

Images of an Invisible Reality

THE NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PRESENTS

IMAGES OF AN INVISIBLE REALITY

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“[...]

Yes...hum...yeah sure, hum true, quite true. Well I'll be [...].

- *Stop.*

- OK. That, that was good. Now, we want to do the scene with John, OK? Now, turn the cameras.

- *Go for it!*

- *You have just seen [Charles Beard], an instructor at the New York State School for the Deaf, in Rome, New York, showing his drama class, something of the art of pantomime. This is only one of the many interesting classes at the school. In this program, we will tell you something about the matter of deafness in our school. The New York State School for the Deaf was founded over one hundred years ago. We are located on a seventeen-acre campus in the residential part of the city. We have 208 students from 30 counties in New York State. Our school is funded by the State Education Department. About 70 of the students are day students. The rest, who live on campus, go home every week-end. Students are accepted at 3 years of age. To understand what we are doing in our school, you should know a little of what it is like to be deaf. If you see me walking down the street, there will be nothing to indicate ourselves. Yet, I have to live everyday with the reality of this handicap.*

'Have you seen John?

- *Oh yeah, over here.*

- John. John! John, your father just called me.'

It impacts me in almost everything I do or want to achieve. For I am a deaf person in what is primarily a hearing world. Because I cannot hear, my speech did not develop naturally or easily. But with hard work, some of us can learn speech and we can learn to communicate with sign language and finger spelling.

That's a big question, I believe that our..."

The reality of deafness is that it means much more than just not hearing. Most significantly, it means that the development of language and communication, the ability to receive a message and respond will be greatly impeded. It means that in all communication, special effort must be made. Special methods must be used. Eyes can become ears, language can be made visible.

“OK, the last question is: who sells it?”

Communication for the deaf utilizes signing, the manual alphabet, lip reading and speech. There are a thousand basic signs, each expressing a word or a short phrase. Other words must be spelled out with the fingers. Lip reading is extremely difficult to master, yet for all

deaf people it offers visual clues and is an important part of communication. The message may be literature, math or history but the medium is always language. The development of better language and better communication skills becomes a part of every course. Their development cannot be left to chance and a consistent language approach is used throughout the school.

“[...] hit me [...]
- [...]”

Modern linguistics has shown that consistent patterns are repeated in all levels of language.

“If I ask you to make up a question for the last part, right here? Who can make up a question?
- [...]
- Alright, who was...”

Because he does not hear them over and over, as does the hearing child, these important language links must be taught to the deaf child. If they are established at an early age, the child will have the tools to develop a rich language system.

“Which part means whose? Which part?
- Dan's.
- Dan's. OK. Now the whole thing, the whole thing means who, who was Disko. OK? If you wanna make up a question for that part there, there what will you do? OK: whose...
- ... Dad.”

“...have no color on them, and some have red on one side. Now what I want you to do is put them together so that the red is on the outside.”

Hearing aids are useful for the deaf but they do not make them hearing people. Whenever residual hearing is present, it is important to utilize it to the fullest degree.

“8 times 6”

It may range from just hearing gross sounds to the ability to catch individual words. Deafness, however, is usually a matter of both a loss of clarity and a loss of volume. Simply amplifying the sounds does not mean the deaf person is hearing as a hearing person hears, but precise auditory training in discriminating sounds allows the child to attach meaning to at least some of the sounds he is receiving.

“64.
- Good. OK, now I'm going to tell you the answer and you tell me the factor, OK? 25
- 5 times 5.
- Good. 35.
- 7 times 5.”

“Good morning.
- Good morning Melissa.
- Good morning.

- Good. Let's try once more, will you?"

We really try and help train these children in sound perception through their natural interest in music. One of the ways we do this is to use that most basic of all musical instruments: the human voice. Every child finds satisfaction in using his voice musically. And our children are certainly no exception. You often see a kind of inner concentration in the child, as he is discovering his voice, the feel of it, the inner sound of it and using it to express himself. And then as Carol, at the piano, moves into whatever key the child is starting in, he then feels the music meeting him and this gives him confidence.

One of the main purposes, here, is to give these children a music program and a music experience as opposed to simply developing their rhythmic sense, because children are musical, basically musical and being deaf does not keep them from being basically musical. It's a matter of developing their musicality.

As we got language development, this gives their voice a rise and fall. It breaks down monotony in pitch. They don't always talk on the same level and the same tempo but their voices are expressive and varied. This enables them to communicate more feelingly, more expressively. It gives them confidence in using their voices and a readiness. Also, you notice they listen to each other, and this is very important. It breaks down the isolation that so often surrounds deaf children. Well, music is an enriching experience, isn't it? Just think, if we didn't have all the musical experiences, the musical memories, our favorite tunes, our favorite dance music, our favorite symphony, our favorite pianist in mind, how much poorer we'd be. Music educates a child's emotional life. There is tenderness in music, there is joy, there is vigor, there is care.

During the high school years, at the New York State School for the Deaf, the decision is made whether to pursue a college course or a vocational course of study.

"You can try to find some of the stomate Try, try that way, some of these, from here"

The school provides, on campus, free vocational training in the industrial arts for all students. This experience can be instrumental in the student's decision, which he must make for himself. Those who choose the vocational route also receive intensive occupational education at the regional vocational high school alongside their hearing peers.

Deafness is often called "the hidden handicap", but as Mr Beard's pantomime class demonstrates so well, the deaf know that this is a world designed for the hearing and that deafness is as permanent as it is invisible.

You burn out the starter in your car because you can't hear the engine turn over or the starter motor screeching. That is typical of the hazards of deafness.

Part of the struggle is accepting the handicap. Part of the struggle is overcoming it. The pre-primary years are particularly critical. There must be a total commitment to communication. Such an encompassing handicap requires a 24-hour learning experience. The deaf child has

a lot of catching up to do. Activities outside and inside the classroom must be integrated through a conscious and logical involvement of language in both.

“And gingerbread man jumped out! He jumped out!

- *Jumped out.*

- He was running. He was running. The man and woman, the man and woman said: Stop!”

A particular language model must be presented to the child again and again.

“Very nice.

- *A man and a woman lived in-a-lil-house*

- Let me help you with this. Joy, I want to help you with this. In a little house.

- *In a little house.*

- Joy, look. That sound, the breath sound. House.

- *House*

- Beautiful speech. That was very nice, very nice.

OK, now look, we have a blue gingerbread man for ‘breath’, a red gingerbread man for ‘voice’ and a brown one for ‘nasal’. I have some words...

- *[...]*

- Maybe. I have some words for the language story with the gingerbread man.”

Through the use of pictures and illustrations and actually enacting a story, the children become involved in a real and visual experience to which they can attach the vocabulary and the syntax of the lesson.

“The man and woman said:

- *Stop! ... we will eat you.*

- *No, no, you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man.”*

“We’re gonna see the movie up here about a train ride. OK?”

Teaching the deaf is very much a visually-oriented task, particularly in the early stages. It is difficult for the deaf child to learn vicariously. He simply lacks the language to understand concepts or experiences described only through language. Field trips are frequently taken to gain the experience, and the use of a videotape in this instance, allows the class to relive the experience as the language is taught.

“He gave the man 2 dollars.

It’s you, honey. Yes, Danny’s riding the train.”

Each day, pre-primary children spend some time in the learning center, a large, open room with several learning areas. Depending on the needs of the child, he may be assigned to a specific learning task or he may exercise individual initiative by choosing the area in which he wants to work.

“...go over to math?”

Reading? OK. You wanna come over to reading? OK, come on over. Put your card in Reading.

- [...]
- Roast oven? Roast beef, roast beef. OK, read here.
- *The little pig had...*
- Had none"

Making the concept of a 24h education work requires a constant dialogue between child care workers, those who look after the children outside the classroom, and the teachers. The child care workers are responsible for insuring not only that the child enjoys his free time, but continues to communicate and use language in a way that reinforces what has been learned in the classroom.

"That's good, Donald. What's the name? What's the name? I want to hear you.

- *Gingerbread.*
- Gingerbread what? Let me help with your language. Gingerbread cookie.
- *Gingerbread cookie*
- Good boy! OK, do you want to put your silver beads on it We're gonna make the eyes.
- *Eye.*
- We're gonna make the eye."

"The big bad wolf came along and he said 'Little pig, little pig, let me in.' But the little pig said, "No, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin!". The big bad wolf said, 'Well, I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in' And he blew the little pig's house in. He blew the little pig's house in.

- *Run! Run!"*

"Moo moo everywhere. Moo moo. Old MacDonald had a farm,

- E-I-E-I-O!
- Good, good, OK."

Education in its truest form offers not just a series of lessons but a whole experience that demonstrates that learning – and of particular importance to the deaf – communication, do not end when classes end. Learning and communication are experiences of infinite life, and these experiences are the life of the New York State School for the Deaf.

"1, 2, 3"

*And we dance
To a whispered voice
Overheard by the soul
Undertook by the heart
And you may know it
If you may know it
While the sand
Would become the stone
Which begat the spark*

*Turned to living bone
Holy, holy*

“nebra.

- Now this is a voiced sound. Watch. Say “s”. With your voice now. Try. OK you’re saying “N”.

- nebra. Nebra.

- OK, you’re saying N. »

“Now you will feel some pressure in your ear, that’s alright. Want you to sit very, very quietly, OK, don’t move.”

“They will start to get harder now, OK?”

This then, is the life of the school, one of the lives of its students. Some will go on to college, others will go right into the job market. Except for their deafness, most will lead normal adult lives, establish homes, raise families, work and play. But they will be able to look back at their experiences at the New York State School for the Deaf and know that there was a school that made all the difference.

THE END

A CAMPBELL FILMS PRODUCTION

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