deal with observed infractions. Assuming authority meant having to conform to a uniform sense of order.

This choice posed a tough dilemma for the “smart” children. They wished to stay close to the world of ideas, which they saw as infinitely more intriguing than the repetitive daily routine. For those who were capable, the domain of sign mastery was a source of endless challenge and reward. For this pursuit they had to bear uniform and unrelenting criticism for avoiding supervisory duties. “He’s lazy because he won’t take charge over the younger boys,” said Mr. Prayun of storyteller Natapong. (For years Natapong had handled class attendance records making him a source on teachers’ own diligence.) A youths who resisted the appointed role were belittled by teacher and peers as someone who “likes to be with younger children.” Student supervisor Prathum said of humorist Jirapan, “He’s lazy, is not a good signer and is a dimwit.” Thus, to those who see through a disciplinary lens, the “smart” children are dumb and incompetent.

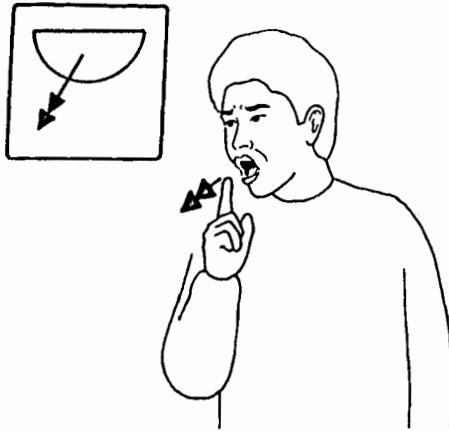
In light of the clear division of the seniors into supervisors and sign masters, it seemed that each older student faced a dilemma of self-identity. Most seniors became either supervisors or creative leaders. Few individuals held both roles. Of the six sign masters who were old enough to assume dorm or deputy leader roles, only two had done so (Thanthep, Supapon). This is unusual because older students rarely managed to avoid the assumption of official duties.

The decision by individual seniors towards authority or creativity made a clear difference in their relationships with younger students. All the interviewees indicated that the two leader roles in the student body required different interpersonal styles. The two types of leader had a distinct role in the emotional life of younger children. The audience members regarded affectionately the few older students who did not wield authority over them, such as Natapong at Bua and Miss Jirapon at Dok Khoon School. It was their non-association with authority that helped make Natapong, Winai and Pachri attractive to younger children. Although it was not said by anyone, sign masters may partly avoid supervisory duties so as to maintain the positive emotional bonds with their followers. Sign masters were more likely to be sought out by young children in distress. They served as “big brothers and big sisters” (phii).

Such caring relations between older and younger Thai people, which Thais call by the term for “older sibling, younger sibling” (Phii-nong) are not seen in authoritarian settings. The student supervisors were feared and obeyed by the students, but were not held in high esteem. When children needed advice or comfort they did not seek out the supervisors. They did not consider them to be supporters. They were said to be people who “only scolded” as seen in the next sign drawing.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ In Thai: Waa yang diaw.

A sign used to describe the behavior of a student supervisor



A few sign masters managed to satisfy the demands of both creative and overseer roles. Thanthep became a kindly supervisor, who gave primary attention to their creative leadership. He reported frequent quarrels with his buddy, Wieng, the head of Dorm 3. Wieng complained that the storytelling and broadcasting (“yucking it up”) was disturbing to his peace of mind and his study. Consequently, Thanthep often slept in Dorm 4 where there was no such conflict.

The call to a scheduled activity is an interruption of the creative flow. To acquiesce to the intrusion is to subordinate one’s internal motivation to an external, arbitrary force. The children did not fundamentally challenge the framework enforced by their peers. Yet there were many complaints about interruption. Thanthep said,

Often we get part way through an story, whether it be Terminator or whatever and teachers interrupt us. They say, “Time to go to class or time to line-up and the story is cut short. We’ll be signing along and just cut it off. We have to leave. This happens many, many times. [He turns to his Wiang and said] Right? Isn’t that right, Wiang? Just the over day I was over there telling this story and Teacher A came up and said, “Come on you gotta stop, you gotta go. Aargh.” [Thanthep makes a sign with a gnarled, gripping five hand at the forehead, which means very annoying].

Pachri felt that her signing mentor, Nuu Jaa, had not returned to school because of antagonism from a peer supervisor in the dorm. Yet supervisors sometimes let free-time activities carry on beyond scheduled time. They were most tolerant of storytelling and often allowed them to finish, partly because the teller was a peer or friend. Yet they expressed empathy with the audience of stories. Several dorm heads expressed frustration at the memory of interruptions by peer supervisors when they were younger and by teachers. Supoj, the Head of Boys Dorm 1 exclaimed, "I recall when I was young, if the story was interrupted it was really upsetting. I couldn't sleep, just tossed and turned thinking about it. When the story was told to the end, I'd feel fulfilled and comfortable."⁵⁶ Every interviewee named a sign master who was influential in their lives. Even supervisors had once sat at the knee of storytellers, and many appreciated its value.

There were school activities that were hybrids of authority and "freedom," such as assemblies, when children were confined to a defined space, but were free to act. In this intermediate situation, the confinement to a room precluded the forming of friendship groups. The children responded to semi-restricted settings with uniquely public forms. These performances were flashier and often simpler in idea and language than the displays of creative talent within natural groups. They were entertaining, not instructive. Some told outrageous jokes to the derision of the girls and the delight of the boys. A popular act was imitating the gyrations of rock singers and lip-synching into an imaginary microphone. A row of young girls were herded up front to perform their new dance step. The performers were regarded as lacking wisdom and grace, like jugglers and jesters of the court. Yet the structure of these intermediate settings challenged and broadened social expertise.

⁵⁶ Videotape #10.

They were learning to acknowledge the demands of social performance outside their cliques. The freedom to act while being confined together led the student body to create new forms of expression suitable for every member.

At times the seniors themselves used their authority to structure and protect a creative activity. After meetings the girl dorm heads would tell the girls to “get in your circles and talk.” They were free to choose their own partners and to converse as they liked, but had to remain in a fixed place for a set period. One night a teacher entered the room and upon asking what was going on, she was assured that “everything was under control.” The older pupils thus protected free-time interaction from encroachment. Regularly in the evenings the senior boys called the second to fifth graders to bring their books to the tables under the dorms. They held hour-long tutorial sessions with the focus on math and writing exercises. Senior pupils would write or sign questions and elicit replies. These tutoring sessions were surprisingly participatory, somewhat like a conversation between older and younger students about a problem. These instances also motivated other boys to sit nearby and pool their resources on homework. Inquiries about these settings were not conducted, but it seemed that the older students had found a satisfactory way to maintain attention of youngsters on academics.

Structure and imposed agenda by itself can lead to fruitful exchanges and learning, as seen in the intermediate settings above. However, when excessive authority was exercised, the atmosphere of privacy was dissipated. In a sense their intellectual home had been invaded and they were ordered out into the public street without belongings. This is the case when creative and participatory interaction was supplanted by repetitive and didactic forms.

Chapter V

Summary of Findings & Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The central question addressed in this study is how deaf children living in an isolated boarding school organize their social relations to create educational opportunities for themselves. This involved describing the nature of the interactional process among deaf students in a boarding school in Thailand. Using an inductive approach of participant observation and interview, the researcher spent seven months documenting the structure and educational function of the deaf students' activities. The findings for the four research questions are described following review of the theoretical underpinnings.

The nature of social interaction plays a critical role in early childhood learning. Deafness highlights two elements of full-bodied interaction: the requirement for a shared channel of communication between interlocutors and the embedding of a vehicle of meaning, i.e., a natural language. The response of caregivers (parents, teachers) to the perceptual orientation towards vision of deaf children has specific implications for the child's ease of interaction and learning. The Thai deaf students at Bua School were raised in homes where audition is the primary channel of verbal meaning. Profound deafness precludes easy communication through spoken language. In such settings, the deaf child misses out on what other children easily learn. This deprivation has serious consequences for the intellectual and language development of the deaf child; most of the deaf students knew little language of any kind when they arrived at the Bua School for the Deaf.

Education for deaf children has been primarily concerned with how to communicate with deaf children and in which language, signed or spoken. Chapter I reviewed the major communicative strategies of educators. The assimilatory approach of oral-aural methods has been supplanted in popularity by the more accommodating approach of using manual (signed) communication. This has meant an increasing level of visual accommodation by teachers to deaf children, using various systems of signing and natural sign languages. In most instances the practice has been to use an artificial, signed code to represent the national spoken language. This is unsatisfactory because it does not provide a clear and consistent model of either spoken or signed language for the child.

In spite of a long history of varied approaches, academic outcomes by deaf students in all nations continue to be disappointing. The mid-20th century shift from oral-aural to visual-manual means of instruction led to solid gains for many deaf students. Most deaf children continue to achieve academically below their cognitive potential. This paradox has compelled a search for alternative means to utilize the visual capability of deaf children. It has long been observed that among themselves deaf people use a natural sign language fluently and effectively. The most insightful situation is in the conduct of childrearing by signing, deaf families. The effective use of a visual channel and language allow these deaf children to learn in a normal manner and rate.

However, these insights from deaf people's communicative practices have rarely been applied by educators to the improvement of schooling for deaf children. Ostensibly, there is an insufficient body of research that demonstrates the efficacy of a natural sign language in achieving educational aims, especially literacy. Yet these issues cannot be studied in the classroom until schools permit the full natural sign language to be used there by proficient adults and to allow

documentation of the communicative process. To date, a few opportunities have opened in schools that have adopted a bilingual-bicultural approach (using a natural sign language and a second, written language.) A handful of substantial research projects in classrooms are underway in the United States and Europe.

For the vast majority of nations, there is only one potential domain for study of unhindered interaction in schools: the everyday social interaction among deaf students using a natural sign language. A boarding school for the deaf in Thailand provided an ideal site for this study.

#1. What kinds of group interactions occur among these deaf children? What are the properties of these activities (form and function)?

This study looked in-depth at the activities of the students during the evenings and weekends while in the dorms and public areas. Initially, it was assumed that these conditions would produce a free-time period that was entirely about voluntary and playful activity. After all, most teachers were off-duty leaving four hundred children on their own. Surprisingly, the students organized both regimented meetings and participatory, creative gatherings during the after-hours periods. The delegation of authority to older students by teachers extended the official sense of order and discipline around the clock.

The data on student interaction was presented in two major sections: (a) **Free-time activities** and (b) **Patterns of authority by students**. Social gatherings were described as to the participants and their roles, the manner of communication, and its function and meaning in the students' lives.

The **free-time activities** of the youth were varied, complex and governed by specific rules of conduct. These were presented under two headings, **Creative narratives** and **Participatory gatherings**.

The students showed a persistent drive to create narratives in sign language. Creative narratives were classified under the headings **storytelling, broadcasting, and interpreting**. These narratives are expressions of the desire to enhance the pool of ideas in a closed-in world. At the center of **creative narratives** were the sign masters. They were prized for their ability to articulate complex ideas in intelligible ways. Their manner of communication was crisp, clear and detailed, which others admired and tried to emulate. The sign masters felt that they were descendants of a line of important leaders in the student body. They recognized their debt to their mentors who had already graduated. They felt a duty to carry on storytelling and in training the next generation of storytellers. The interaction between sign master and audience was structured as regards who is allowed to join and rules of conduct.

Storytelling was very popular among the 10-13 year old students. Snippets of tales filled interludes between authoritarian activities. When time allowed, skilled storytellers told lengthy and detailed renditions of movies and original stories. These sign masters, ranging in age from 13-17 years old, had no identifiable advantage in their background, such as signing, deaf parents. They had practiced their skills and spent years watching older storytellers. They told stories because they felt an urge to express themselves and because they felt obligated to take over the role of storyteller from a mentor who had graduated. Their audience members were typically only one to three years younger. This small age gap is typical of most free-time interactions. The girls' story circles tended to be more exclusionary and private than boys.

Broadcasting serves an important function of acquiring and conveying news from the outside world. The students who choose this genre are judged by their veracity and accuracy, which often motivates them to improve their literacy and investigative skills. **Interpreting** is the expression of an analytic skill in figuring out visual clues, like television shows and the signing of teachers. Older students interpreted in order to assist the understanding of younger students.

Participatory gatherings are dialogic and egalitarian activities by students of equal social status. Three types were discussed: **conversational circles**, **verbal dueling**, and **games and sports**. The large size of the Bua student body enabled the children to form a myriad of such associations. **Conversational circles** are used by students who are comfortable using the sign language, usually after three or four years. They break into groups of three to eight children with similar mental and linguistic skills. The circles are intended for rapid and easy rapport, and so every member must have the requisite skills. Slower youth, even of the same age, are often excluded. **Verbal dueling** is an improvisational and competitive exchange among boys of equal standing. The boys seemed to play out a good-spirited verbal duel for personal recognition. **Games and sports** are an outlet of both intellectual and physical skills for all the students. As such, it provided a window on their structuring of participation and mechanisms of teaching and learning. The transmission of gaming knowledge is chiefly by watching and practicing with peers of a similar skill level. Almost no explicit instruction was observed, since players are expected to know the rules as a qualification for joining a game. Yet there was variance among players in terms of skills and experience, which may have served as guided instruction. Finally, the relations between teachers and students during athletics were more normal than in any other activity. This may be attributed to the

visual, concrete nature of sports and the belief by teachers that deaf children could succeed in this activity.

The second major category of interaction is **Patterns of authority by students**. In the Thai schools for the deaf, the students have a major role in discipline. Older students took care of the needs of youngsters, such as getting them to meals, making sure they bathed, and instructing them in rules. By delegating authority to reliable older students, the teachers successfully extended an adult sense of order into the private times and places of the youth. This had a profound impact on the relations among students. Dialogue was replaced by one-way, didactic lecture. Drills and line-ups emphasized control, not creative initiative. The aim was to transmit a sense of proper behavior, which the seniors derived from recollections of their own dorm upbringing and the models of discipline by teachers. They did not exercise authority in a purely conforming manner, instead modifying and even ignoring rules. While often as strict or stricter than teachers, the older students did have a sense of empathy for the children engaged in creative narratives. In fact, occasionally the student supervisors protected free-time activities.

#2. What function does each type of group interaction have in the learning of language, knowledge and social norms? What value do the children themselves see in these interactions?

The interactions among the students play an important role in their cognitive, social and language development. Teachers stated that the teaching by older deaf children is important in producing impressive learning gains after entering the school. The task here is to summarize how the different types of after-hours activity support learning. The precise function of each activity was difficult to discover. In some instances, the students told what their social activities meant to them

and these explanations were quoted in the text. The researcher drew inferences from the students' statements and about the skills that each kind of activity seemed likely to exercise. This information has been summarized in the following table.

Table 9. The functions of interactions for students at each status level

Types of interaction and their functions			
Social status:	Creative narratives	Participatory gatherings	Authoritarian exercises
Senior	(Foregone, except for few who escape overseer duties.)	Emotional support, Joint learning	To exercise authority over youngsters
Regular	To learn new signs and concepts	Camaraderie & practice	To learn discipline; leadership training
Newcomer	(Excluded)	Association through play	To learn rules & language in context

Each activity, of course, has multiple and varying functions in learning, depending on the individual child, the combination of participants on each occasion, and the history of the interpersonal relationships (see Clignet, 1981).

“We thirst for narratives” was the explanation that students gave as to why they liked **creative narratives**. The signed stories, re-telling of news and interpreting of television were most popular among the regular status students. They attended to overcome boredom, to seek explanation, to get some new ideas, and to socialize. The ideas that were shared helped overcome the isolation of the boarding school. Their favorite topics might not seem to provide good examples for learning. Yet all complex narratives are vehicles for concepts, examples of vocabulary and sentence structure, and frameworks of interrelated events (plot).

A story about science fiction and ghosts embeds concepts like cause-and-effect and challenges the child to distinguish the realms of the real, the possible, and the fantastic. Heartfelt tales of relationships reveal the range of human motivation and emotion, and enable children to ponder these socially. The Bua students' choice of topics reveals their interests and their concerns. To these topics, the students paid close attention for over thirty minutes at a stretch, while in class they are restless. They showed keen interest in the narrative structure and followed the plots from beginning to end, which may be helpful in reading. A wide range of topics lets these shut-in children reach out and touch more pieces of the world, whether news or tales.

Watching creative narratives enriches the students' receptive skills in the sign language. New vocabulary is introduced in the context of a story, so that clues are available for figuring out the meaning. The audience watches how masterful signers make precise distinctions of meaning, using manual and non-manual elements (body, eyes, facial expressions) for both affective and grammatical functions. In contrast to the restricted pattern of language in daily routine, the creative narratives are a singular occasion of declarative, non-conversational sentences. This may help youngsters to use more complex constructions themselves.

At the core of creative narratives, the sign masters gain an opportunity to learn how to make public presentations. The public signers show a level of self-confidence which may carry over into their relations outside school. After all, the deaf person in a non-signing society always needs to take the initiative in bridging the communication gap, which relies upon self-assertion and resourcefulness. The stories exercise the memory of the teller, since they have a repertoire of a dozen or more tales, each perhaps thirty minutes long. Those who were news broadcasters were resourceful in gathering and verifying information

from television, magazines and adults. This pursuit of knowledge heightened their interpretive and possibly literacy skills. Interpreters needed to rapidly analyze sparse non-verbal clues from television and convey it in a simple fashion to younger children. This analytic faculty of "making sense" is a key skill for deaf people in situations where their sign language is rarely used. Skills of deduction are also involved in figuring out the irregular and incomplete signing by teachers.

The younger children were well aware that mastery in signing required practice, and a few aspired to pursue this goal. This required dedication to the task of watching, imitating and practicing. Thus, the creative narratives motivated some students to apply their efforts in order to excel. The creative narratives do not appear to serve a major function in learning by the youngest students (newcomer status). They are often excluded from these gatherings by older students. This is regrettable, because the youngsters in their second year and older are interested in some stories when they are welcomed. As for seniors, most give up creative narratives in favor of conversational circles and to satisfy the demands upon them to act as supervisors.

Participatory gatherings gave the students a chance to learn a variety of norms for varied situations. Each conversational circle, verbal duel, and game had an underlying set of rules and privileges which had to be learned. To violate these norms was to risk being expelled by one's fellows. For example, when a child attempted to dominate a conversational circle they might be chastised with the sign "speaks too-much." Those who took offense at the gibes during verbal dueling were not welcome. Illegal play of fellow soccer players was chastised. Girls reported expelling friends who had shared private secrets with other girls outside their circle. The consequences of indecorous acts were swift and

sure. Thus, even within the confines of an institution the students learned lessons about how to act socially.

Deaf children are often in passive roles in settings where speech is used. Among themselves they finally had opportunity for self-expression. The students at Bua spoke of a burning desire to release bottled up ideas and feelings upon returning to school after holiday. They had their deaf friends with which to share their experiences. The friendship circles gave students a way to form an intimate and private space within the large institution. In no other setting had the children been able to discuss their thoughts about family, life, and the future.

Cognitively, the circles are a way for students to pool their knowledge in problem-solving. This is an excellent example of cooperative learning and was observed among boys and girls in the regular and senior status. Most of the participatory interactions were among children of similar gender and age. Thus, the difficulty of play and discourse was tailored to comfortably allow equal understanding and contribution. The exclusion of younger and less capable individuals stemmed in part from the intent to create a fully participatory gathering.

Verbal dueling is a way for students to engage in pure language play at a sophisticated, humorous level. Games and sports are both an intellectual and physical exercise, requiring coordination of knowledge about rules and strategy with physical movement. The less competitive games seemed designed as a social event and a way to create strong relationships, and offer the comfort of touching.

The **patterns of authority** did impress upon the students the normative conventions of the school and the hearing world. The older students believed that their discipline and instruction were essential for youngsters learning the "proper ways." These are basic obedience,

timeliness, diligence, and cleanliness. Even though older students frequently railed about the state of disorder, most youth began to accept their duties within three years. They would rise early, bathe, dress, and get to meals with minimal prompting. Their chores included grounds upkeep and dorm cleaning. In the terms of the Thai educational system, these deaf students are well-behaved. Their progress is due in large part to the instruction by older students.

Older students received the message that conformity brings rewards. Those who were reliable student supervisors and played by the rules were allowed great latitude in the conduct of their after-hours affairs, including visits to town. Those seniors who refused to become overseers were considered immature and untrustworthy. However, for some, retaining control over their lives was worth the cost. The tension between free-time and authoritarian modality presented the students with many choices. The boarding school can thus provide its students the opportunity to learn how to cope with varied social settings.

Implicit within the success of an authoritarian activity is adherence by each student to the roles of the social hierarchy. Respect for more senior people and consideration for those below oneself is a tenet of Thai social life. The limited interactions between children of different status levels does seem to belie the phii-nong (mentoring) relationship called for by educators (the awu-so concept is similar). The students soon came to believe that a fierce and commanding manner was the only way to get respect and obedience from youngsters. Teachers supported this view. This belief was contradicted by the example of sign masters who had earned loyal followings because of their intellect and compassion.

The students taught and learned many lessons by themselves, and this knowledge helped them understand lessons from teachers. In other words, the children are active partners in their learning. The teachers

limited knowledge of sign language may prevent them from recognizing the students' existing knowledge.

#3. How does children's intellectual and linguistic condition relate to their social standing in the student body? What are the varying interactive opportunities available to children of different ages and gender?

At Bua School for the Deaf, a student's intellectual and linguistic condition is a key to their status in the student body and thus to their opportunity to engage in various free-time interactions. Most of the deaf children enter the school from hearing-speaking families with whom they have had only very difficult communication. While in the residential school most of the deaf students show a gradual growth from a state of languagelessness to full fluency in the Thai Sign Language. As they grasp the use of a language for the first time, they make commensurate gains in their general knowledge and social skills. The stages of learning that individual members pass through is reflected in the social organization of the student body. They have formed three major sub-groups. Every pupil is ranked in a hierarchy as either a newcomer, regular member, or senior.

Each status level has a corresponding term in the children's sign language which refers to cognitive and mental condition. This was dubbed the "social hierarchy of the mind." The new pupil (newcomer) is called a "know-nothing," since they have little knowledge of the sign language or of school routine. After three to four years the student is said to have "become mindful," which earns them the status of regular member of the student body. A few who do not develop language and mental acuity in a timely manner are called "numbskulls." While some of these youth are victimized, the other students usually label them as

unfortunate and dysfunctional. At the other end are the highly respected individuals who are called "smart" by virtue of their wit and elocutionary skills. Upon an individual child's intellectual designation rests their social standing and, thus, their role in student body affairs.

The implications for learning arising from an intellectual basis for social organization was addressed. The study does not fully explain the subtleties of student social organization, which also involves differentiation and ranking of age, personality, and physical prowess. In these considerations, the deaf students are like other children. What makes the case of these deaf students intriguing is that they have developed a pattern of educative social relations for themselves. They structure their relations in ways that provide students' access to informal teaching and learning activities that are deemed suitable for their level. The rationale and objectives of their own educational approach were often implicit, yet structured and disciplined nonetheless.

The general pattern of free-time association is two-fold: (a) limited and didactic interaction between children in different levels and; (b) elaborated, extended exchanges among students within each status level. The bulk of interpersonal communication between different social groups tends to be generated by the school's own groupings, such as dorm affairs and assemblies. Very rarely do seniors and newcomers interact directly. The seniors use deputies drawn from the "regular" group to help in the care of newcomers. Didactic and concrete language is common. The transmission of information is usually downwards, from elder to younger child. At the same time, younger students at every level spend considerable time watching and learning from their elders. Typically full participation in the higher-level activities denied those below. Even watching quietly may be denied a younger child in some circumstances. Girls tended to be more exclusionary than boys.

The ranked separation of the students compels them to draw upon the learning resources of members of their group. Children spend most of their free-time involved with others at the same status level. Friendships, games, and conversational circles are almost always formed within one group. Because each status level in fact contains a diverse mix of individuals, there is close association among children of moderately different stages of cognitive, linguistic, and age development. This is a key part of the children's informal learning. For example, observation of newcomers revealed that they are actively taught during play and instruction from pupils who are slightly older. The slightly more experienced student provided guided support within the newer student's "zone of proximal development" (concept from Vygotsky, 1978, see interpretation by Rogoff, 1990). The older child may also benefit by being challenged to explain concepts.

This supportive role is declined by older students, who seem to have no interest in the individual newcomers beyond their supervisory duties. The elders implicitly admit the bond among in-group youngsters in their cascading approach to management. Older students' practices of supervision revealed their notions about how deaf youngsters should be taught. In general, newcomers were considered to be in a state of transition requiring time, immersion in a signing environment, and direct instruction. Newcomers were made to "act in undifferentiated unison" (see Table 3). They were expected to watch silently and thereby learn the signs and the rules. Older students believe that this "scaffold" of predictable routine is how they themselves "became mindful."

The emergence from a state of "know-nothing" was described as a long period of watching other students in regimented and free-time periods, remembering more and more, and finally a dawn of understanding. Graduation from a status group depends upon

communal recognition of a child's cognitive and linguistic abilities, and, except for the precocious, reaching an appropriate age and size. Most newcomers take from three to four years before they are considered "regular" members, and they become seniors when they enter the secondary level.

The shift to a "regular" status gives students the wherewithal to create and to participate in varied free-time interactions. The "regular" group is quite diverse, ranging in age from ten to fourteen years old. The large size of Bua School is a boon to the formation of numerous natural groups. Other distinctions which the children make among themselves are not explained here. These involve personality (assertiveness brings respect), gender (boys valued over girls), and physical prowess. The life of a regular student is complicated by this group's own internal hierarchy by age and by gender relations. The members of this regular group share a fondness for creative narrative, such as storytelling. Having achieved fluency and understanding in an accessible sign language, they yearn for the narratives spun by peers, be they truth-telling or make-believe.

Regular students are generally permitted to observe the social affairs of seniors and to assist them in their supervisory duties. These relations with older students are an important element in their advancing learning, as well as in instilling a desire to move up the status ladder. This aspiration of regular students was observed in their imitative behavior of both storytellers and dorm supervisors. At this early juncture the student already faces the choice of whether to follow a creative or an authoritarian path to leadership.

At the pinnacle of the social hierarchy of the mind are "smart" students. This honorific sign is reserved for those who are able to grasp and to convey ideas extremely well and who have the daring personality to do so publicly. These rare masters of sign are the storytellers, the

conveyers of news (broadcasters), and interpreters. In a closed world, the sign masters generate new ideas. They are prized sources of insight, inspiration, and information. By interpreting the silent images on the television, they string together disparate images into coherent narrative. These special boys and girls help younger pupils make sense of the world around them. The sign master is central to the intellectual development of the deaf children at Bua School.⁵⁷

By making intellectual and language skills a basis for social standing, the deaf students at Bua School create a pathway of experience through which they all pass. Their social hierarchy of the mind is based on the belief that interaction using signs will dispel the stultifying effects of early communication deprivation. The students give their highest rewards of attention and respect to peers who enrich the learning environment with new ideas in an eye-catching manner.

#4. How does the structure and climate of the boarding school affect interaction and learning among students?

Above all, the boarding school provides a place for deaf children to find others like themselves. Thai deaf graduates consider the attendance at the boarding school as a central event of their lives, which gave them the chance to learn their sign language, become a member of a community, and acquire skills. This is possible because Thai educators tolerate sign language and provide ample free-time for deaf students.

Every deaf student is involved in four school groupings, namely, as a pupil in a classroom, a resident of a dorm, a participant in gender-specific activities, and a member of the student body. They have to learn the unique purpose and set of norms for each school grouping and figure

⁵⁷ Shorter observations suggest that they seem to fulfill the same key role at Kulaab and Dok Khoon Schools. Owen Wrigley pointed out that the sign masters retain their influential status in the Thai deaf community, as leading members of cliques (personal communication, May, 1994).

out how to handle the shifts and conflicts between them. Each child gets exposure to other children with whom he might not naturally associate. Since these groups have children of different ages and skills, there is an enhanced opportunity for learning compared to groups with children who are all the same level. For example, in its class placements, the school creates groups that support cross-age learning. Every grade contains a mix of ages, due to varying year of enrollment and the high rate of repeated grades. This mix may be most helpful in the lower grades. If the teacher allows cooperative learning or back channel explanations, the older students can help instruct the younger. These relationships continue outside the classroom, since the school permits children of different ages and genders to associate during free-time.

Teachers at Bua School delegate authority for child supervision to older pupils. This has a profound impact on the relationships among the students. The older students assume a role of proxy supervisor and, indeed, caretaker for young children. The teachers seemed to most value the traits of reliability, obedience, and diligence in supervision. While the supervisory role is felt to require a strict and didactic manner, this style of leadership is not conducive with the older-younger, brotherly-sisterly relationships (*phii-nong*) held as an ideal in Thailand. In other words, there is an incompatibility between the compassionate approach valued in Thai social relations and the brusque manner that older children are told to express towards younger students. Most older students reluctantly assume authority. They are fourteen to seventeen years old and desire to pursue their own social affairs.

Those who are known for their mastery in signing face a dilemma. The involvement with creative ideas and public performance is not compatible with the supervisory role. The teachers and peers pressure the sign masters to become supervisors. Ironically, these “smart” youth who

are at the top of the students' social hierarchy are thought to be dumb and incompetent when they resist assuming authority over others. In general, the teachers could not accurately distinguish between students who were slackers and those who were serving important roles in intellectual leadership.

In line with Thai educational policy, Bua School places emphasis upon maintaining a sense of order and discipline. The older students supervise youngsters generally according to the teachers' model of discipline. Four examples are the use of intermediaries in student management, vocal drills, the delegation of labor and the attitudes towards punishment and discipline. Thus, even in spite of the language barrier, the students are learning normative expectations and techniques of control. The transfer of social norms seems to be more effective than academic instruction.

The isolation of the boarding students impoverishes the resources for their intellectual pursuits. They avidly try to make sense of fragmented information from the outside. Their sources of information are limited to television without captions or interpreting, printed material, and the occasional visitor who uses signs. They do not ordinarily seek out the advice of teachers; the students who are skilled at broadcasting news and interpreting information are considered more reliable. Still the students do not receive enough input to satisfy their natural curiosity. The students do not feel that they are welcome inhabitants of the town of Bua. Bua is a small and safe town, which would probably open its arms to the deaf students if the school showed the way. Fortunately, the teachers and the students have unofficial agreements whereby trustworthy students can visit town briefly. However, the youngest children need guided experiences outside the walls of the school.

The physical isolation does produce conditions for rich and useful interaction among the deaf students. The fact that all children remained together at school during weekends enabled them to devise a number of extended participatory and creative activities. When the students commute daily or go home on the weekends, the natural groupings of children in the school are suspended. This is so at Kulaab School for the Deaf, where less than 40% of the student body were boarders, and the child peer groups were depopulated on weekends and evenings. Consequently, the children at Kulaab were relatively passive and listless, as if awaiting leadership.

Recommendations for education of deaf children

While directly relevant to Thailand, the recommendations may have bearing for other nations considering the role of residential schools.

Recommendations for education policy:

1. **Recognize** that a residential school provides supportive conditions for learning by deaf children, by enabling full participation with others in the same language. • **Apply** these conditions as criteria by which to evaluate the efficacy of various educational placements for deaf children. • **Consider** the residential school as an appropriate educational placement for deaf children, unless an equally conducive environment can be sustained in other schools.
2. **Adopt** the national sign language (as used by deaf people) as a medium of instruction, so as to provide accessible instruction. • **Modify** hiring and credentialing regulations so as to involve deaf adults (who are expert users of the sign language) in the classrooms.
3. **Provide** kindergarten and primary education to all deaf children, even if this delays the expansion of the upper grades. Early schooling is critical for those raised in hearing-speaking homes.

Recommendations for school and classroom:

4. **Devise** a curriculum for new deaf students that focuses on the development of sign language and conceptual skills, so as to accelerate academic readiness.
5. Teachers should get to know their students outside the classroom. • **Assure** that the boarding students' overall school life has a "normal" balance of disciplinary and free activities, i.e., similar to other children in the society.
6. **Allow** deaf students of all ages a chance to socialize together, to take advantage of their tendency to teach and learn from each other. • **Adapt** the students' own forms of pedagogy and language to the classroom. • **Encourage** older students to assist the academic learning of the younger pupils.

The justification of these recommendations are discussed below followed by suggestions for further research.

Justification of recommendations

Purposes of education for deaf children

Ideally, a deaf child would be provided a full education while meeting their unique needs. This means learning social norms, values and behaviors of the community and nation, and knowledge and skills deemed necessary for citizenship. For example, Thai education aims to produce children who are diligent, disciplined, and have a strong moral and ethical sense. Academically, Thai students are taught a combination of traditional knowledge, scientific material, and practical skills.⁵⁸

In every society children who are deaf are capable of learning full curricular and cultural knowledge. Deafness does not have any direct impact upon raw mental capability and intellectual functioning. There is essentially a normal distribution of intelligence in the deaf population. Where deaf children are different is their need to learn through the sense of vision. Deafness precludes effective communication through speech. If speech alone is used, even with hearing aids, most profoundly deaf children will be unable to learn at a normal rate. This is confirmed by the low academic achievement and high rates of illiteracy among deaf students educated under the "oral-aural" approach. The developmental lags of new students at the Thai school (called by their fellow students "know-nothings") are clear evidence of the cost of being raised in an oral-only home.

Society and its schools must make a special accommodation to the deaf child as regards the channel of communication and the medium of instruction. The process of schooling for deaf children must be conducted

⁵⁸ Sources used on Thai education policy include: The 6th & 7th Educational, Religious, and Cultural Plans, and interviews with officials, namely, the Head of Special Education Division and administrators at three deaf schools. The work benefited from interpretations by Thai educators, especially Mrs. Sathaporn Suvannus, while the researcher was working in Thailand from 1978-1985.

in a visually accessible medium, of which more will be said later.

The diversity of background among deaf children means that schooling can serve different functions in their development, especially in the early years of attendance. A small minority of deaf children come to school ready to learn academic tasks. These are usually children whose parents are deaf and who have used a sign language at home with them at home since birth. For these youth who enter with grasp of a (sign) language, normal learning gains in academic and normative goals can be anticipated, if the school makes an accommodation of providing a sign language as the medium of instruction. For these few deaf children, the school serves the same function as for hearing children-- to build upon the learning which has begun at home.⁵⁹ It is not so much the sign language per se that is important. Rather, these youth have the advantage of being immersed in a consistent language environment at home and at school. They participate in daily life using an understandable language, and this nurtures their intellectual and social development.

However, the vast majority of deaf children come to school cognitively and linguistically delayed. For them school is a place to acquire a primary language and the fundamental knowledge which was not learned during years of communicative deprivation in speaking homes. The deaf child who has grown up in a hearing-speaking family has limited experience, since the natural process of socialization at home has been stymied. First of all, these deaf children need to acquire a first language. Without language, their intellect and skills are kept bottled up, which is a frustrating burden for them and their families. To the schools falls the task of helping the majority of deaf children overcome

⁵⁹ This is not intended to mean that school and home experiences are always mutually supportive. For example, the children of Sino-Tibetan hill tribes are sent to Thai boarding schools which aim to replace their home language and customs.

their delayed development. A process of basic and remedial learning must precede the introduction of an academic curriculum.

In summary, all deaf children need special accommodation of visual communication and language. In addition, many require a period of basic and remedial learning. Once these needs have been met, deaf children are capable of undergoing a full socialization and education like any child in the society. The major types of schooling should be evaluated as to their suitability for providing such service to deaf children. These are residential (boarding) institutions, special day schools, and placement in a regular classroom in a local school (called mainstreaming). The scope of this dissertation allows us to pursue one part of this query, namely, to what extent can a residential school satisfy the educational goals and needs of deaf children?

Justification of recommendations

The residential school is a place where a deaf youth can be immersed in an educative environment that is fully accessible to them. **Thus, it is recommended that educational policymakers recognize that a residential school provides supportive conditions for learning by deaf children, by enabling full participation with others in the same language.** The key is the integration of full communication with participation in a variety of activities. The sign language, as a vehicle of shared reference available to all, is a binding element of the school community. The myriad daily tasks of living and working together in a defined space enable learning in consort with action. By immersion in an active and accessible social scene, the deaf child of hearing parents who has little language can gradually fill in gaps in fundamental skills and knowledge. (In this study the process of remedial development took three to four years.) At the same time, the child of deaf parents who

already knows signs may immediately begin to take advantage of the situation, because there is no disjuncture of language between their home and school.

Many residential schools fail to fulfill their potential, because of the failure of educators to use the sign language in the classroom. Too often there is a split community: into signing deaf students and speaking teachers. Educators are often ill-prepared to converse fluently in signs. Thus, there is a bifurcated situation of fluent rapport among students, but fractured communication between deaf students and hearing teachers. In such settings, the classroom activities are made extremely cumbersome. Consequently, in the Thai school studied here the academic processes and outcomes were unsatisfactory to teachers, students, parents, and this researcher. In fact, there have long been complaints about the low standards of residential institutions worldwide. While educators tend to blame the incapacity of deaf students, in informal settings where sign language is being used they are quick of mind and ready for learning. The source of low academic standards is not the deaf students, but the attitudes and practices of their educators. To be fair, this is an endemic problem in all schooling for deaf children. However, it seems more frustrating in the residential setting, because of its potential for providing a completely accessible learning environment.

It is recommended that schools for the deaf adopt the national sign language (as used by deaf people) as a medium of instruction, so as to provide accessible instruction. Moreover, the social community enabled by a consistent form of communication has both pedagogical and psychological benefits for students. There are many forms of visual communication invented for deaf education which have some usefulness. However, these artificial codes lack a community of users and productive power of a natural language. Fortunately, the most

sophisticated form of visual communication, a sign language, is available within virtually every nation. The sign languages of the world have been developed within local deaf communities over long periods of time and so have become effective and precise vehicles of meaning.

In many nations the indigenous sign language is still unrecognized by educators and general society, which does not negate its potential usefulness. Since natural sign languages have only rarely been used during instruction in classrooms, a period of trial-and-error should be anticipated. The most experienced educators in sign language are deaf adults, who use signs to raise and educate their children and to carry out their communal activities. They can be good resources in classroom instruction using signs. This may require that the authorities **modify hiring and credentialing regulations so as to involve deaf adults (who are expert users of the sign language) in the classrooms.**

Interestingly, in many nations the trend towards using sign language has co-occurred with a shift away from institutionalization in boarding schools. An innovative approach called bilingual-bicultural education is now being implemented in several state residential schools in the United States and in the Nordic countries, among others. A premise of this approach is that the school should be an integrated and consistent language community. Research in these bilingual-bicultural schools will reveal the possibilities and limitations of the concept of school as learning community.

The most steadfast contributor to the efficacy of the residential school is the social relations among deaf students. While policies and practices about communication in the classrooms vary, the helpful influence of the deaf student body in supporting each others' learning persists. Given the chance, deaf children have impressive capacity to learn and to teach. Deaf children in the Thai case created an after-hours

environment that was supportive of natural and easy learning through the eyes. All members of the student body benefited from the diverse and complex array of learning opportunities. Together they found a way to achieve a normal state of childhood, in which curiosity and involvement spurred evolution of the mind.

The educational tendency of deaf youth together should be acknowledged as a unique asset of the residential institution. **Three conditions (aspects) of residential school life seem to engender active teaching and learning amongst students: (a) the use of a sign language as a vernacular; (b) sufficient numbers of youth of different ages to form peer groups and a multi-tiered social organization and; (c) having ample opportunity to associate together during a wide range of activities. It is recommended to apply these conditions as criteria by which to evaluate the efficacy of various educational placements for deaf children.**

This re-evaluation is becoming important, because in many nations the decline of the residential school has preceded consideration of its value. During the past thirty years, the integration of deaf children into regular schools (or mainstreaming) has become the dominant arrangement in most Western nations. Where the residential school has become a placement of last resort, the composition and size of its student body has changed dramatically. More multi-handicapped youth are placed there and the brightest youth are sent to regular schools. The enrollments have dwindled and limited the development of complex student social organization. In fact, it is probable that the findings of deaf youths' social vibrancy and mutual teaching-learning seen in this study are unlikely to be seen within "modern" residential schools. Yet the benefits to deaf youth from their informal interactions have never been adequately documented and included as part of policy and placement

decisions. For example, in the United States the Deaf community and others have long asserted that the residential school is the closest approximation to a normal learning environment available to most deaf children (Garretson, 1977; Innes, 1995) and warned of the drawbacks of isolation within a speaking environment (see Ramsey and also Stone in Johnson & Cohen, 1994). Yet specific evidence from the everyday lives of deaf students is too rarely brought into the policy debate.

This dissertation has provided many examples of how peer interaction benefits the learning of deaf boarders. These particular findings must be considered within the Thai context, where it can be seen that there is simply no better alternative for deaf children than the boarding school. This may be verified by a brief look at the alternative educational placements in Thailand. This exercise also provides a chance to partially demonstrate how information about the conditions of a residential school can be used to decide among various school placements. It is useful to examine to what extent the regular school (mainstreaming) can offer the deaf child the three supportive conditions listed above.

Language-wise, the regular school puts the deaf child in a setting that is similar to the hearing-speaking home, which failed them so miserably. At school, as at home, the child is surrounded by people who speak, and the child still does not understand. They can not become full participating members of a social group to the extent that is possible when sign language is the vernacular.

Regarding the issue of numbers of deaf students in a program, mainstreaming classes are often designed to contain fewer rather than more deaf children. This is partly because the placement of a disabled child is considered to place an extra burden upon the teacher and partly due to the low incidence of deafness. Consequently, mainstreaming

Programs do not have sufficient numbers of deaf students for them to form a full-bodied social organization or even peer group. It is not the overall number, but their distribution at different skill and age levels that is the key to having worthwhile interaction among children.

The third beneficial condition for peer learning is having ample opportunity to associate together during a wide range of activities involving different cognitive and linguistic demands. Maintaining such conditions for deaf children's learning is problematic in a regular school setting. A day school which substitutes experience inside a classroom for physical exploration and activity will have a difficult task in providing the sensory stimulation needed to stimulate languageless deaf children. A premise behind placing the deaf child in a regular classroom is that the child will be able to adjust to the regular teaching practices, pace and curriculum. In such cases, the deaf children will have only brief daily periods to engage in or create activities that support their emerging conceptual and linguistic skills. The larger classrooms of a regular school make it difficult for teachers to provide the intensive special support needed by many deaf children. Teachers in regular classrooms sometimes assign the deaf child to self-study or design tasks that help them catch up and at the same time keep them from hindering the flow of activity. Ironically, this may give them some time to work at their own pace.

The placement of a profoundly deaf child in a regular classroom isolates him from the conditions which lead to rich and beneficial processes of social interaction amongst deaf children (and deaf staff, when present). Conceivably, this avenue of learning may be replaced by a suitable accommodation by teachers, such as by making visual adjustments in instruction and using the sign language. The social isolation which many deaf children experience in the regular school should be considered as a serious drawback to this kind of placement.

It is recommended that educational policymakers consider the residential school as an appropriate educational placement for deaf children, unless an equally conducive environment can be sustained in other schools.

In many nations, education of deaf children is not yet widespread. The problem of expansion faced by developing nations can be framed by considering the example of Thailand. After forty years, only about 20% of Thai deaf children are in school (see Table 5). Over 10,000 Thai deaf children languish at home.⁶⁰ By contrast, nearly every hearing Thai child is in elementary school, now compulsory to ninth grade. The main obstacle to expansion of special education is social attitudes. Public awareness is increasing, due partly to the efforts of the Royal family. But it will be a long while before Thai society as a whole accords high priority and financial support to the education of its disabled people. Meanwhile, Thai special schools are receiving a flood of applicants. Many more children apply than can be enrolled annually, due to budget and space limitations. Those who are judged "not ready to learn" are sent home and told to try again next year. One reason is that scarce seats in classrooms are occupied by older students, many of whom take eleven or twelve years to complete the nine year curriculum.⁶¹ The scarce resources of the Special Education Division are overwhelmed.

Like many developing nations, Thailand faces a dilemma about how to extend education as fairly and quickly as possible to its disabled children. When a choice about allocation of scarce educational resources has to be made, the benefits of schooling should be offered to as many deaf children as possible. To make room for new pupils, the students

⁶⁰ This figure is arrived at by taking the estimate of number of deaf people ages 7-15 (Table 4) and subtracting the total school enrollment of deaf children in 1991.

⁶¹ For example, in 1991 at Bua School 60% of the first graders repeated the grade the next year, and in the subsequent year 40% of that group again stayed behind for another year.

could be moved straight through the grades and encouraged to leave school at the end of the primary level (six years).⁶² There could be tougher admission standards for the secondary level.

This idea has merit because the transformation of the deaf youth into a socialized person is achieved in the early years of schooling. For example, within six years after entering the school most of the Thai deaf students had gained proficiency in their first language (Thai Sign), became able to express their thoughts and emotions appropriately and how to act in different kinds of social groups. (See "social hierarchy of the mind" in Chapter 4.) And they had the "credentials" to become members of an adult deaf community, that is, fluency in the sign language. Moreover, after six years the boarding student had learned the core values of the traditional Thai culture, such as obeying their elders and acting politely. They had learned to respect the nation, religion, and monarch. The typical graduate was disciplined and showed good work habits. Many Thai school graduates managed to hold down jobs, raise families, and satisfy the duties of citizenship. These gains can be accomplished in six years of attendance at a school for deaf children. (Moreover, survey data of deaf alumni suggests that there were no additional gains to personal income from staying in school after sixth grade.)⁶³

A six-year program might consist of a two year kindergarten program, then a four year program of ungraded, but progressively advanced skill instruction in literacy, numeracy, and basic knowledge. The medium of instruction needs to be the national sign language, which the children acquire rapidly enough to be useful in instruction. Thai reading or writing is acquired too slowly to use for curricular

⁶² This idea is possibly attributable to Dr. Maliwan Tammasaeng.
⁶³ In a survey of deaf graduates, those with less schooling had higher incomes perhaps because they began their careers earlier. From Reilly, C. (1983). "Survey of working conditions of Thai deaf adults". Reaching The UnReached Project. International. Human Assist. Program. Available from the author.

material. Schools could teach practical knowledge for everyday living, especially literacy and numeracy.

Ideally, of course, both kindergarten and upper secondary levels (through twelfth grade) would be provided by the government in every school for the deaf. **Until full enrollment is feasible, it is recommended that national governments provide kindergarten and primary education to as many deaf children as possible, even if this delays the expansion of the upper grades.**

Most newly entering deaf students are not ready to learn a regular curriculum. The problem lies as much in communication itself as in the state of cognitive unreadiness that language deprivation has produced. The new deaf students need to be immersed in a stimulating setting where sign language is used to introduce basic concepts and skills. It is recommended to **devise a curriculum for new deaf students that focuses on the development of sign language and conceptual skills, so as to accelerate academic readiness.**

There are models for a pre-school curriculum for deaf children available in the United States and Europe (for examples, see the Pre-school Curriculums at Kendall Demonstration Elementary School at Gallaudet University and The Learning Center for Deaf Children in Framingham, Massachusetts). A common feature of these "state-of-the-art" curriculums is their emphasis on creating an environment which is rich in opportunities for the children to watch the sign language, and to use it as part of concrete activities. Often there is quite a range of skills in any classroom of deaf children, which are the basis of sub-groupings and one-on-one work. Themes are often used to organize activities that are related by their emphasis on language modeling and play. Storytelling, naming games, drawing of pictures to relate a sequence of events, and drama are some of the activities used to involve the deaf child in

language play. The theme provides the repetitions of vocabulary and grammar structures needed for the young language learner to internalize it. As the child becomes familiar with the ideas, they grow confident enough to try and re-tell it. The teacher can then work with the emergent language structures.

The key is having adults and older peers who are willing and able to devise activities at the child's language and cognitive level. It can be very frustrating to work with delayed children. Yet even the pre-lingual deaf child offers clues about their level of understanding and readiness to learn through their gestures. Goldin-Meadow, Alibali & Church (1993) note that, "The child's spontaneous gestures index the zone of proximal development, thus providing a mechanism by which adults can calibrate their input to that child's level of understanding." The teacher who is willing to engage the pre-lingual deaf child inter-personally can engage them in a rewarding process of learning. It is essential that fluent signers be available to the young children, as models for the sign language. Deaf adults have first-hand experience with learning language late in life, and are often skilled in establishing early communication with young deaf children. Too, older deaf students can help as assistants in the kindergarten. The success of the early pre-school curriculum depends upon immersing the child in a natural language environment, which means letting them interact with many fluent signers. As the child breaks through and learns their first language, they gain the readiness to learn their second language: the written language of the society.

Teachers in a residential school for the deaf can better understand students' academic performance by exploring their life outside the classroom. Because it is often difficult for hearing teachers to communicate with deaf children, it is important to pay attention to how deaf children behave. Games, storytelling and chatting are ways for

children to express themselves. By observing in dorms and on the playground, the teacher can gain insights into her students' language and social development and their preferred style of interaction.

For example, a teacher may notice that her students eagerly pay attention to well-told stories. This reveals that they are cognitively receptive. The conduct of the storytelling itself illuminates effective styles of presentation. Although rapid signing is difficult to understand, the hearing teacher may sense that the vocabulary and construction of the narrative is complex. This reveals that the children have a facility with higher concepts and language greater than they are able to convey in speech or writing.

Finding out about the children's after-hours lifestyle during free-time is a first step towards a better understanding of them as individuals. Often deaf students are bored because instruction is too easy or too difficult. By paying attention to the social interaction among the children, the teacher will be able to discover what the children already know and what they are curious about. The instruction can then be matched to their particular level and interest. The teacher might pursue inquiries such as: What is the structure and manner of the students' own activities? Who are the natural teachers in the peer group? What do their social relationships reveal about individuals' skills? What are the topics and concepts of interest, and what is notably missing from their repertoire? What communicative styles are used, when and by whom? How does the imposition of authority affect the nature of activity?

As this researcher discovered, the adult needs to earn the trust of the children before they will share their secrets. Adults need to observe in a quiet manner, perhaps sitting and watching, and making no indications of disapproval. If the children sense that the teacher is just "making a social visit" they may be willing to explain what they are

doing. These explanations will be in the children's own terms. There is inestimable benefit from learning about the perspectives and meanings of the students. More information can be obtained if a number of children are encouraged to give open-ended responses.

This does increase the difficulty encountered by the hearing-speaking teacher in understanding rapid signing. Spending time with the students, the teacher will naturally become more fluent in the Thai Sign Language. For example, a teacher may see a group of boys involved in "verbal dueling" (see Chapter IV). As the boys compete for the chance to display their wit, they provide a demonstration of attention-getting and turn-taking strategies in signed conversation. Studying these behaviors would be a way for teachers to learn about proper ways to converse in signs with the students.

There are psychological and emotional benefits from a teacher showing broad interest in her students. When showing interest in the children's own experience and terms of reference, the teacher may win their loyalty and trust. This increases an intellectual and emotional bond between child and teacher that bodes well for classroom instruction. The students in this study told the researcher that they honored those teachers who took real interest in their well-being. Moreover, the students are motivated to study harder for a teacher whom they respect. An emotional bond with the students can help the teacher be an effective communicator, even if they are not fully fluent in signs. **For these reasons, it is recommended that teachers should get to know their students outside the classroom.**

In the major work on residential school life to date, the researchers argued that deaf youth were suffering intellectually and socially by being shut off from their families and the outside community (Evans, 1975, 1982, Evans and Falk, 1986). But this idea contradicts the purpose of

these special institutions, and is not supported by the data in this study. The residential school is designed as a place for intensive socialization of those who are considered "at risk" of failing to learn the essential skills of cultural membership. That is, there tends to be more, not less, emphasis on normative and behavioral instruction. This is easily seen in The Thai school in this study. While physically isolated from the surrounding community, the deaf students still learned Thai social norms and patterns of behavior from each other and teachers. In fact, the older students became proxy instructors for the teachers. It is clear that the residential institution can serve as a site of transmission of cultural and social norms.

In fact, there is the risk that such an institution may tend to be overly emphatic and leave the resident child little choice in how and what they learn. **It is recommended that educators in residential schools assure that the boarding students' overall school life has a "normal" balance of disciplinary and free activities, i.e., similar to other children in the society.** There are two concerns here. First, is maintaining a schedule that allows children adequate time to express themselves freely. The teachers can design classroom lessons in which the students have a chance for dialogue, discussion and self-expression. Outside the classroom, the administrators should arrange for sufficient time in the daily routine for student socializing. If the school day is fully scheduled with orderly, adult-controlled activity, the opportunity for student-student interaction is greatly reduced. As the educational systems develop this usually involves increased programming, including adult-run extra-curricular events. A trend towards more programming should not be allowed to threaten the private time of the students. If excessive, adults can dominate every situation. For example, in Thailand, at present the Bua School provides its students generous blocks of free-

time. However, this is because the teachers tend to ignore the pupils. But at Kulaab School there is much more adult control and programming, which does make for better academic work. Yet the students of Kulaab have not developed the creative and instructive functions in their social organization, like at Bua School. The students of Bua School benefit tremendously by having sufficient time to structure their own social interactions and informal education.

When teachers assert order they should be aware of the creative and participatory activities they are supplanting. For example, in the Bua School the value of storytelling was not recognized as a tremendous display of knowledge and vocabulary. So this activity was often interrupted in favor of drills and meetings that talked about rules and regulations. In part, this is a failure to recognize teaching and learning as it is taking place. Clearly, the school is failing to notice youth's conceptual, linguistic, and social progress because it occurs in an unknown language of signs and separate from teacher-organized instructional activities.

The style of interaction should suit the learning task. For example, during Scouts (a curricular activity for both boys and girls), standing and marching in straight formations may be suitable, because the purpose is to teach obedience, perseverance, and teamwork. The teaching of classical dance movement often relies upon imitation of the teacher. Mathematics instruction may be effective when it encourages individual trial-and-error. The relationship between teacher, child, and the task needs to vary according to the nature of the discipline (see Clignet, 1981).

However, an authoritarian mode of interaction dominates both the class time and the free-time of the deaf students at Bua School in Thailand. The repetition of rules about hygiene and conduct during

dorm meetings and assemblies was a major part of their experience. This kind of structure appeared to help the very youngest students to advance conceptually and linguistically, as well as to learn about the school's expectations for them. But these drills and lectures consumed a lot of time and were boring for many students. After all, deaf children are normally intelligent, and they quickly understand what is expected of them, when stated clearly in the sign language of older students.

After observing the students' lives, the teacher can consider if the school is providing a learning environment that is supportive of all the educational objectives. Overall, it appears that there is far more emphasis on order and discipline in deaf education than in regular education in Thailand.⁶⁴ A teacher at the Kulaab School for the Deaf stated that about 50-60% of school time is spent solely on ensuring correct behavior. She said, "In addition, during all other activities the children are constantly reminded of the proper ways of behavior." She felt that if deaf people learn how to act in a polite manner they will be accepted more readily by society: "People may say, 'Even though she's deaf she knows how to act correctly.'"

When an excessively restrictive code of behavior is imposed, the younger deaf students are denied even basic communication. They are told what to do and must stand silently for long periods of time. It must be kept in mind that these children have been denied dialogue for many years, which argues for more emphasis on activities which encourage conversation. To tackle the lag by new deaf students in language, they need both periods for unrestricted rapport with others and immersion in a community life, including group routine. As this study has shown, deaf students create a wide range of useful social events with their own

⁶⁴ The educational welfare schools for the Sino-Tibetan hill tribes and disadvantaged youth also seem to be more concerned with discipline than regular Thai schools. Thus it seems the main objective for special education is to teach rules and proper cultural behavior, as defined by the government.

unique rules and structures. They create these activities to serve a particular function in their lives. Each activity is tailored by the participants to suit their specific needs.

On the other hand, authoritarian activities tend to be "one-size-fits-all." Regardless of their linguistic or intellectual level, gender, or age, each child is required to submit to the same order and watch the same message without response. The diverse backgrounds and skill levels of deaf children in a large school demand a customization of the learning settings. For example, there are specific norms of behavior in storytelling, conversational circles, and verbal dueling, as described in Chapter IV. Student leaders sometimes use their authority to compel younger students to form groups for storytelling and conversation. They thus structure the situation to enable creative interaction.

The teachers should be alert to degrading and demeaning tendencies of the child social organization. Adults should prevent older children from abusing youngsters and belittling them. The teachers should not support children to be heads of the student bodies just because they are strict disciplinarians. The teacher's delegation of authority to older students can elevate children with a fierce personality. In some cases, these children become tyrants and terrorize younger children. They may intimidate the creative leaders and thus reduce the amount of storytelling and other participatory gatherings. Power and intimacy seem opposite poles of the magnet. The fierce student leader is not a source of emotional support for youngsters, instead invoking fear. These children need older people who will offer them guidance. Teachers should encourage children to act as mentors to younger students (phii-nong relationship).

At the same time, teachers should watch their own behavior and not unwittingly act as models of violence towards the students. A

minority of male teachers in schools for the deaf in Thailand habitually use force against students. Overall the switch has become a symbolic sign of authority--most Thai teachers have a tolerant manner. But a few teachers strike terror in the hearts of students and negatively influence the way in which older boys relate to younger pupils.

The final recommendation is to provide deaf students of all ages a chance to socialize together, to take advantage of their tendency to teach and learn from each other. Adapt the students' own forms of pedagogy and language to the classroom. Encourage older students to assist the academic learning of the younger pupils.

The ways in which children learn and teach from each other can be utilized as a resource in the classroom. There are numerous examples that can be drawn from this case study. However, the key point is that the teacher recognize that the children themselves will provide clues as to how to structure effective instruction at a given age level. It is not essential for the teacher to entirely grasp the mechanics of the interaction, nor the content of the exchanges among deaf students. Rather, the teacher may find it fruitful to see themselves as facilitators of communication, who set the topic and direction of the class and allow the students latitude to sign together rapidly at their own pace.

Some of deaf children's habits seem pertinent to all classroom levels. One example is seating arrangements. A group of deaf children will naturally form a circle. Everyone is at the same height level (all standing or sitting). These adjustments are done so everybody can see each other and has equal chance to participate. This was done in activities whose purpose was full participation, such as games and conversational circles. In the semi-circular arrangement, the individual at the front is in

a privileged position, but others can still converse peripherally. This was seen during storytelling and broadcasting activities.

Circular and semi-circular seating is common in public settings in Thailand. During worship at the temple, people sit on the floor in semi-circles. The design of communal rest houses (*sala*) embody a folk preference for face-to-face interaction in a circle. These small open-air buildings often have benches in a U-shape. In this case, the deaf way of interaction is similar to a traditional Thai way.

But many schools for the deaf arrange the seats in classrooms in straight rows. In the Thai case, less than five of thirty classrooms were arranged in circular or semi-circular seating. Straight row seating is feasible in a classroom for hearing children, since everyone can hear an utterance, even if it comes from the back row. If used for deaf students, this seating arrangement has a stultifying effect on communication in the classroom. Only the teacher can see everyone else in the room. When a pupil makes a remark, every other pupil must look around. To follow an exchange an individual must turn his head back-and-forth repeatedly, making it difficult to follow conversations. This has implications for the nature of classroom interaction. The dominance of the teacher is amplified, since each child has an easy line-of-sight to the front only. Dialogue is hindered and one-way discourse becomes more prevalent in this situation.

It is recommended that the schools for the deaf re-arrange their seating into circular or semi-circular arrangement. This matches the seating preferences of both folk groups and deaf people. The seating can be shifted to suit the academic aim. In general, more circular seating will increase visual contact and communication among pupils. Teachers may feel that this is useful, depending on their aims and methods. On the other hand, if a teacher believes that adult knowledge should be

transmitted to children, more dialogue among pupils may be unwelcome. However, the varied function of student rapport in the classroom should be examined before making this judgment. Given the chance, deaf children try to jointly figure out what the teacher means. Those who grasp an idea often explain it to their classmates. These back-channel communications are denied deaf children who are subject to visually-unsupportive arrangements. The teacher is unable to tap a potential for self-instruction among students. Adapted to the classroom, semi-circular seating would enhance ease of communication--a major goal for deaf education.

Given the chance, older deaf children play a major role in the instruction of younger students. The school can take advantage of these skills. The most important function of the older students is their demonstration of how to express complex and creative ideas in the sign language. The teachers will not be able to do so this, since they are not native signers. Only people who have been signing since their childhood can offer a good model of language to deaf children. If the number of older students must be reduced, then more deaf adults should be hired as teachers or assistants. While the teacher handles discipline, the deaf adults can become involved with developing the students' concepts and language.

The facts of the social organization must be considered in matching older and younger children. In general, the older students do not show interest in those who are more than three years younger than themselves. Slightly older students are more willing and able to provide mentoring and guided assistance. The active transmission of knowledge and skills between children of closely matched ages can be utilized to academic benefit. Most elementary classes at Bua typically have children of different ages, due to varying age of entry and repeaters.

Consequently the early grades have students with virtually no language skills and those who have been using a sign language to communicate for one to several years. These children are in a dramatically different position socially and cognitively. Yet in the eyes of their teachers they are equivalent academically, which is why they are in the same grade. Classes with a mix of ages provide a diversity of skills. By observing children in their social circles, the teacher may be able to recognize the different skill levels in the class and encourage cooperative learning. Thai society values teamwork among its school children. In fact, the deaf students already engage in joint problem-solving both in the classroom and after-hours. Yet this ability of children to help teach each other is not utilized during instruction by the teacher.

In general, the oldest students are not much interested in assisting the youngest students. A notable exception is that a few older children with exceptionally patient and helpful personalities became important role models for much younger students. They provided emotional support, by being open and welcoming the youngsters to join gatherings. Such rare individuals might be encouraged to assist the growth of particular children, via mentoring and tutoring. Two Thai deaf schools already have effective programs for the mentoring of newcomers. One upcountry school for the Deaf pairs newcomers with older students in their taw luuk kai orientation program. At a school in Bangkok the dorm teacher has run a successful Big Sister program for years. Thus, educators of the deaf have already recognized how helpful older children can be in the educational process. However, their role is usually limited to non-academic affairs. The exception is the Kulaab School where student leaders work with teachers to plan the afternoon vocational lessons. Older deaf students can serve an expanded role in the classroom instruction.

In any case it is essential to carefully choose the tutor for the task. For subjects which require the students to express themselves and engage in dialogue, it may be better to use those children who are already serving as informal teachers outside the classrooms. The natural student leaders are respected by their peers for their articulate signing and cleverness. They have an ability to explain concepts to other children, partly because they can draw upon shared experience. This researcher observed a good partnership at Kulaab School between an teacher of English and a boy named Siam. The teacher set up the lesson and then put Siam in front to drill his classmates. The boy used humor, put the vocabulary words in sentences about everyday school life, and played various "tricks" (deliberately mis-labeling pictures, etc.) to make the other students watch him closely. The teacher gently directed him to discuss the lesson.

Encouraging elders to support the learning of youngsters at the lowest rung in peer social status would be beneficial. This might be done in a limited way, such as helping teachers with assessing the cognitive and linguistic status of newcomers. Children continually engage in assessments of the intellectual and linguistic condition of their fellows, in part to place them properly in the social organization. Teachers of the early grades are much less astute about the cognitive, linguistic, and social progress of the young student. They see pupils only in the classroom, which is devoid of material objects and routines with which the child is familiar. By avoiding the "home" life, that is, after-hours in the dormitories, the teachers preclude themselves from getting to know the children as whole individuals.

As part of their socialization into the student body, the deaf students acquire skills in assessment of intellect and language skills of other deaf children. Their skill in assessment could be beneficially applied to the design of their early instruction. They can help determine if a new

student is developing normally, i.e., learning the sign language and daily routine. Older students quickly notice the youngsters who are failing to progress, that is, those who are labeled with the term "numbskulls." Thus, older students can help teachers make early identification of deaf youngsters with mental handicaps.

Suggestions for further research

This study has raised several intriguing questions which await further research.

What conditions of schooling influence the tendency by deaf children to develop teaching and learning among themselves?

There has been tacit recognition for centuries that social interaction among deaf students is a vital force in their learning. Deaf students have carried out a parallel process of teaching and learning among themselves. Yet this has been largely ignored in matters of policy direction and instructional approach in deaf education. At present it has become critically important that we understand the relationship between the conditions (characteristics) of schooling and the informal processes of interaction among youth. The indirect benefits of putting children together have been largely overlooked during the shift away from residential schooling. In fact, it may now be impossible in many Western nations to find residential schools for the deaf that display full-bodied interactive processes. (This is a reason for doing comparison on a worldwide basis, since boarding schools for the deaf in developing nations still enroll a diverse, large student body.)

Mainstreaming programs have come into vogue, which puts the deaf child in classrooms with those who do not share his orientation to visual communication. Because there has been so little ethnographic and

interaction research in deaf education, this reform is being made without information about the impact of different settings on the deaf child as a social being. At the same time, there is increasing interest in the use of a natural sign language in a bilingual approach. This will presumably allow the deaf child to learn a primary (sign) language in a normal fashion, as a basis for learning a second, written national language. Failure to make explicit the role of social interaction among deaf children is equally damaging to the advancement of this bilingual approach. For if the child is to learn a primary language naturally, they must be immersed in a full language environment. To ignore the role of peer interaction is to overlook a fundamental contribution that social play makes in human learning. The outcome is a model of language learning that is adult-centered and thereby unnatural and incomplete. The risk is the suppression of such activity by the structuring of the school day.

To ascertain how conditions relate to social interaction and learning, in-depth study of interactional relationships within other schools with deaf children needs to be undertaken. This involves documenting both the particulars of each case and those school-level conditions (characteristics) that may influence interaction. The theoretical aim is to ascertain the causal relations between the schooling conditions and the nature of interaction. Yet the identification of pertinent conditions (variables) is problematic in the absence of theory in the area. The case study design itself provides no way to determine which conditions (variables) are related to the phenomena of study. A useful place to start is Charles Ragin's *The Comparative method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative methods* (1987). Ragin describes strategies for using information from case studies to develop variables and to conduct systematic comparison of cases.

Tentatively, this study has identified conditions that appear to influence the nature of student interaction in a school for deaf children in Thailand. This began by collecting information about the school to understand the framework of student life. Shorter visits at two other Thai schools for the deaf did show that there were obvious differences in terms of the school-level conditions among the three schools. Moreover, varying conditions co-occurred with differences in the extent and complexity of student free-time activity. As for school-level conditions, information was collected on:

- Isolation of the students
 - Setting of the school (rural-urban)
 - The percentage of commuting students
 - Access to town
- Overall size of student body
 - Numbers of deaf students at each age level
- Accommodation of language by adults to children
- Opportunity for free-association across age groups
- The presence of a vernacular language in the student body

The students at Bua School created a rich array of educational activities for themselves, which was a primary learning resource in their individual development. Bua imposed a high degree of isolation (rural location, all the students are boarders, and access to town is restricted). The school was large enough for multiple peer groups to form at every age level. All students were free to associate together for long periods of time, if they so desired. Adults did not use the sign language well or willingly. The students at Dok Khoon School displayed the same types of activities as at Bua, and shared the same conditions (student body almost 400 children, nearly all boarders, poorly signing teachers, long free-time).

Located in an urban setting, Dok Khoon's students had more exposure to the outside than children at Bua.

While Bua and Dok Khoon seemed to be sister schools in terms of both child interaction and conditions, the Kulaab School differed markedly. At Kulaab there was a startling absence of free-time initiative by students. During after-hours the number of students dwindled so much that peer group activity was diminished or suspended. Intriguingly, the Kulaab School had markedly different conditions from the other two Thai schools (student body is about 160 children, half of whom commute, located in a large city, access to town and visitors is easy). Notably, the teachers at Kulaab were actively involved in school programming throughout the school day and considered the older students as accountable subordinates in instruction and dorm management. The access to alternative sources of information, the influence of family life, and the exposure to urban lifestyle seemed to have a sapping effect on student interaction and social organization. At Kulaab School the remaining boarders slumped and slept in front of a television during the entire weekend, with only a few groups making any effort at playing. Boredom reigned supreme.

The variance of both conditions and interactive patterns together at Kulaab compared to Bua and Dok Khoon suggest a correlation. It can be posited that the greater the physical isolation and social privacy of the student body, the more abundant and elaborate are their interactions together. The number of students seems influential, especially if it falls below the number needed to form peer groups. It would be insightful to undertake comparative research using schools with different conditions to understand the impact of placement options on deaf children.

What do findings of peer enculturation in residential schools tell us about the formation of a deaf culture and community?

Scholars in the United States have argued that deaf children who have deaf parents play the leading role in transmitting knowledge of the sign language and deaf culture in the student body. This supports the idea that deaf culture is transmitted inter-generationally, like an ethnically-based cultural group. There is already a solid body of evidence showing how enculturation occurs in deaf families (with both deaf and hearing children). Undoubtedly, deaf children raised in deaf families are on the path to membership in the deaf community. Predictably, they become influential students in schools with other deaf children thanks to their facility with a sign language and normal upbringing.

However, it is unwarranted to conclude that deaf culture and sign language is transmitted chiefly by children of deaf parents and by deaf staff in schools. We must acknowledge the teaching and learning processes among deaf children who have no link with deaf adults and community. In the three schools in this study there were no deaf students with deaf parents. The deaf students came to school without knowing sign language, and there were no deaf adult role models on the staff. Yet these students created an array of activities that engendered learning of the sign language and complex patterns of association. The transmission of knowledge depended upon memories of earlier lessons from older deaf students who had since graduated. In fact, this is an inter-generational transmission of culture and knowledge among children. In a school for the deaf without deaf adults, the older children are the role models and thus, in many ways, function as adults. In the cases studied here, and many other schools worldwide, they draw not upon a deaf family or a greater community of deaf adults, but rather their own upbringing within the school. To assert that deaf culture and

language passes chiefly from deaf families to their deaf children and then to other deaf children in the playgrounds and dorms is to declare illegitimate the majority of instances where there is no such resource.

Residential schools where the students are isolated from deaf communal and familial contact are excellent sites for study of a child-driven enculturation process. We may ask questions such as: How has the sign language developed and been maintained in a setting where all members acquire and teach it within ten years? Are the forms of social organization and role conflicts (authoritarian/creative) seen in the school evident in the adult deaf community? What aspects of student culture survive and are transmitted to later cohorts and what is created anew by each generation of students.

In some countries, adults make substantial accommodation to deaf children, by adopting their sign language and focusing on "individual needs." This is a laudable approach, but it should not be used as an excuse to overwhelm children's natural desires to engage in self-directed play and learning. This is a particularly difficult lesson for Deaf intellectuals and professionals in Western nations. Having recently begun to assert their rights to involvement in the socialization of deaf children, they are highly motivated to transmit their sign language and cultural values to a younger generation. At the same time they should help sustain the tradition of informal instruction among children which, they acknowledge, was the wellspring of their community.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ The demise of the residential school has made the Deaf family a more central institution in the formation of the community in the U.S. and other countries.

Appendix 1: Interview forms

Interview, part 1: Background info on student leaders

(1) Code	(2) School	Date
Name (in Thai) (Romanized ltrrs.)		Sign name
(3) Sex	(4) Physical attributes	
(5) Age {year born}	(6) Age Entered school {year}	
(7) Grade	(8) Years at school {flunked}	
(9) Kind of stories/messages		
(10) Why do you <i>(take charge/ tell stories)</i> ?		
(11) Sources of ideas		
(12) Role models		
(13) Protégés		
(14) Audience (Ages and some names)		
(15) When/where		
(16) Positions in school activities Class asst. Scout leader		
(17) Positions in dorm Head Deputy Tutor (17a) Dorm		
Family		
(18) # deaf people in family--		
(19) Family use sign before or now?		
(20) Hearing status--		
(21) Father's work--		Level of schooling--
(22) Mother's work--		Schooling--
(23) Parents income: wealthy sufficient insufficient		
Notes:		

Interview, part 2: Relationship of authority to creative narrative

Videotaped Interviews with student leaders: sign masters and dorm heads.

Aim: To pursue these emergent questions:

- (1) Is there a relationship between authority and storytelling?
- (2) How is leadership transmitted (both creative & authoritarian)?
- (3) Do the youngsters relate differently to student supervisors than to sign masters? (By asking current leaders to recollect their childhood, #27,31.)

Younger members of student body were asked questions # 24-38.

Recollection of dorm life as a youngster

(#24-34) "I want you to ask you about your growing up in the dorm."

- (24) What dorm are you in?
- (25) Do you remember any of your dorm heads when you were younger?
- (26) Tell me about them, i.e., how they acted during dorm meetings.
- (27) Did you like them? (If you fell down and needed first aid, did you go to the student head? If you had a problem, like feeling sorry, or had a fight with a friend, did you go to them?)
- (28) Did you learn from them? Do you use that learning now?
- (29) Do you remember any sign masters when you were younger?
- (30) Tell me about them, i.e., what they did when they signed?
- (31) Did you like them?
- (32) Did you learn from them? Do you recall/use that learning now?

Student leaders estimating the worth of the 'other type' of leader

[Ask about their own dorm, first without names mentioned and later with names.]

- (33) Do you feel that ADD 'storytellers' or 'dorm heads' make dorm life better or worse? Are they necessary? [Probe on attitudes towards both authority and creative activities.]
- (33a) Does the other kind of leader interfere with your activity with the group?
- (34) What do you think about name of [individual head or storyteller] ?

Rating dorms by prevalence of authority and storytelling

(#35-36) "I want to ask you about all the dorms."

- (35) Rate all the dorms in terms of amount of exerted authority.
- (36) Rate all the dorms in terms of amount of storytelling/residing storytellers.

Appendix 2: Methodological notes

Recording interactions

The selective perception of observers, details overlooked in interaction, and the inescapable reductionism of fieldnotes are some of the threats to thoroughness in recording social interaction. This section describes how this study used a combination of audio, video and written records to carry out data collection.

The properties of sign languages influenced decisions about the method of data recording. First, the observer must maintain continual eye contact with the interaction. A pause to write a note cuts the researcher entirely off from the conversation. The practice of continuing to listen to a scene or an interviewee while writing down notes is unworkable with studies of deaf people. An alternative is to wait until later to make fieldnotes. Unable to record on the spot for fear of arousing suspicion, William Whyte in his *Street Corner Society* learned to retain his thoughts until he was back in the privacy of his room (Whyte, 1984, p. 86). In interviews there are reasons to avoid conspicuous note-taking. Whyte notes that taking an active role in engaging the interviewee in a dialogue often brings high rewards and that taking notes is a task which takes attention away from the duties of a good conversation. Informants may become self-conscious by note-taking. On the other hand, there are good reasons for not delaying note-taking until afterwards related to the researcher's memory limits.

The strategy followed in this study was to make records on the spot for most occasions. Field notes were spoken into a lapel microphone attached to a pocket tape recorder. Although the microphone was a curious item, the speaking itself was unobtrusive because deaf students are largely insensitive to voice. These audio-records were transcribed.

A video camera was used for the detailed study and transcription of interactions. The problem of "the disjuncture that exists between what can be seen and what is heard" frequently occurs in audiotaping, noted Cicourel et al (1974, p. 12). Because the non-verbal aspects of communication (affect, etc.) and the verbal aspects are both transmitted in the visual modality during sign language conversations, the camera was the most important tool of data collection. The use of a camera is problematic. The limited view leaves the researcher to recall the context and related off-camera actions. There is an inescapable trade-off in the type of information collected from wide views versus close-up shots.

Researcher effect

In this study, a foreign stranger entered a closed world of lonely children and showed interest in them. As a hearing person, a Western foreigner, and a carrier of fancy equipment, the children had good reason to pay extraordinary attention to this researcher. Initially the researcher and a research assistant--who is Thai, deaf, and his wife, were always surrounded by youngsters of all ages. They blocked our view, queried us endlessly and generally made it difficult to reach a position of unobtrusiveness that we sought. Within one month we were no longer novel, although a small number of first and second graders never relented in their pursuit of us. This compelled us to develop a set of techniques, as related below.

These strategies were used to minimize the effect of the researcher: I maintained a regular presence over the academic term so as to become a familiar face. We tried to avoid drawing attention to ourselves, such as by adopting a disinterested manner and a purposeless gait. One unsuccessful ploy was pretending to be busy writing notes. The youth were so fascinated with the mechanics of English lettering that they drew closer. Yet their speculations about writing and languages became data. We received help from older children who banished youngsters from bothering us. Admirers often blocked our view, but at times they were a useful "front" behind which to observe a nearby activity.

Some groups, such as intimate friends, tended to be exclusionary and to meet at unspecified times. Even when willing to admit outsiders, such groups usually could not be approached or observed without disrupting what they were doing. As friends together will do, they made small talk and waited for some action. The photographs on the next page show a typical response when an outsider approached.

Since it was rarely possible to observe the sharp-eyed youngsters surreptitiously, a participatory approach was taken. We often joined activities and tried to stay unobtrusive.

At times we had to shift to non-participant observation. This meant we tried to remain detached from activities, declining to converse. During games and other scenes this fit with a common role of audience. However, it was difficult to not be pulled into conversation and participation. The work was made possible only by my fluency in Thai Signs and the presence of my wife, who is a Thai deaf person. Our language skills made us attractive as conversationalists, and students began to seek us out as arbiters, advisors and confidants. The researcher took on medical service projects which gave more reasons for dialogue



(a) Intimates chat in a circle.



(b) An outsiders' approach disturbs conversation.

with students. Over time it became more difficult to ignore them (and they us). They had become our acquaintances and even friends.

When researcher effect was evident this was recorded in fieldnotes. The aim was not to try and factor out the researcher. How the children dealt with an outsider, whether as a source of information, a topic of conversation or someone to side-skirt, was another look at their varied learning and social strategies. The researcher viewed himself as an actor

in the setting, who gave the youth more opportunities to reveal their full social repertoire. It was a shock to observe a conversation and realize that the youth were talking about something that the researcher had said or done. During an interview with Patipol and Thanthep, the researcher had mentioned that students at another deaf school had also said they had ghosts on campus. This news spread quickly in the school, with the researcher's name used as the truthful source. My task then was to consider how the children sought and spread new information.

The cameras caused the most marked change in students' behavior during unstructured settings. The still camera was introduced early in the study and was used without flash. Cicourel set up his video camera in full view of the participants so that the camera "could be routinized as part of the daily activities" (Cicourel, 1974, p. 11). The video camera in this study was introduced after three months. The camera was left unattended as much as possible. The boys often frolicked and made obscene gestures in fun, showing an extraordinary lack of inhibition. The focus on creative narratives heightened the threat of "camera effect." Because some youth are dramatic in their manner, when a camera is turned on them they modified their behavior, such as by increasing their dominance of the encounter. Although the behavior of the peer leader was a focus of the study, this fact was not made clear, so as to not to increase the likelihood of "showmanship."

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