

# Deaf Studies Links

A Newsletter for Itinerant Teachers of the Deaf in the Central and Southern Regions of New Zealand

Issue 4

November 2003

## Deaf Studies in the Regions

There has been a tremendous amount of work gone into the teaching of Deaf studies on base and in the region! As we have gone around, we have discovered a huge variety of skills and creative ways of teaching 'Deaf Studies'. More often than not Deaf Studies can be integrated into the regular curriculum and form part of some more general discussions. For instance, talking with your students about where they sit and why. Many students are told to sit up the front of the class- but have no idea why. Is this the best place to sit? Some students report that whilst they can hear and lip-read the teacher, they cannot follow class discussions because of seating. These simple everyday discussions help form the understanding about what is special about being Deaf.



## Lee Bulivant- Deaf Resource Person - Hawkes Bay and Gisborne:

This year I have run both group and individual Deaf Studies sessions. I want to talk about the two sessions in particular that demonstrate why Deaf Studies is very useful within the education sector.

Firstly, in Gisborne I have a caseload of students where most of the students feel isolated, lonely and in need of some friends. I ran two group sessions with the boys there and the outcome has been very positive. One of the topics we discussed was "Identity" - who am I, why am I different and why is everyone different. One of the things that really impressed me, has been a student who was initially very shy and passive but after several visits is starting to ask all sort of questions to do with "Deaf Issues". I think that he has done so well.

At the beginning of each session, I also teach all the students in the class some NZSL signs, including how to introduce yourself. This has helped show how confident they can be when introducing themselves to people for the first time. It has been great to see the class supporting each other when they made a mistake or needed clarification by using the correct signs. Unfortunately, I only visit Gisborne twice a term but would like to visit more often.

The other strand I have covered with a variety of groups and individuals is "Communication". The topic that we focused on was looking at the differences of Deaf and Hearing home environments. I showed them what a Hearing home looks like and then asked them what they think a Deaf home looks like. After a good discussion, everyone was amazed and wondered why both home environments were so different. One of the situations that I posed to the groups that really got them thinking was... What would you have to consider if you as a Hearing person invited a Deaf friend to stay over for the night? For instance, do you have teletext, flashing lights (fire alarm), sign language? We compared this possible situation with the example of one family member who was in a wheelchair and wanted to visit your house- would your homes be accessible for her? Why and why not? How do you think she might feel knowing that she could



For our last edition for 2003, we felt it would be a great idea to include some feedback from some of the staff who have been teaching Deaf Studies. We have also included information on 'Deaf Humour' which we hope you will enjoy.



*continued on page 2*

not visit because she couldn't get into your house? So after some discussion, it was great to see the class begin to understand some of the needs of Deaf people in the community.

From the student's perspective, it is a positive and perfect choice to have Deaf Resource People providing Deaf Studies and NZSL. It has boosted their morale, their confidence and it has given them the opportunity to explore and learn more about Deaf Issues in New Zealand and around the World. It has also given them more ideas about setting goals for their futures as Deaf people.

**P**am Witco -  
**Deaf Resource Person -  
Wellington/ Marlborough**



Many of my Deaf Studies lessons have focused on the area of 'Identity'.

In particular looking at people's similarities and differences. I taught this topic to two Oral Deaf mainstreamed seven year olds. I found the following:

- very positive involvement of the students.
- a wonderful opportunity was provided for them to open up to each other and myself about the differences between deaf and hearing.
- both were happy to identify themselves as deaf.
- both wanted to meet a signing deaf and a cochlear oral/signing deaf student.

I arranged for this meeting to happen and received the following feedback from these students:

- We are all the same.
- We are all Deaf no matter what degree of deafness we have or mode of communication we use.
- We now want to learn NZ Sign Language to help us in the future, so we can have access to an Interpreter.



I also ran a session based on the 'Communication Strand' CO9 - Working with an Interpreter. This session was aimed at a group of signing deaf students aged 8 - 13 years old. During the session we looked at:

- The difference between interpreters and communicators.
- The kind of training and qualifications an interpreter must have.
- The interpreter's role.
- Role-plays on 'How to use an Interpreter'.
- Our responsibilities when using an interpreter.

The session also included a visit from a qualified interpreter who answered questions from the students. (Teacher aides and communicators were encouraged to join in this session and ask questions)

Some of the comments made by the students were:

- I would like to use an interpreter, because I want to know what is going on.
- I now know I can ask an interpreter where I would like them to sit or stand.
- I did not realize that the interpreter also spoke in English.
- My mother does communicating for me at the doctors, sport, and church. It makes me feel good.
- It is my responsibility to watch the interpreter and remember what is being signed.
- All information is confidential and interpreters are not allowed to lie.
- My communicator is great and is always listening.

*Below left:* Pam Witko with Anais Butler and India Craddock.

*Below:* Pam with Barbara O'Neil, Tito Va, Jacob Pratt, Benazir Kumar and Amber Tiopira.



## **M**ark Bolger - Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf — Taranaki



Hi from sunny Taranaki

I would like to take the opportunity to update you on the Deaf Studies programme I have been running in New Plymouth.

For two years now, I have been holding Deaf Studies sessions for the High School students on my caseload. The workshops are held weekly to give continuity and to enable us to fully explore the topics through to a logical conclusion. As you will be aware, timetabling is notoriously difficult in High Schools but fortunately, the school I work in operates on a five day not a six day rotation.

Prior to starting the Deaf Studies sessions, I was becoming increasingly concerned that the students I worked with seemed to lack confidence and self-awareness. This was particularly pronounced in the students who used sign as their primary mode of communication. They had a lack of understanding about Deaf Culture and were often confused about their role and responsibilities in a mainstream school setting. My students had all grown up in hearing families and had very limited contact with deaf adults. As a consequence of these concerns, after several discussions and with support from Paul and James, the Deaf Studies sessions were begun in earnest.

The sessions are planned around a theme or topic. At the beginning of each session, the students' prior knowledge of the topic is established and plenty of opportunity for open discussion is given. Students are encouraged to brainstorm their views and opinions on the given topic first. These thoughts are recorded and later reviewed to see if their views have changed or been modified by the ensuing discussion or in fact if any misconceptions have been dispelled.



The two themes, that I feel have had most overall impact on the students in developing their self awareness is “Respecting Difference” and “Working with a Communicator”.

I often begin the year with the topic “*Respecting Difference*”. In these sessions the definition of culture is explored. We discuss the cultural traits of different peoples and we link culture to language and discuss how these two things are inter-connected. Students are then encouraged to identify differences and similarities they share with deaf and hearing peers. We also discuss these differences and similarities in respect to family life and how an understanding of these can lead to more positive relationships.

“*Working with a Communicator*” is the second theme, I find myself re-visiting a lot. We discuss the communicator’s role as one of partnership, where both student and communicator have responsibilities. We spend time looking at the barriers both the communicator and the student face in a mainstream setting and discuss how these can be overcome. The ethics surrounding communication are also explored and students are encouraged to find ways in which they can advocate for themselves. Students have found that role playing different scenarios has helped highlight issues in this area.

This is of course a very brief summary of these topics. Some topics are discussed over several weeks as I have found that it is important to spend sufficient time on each theme. This is to allow the students’ time to develop their thoughts on the topic and to reflect how this knowledge may impact on their day to day lives.

I do, however, recognise that there are limitations in running Deaf Studies programmes in the regions. The Deaf Community in Taranaki is very small so students have a very limited number of deaf peers and adults with whom they can communicate with. There are very few opportunities for the students to socialise in a Deaf environment, hence they have few opportunities to experience some of the issues we discuss on a regular basis.

However, I truly feel that Deaf Studies is relevant to all students wherever they live and whatever their hearing loss as it encourages them to advocate for themselves while respecting and understanding the challenges they face.

Left: Pam Witco and Jackie Davidson  
working with students at a KIT day.

## Feedback from on-base Deaf Studies Programme.

To those who don't know me, my name is Janet Stokes and I work as the on base Language Assistant/Deaf Studies tutor at van Asch. What has been happening in Deaf Studies here at VADEC. Well... where to start? This year the students have covered a wide range of topics, some being more relevant and in line with what has been happening in the New Zealand Deaf Community, such as the TTY Relay Service public meetings. This was a good opportunity for the students to learn about what the TTY Relay service is about and how they can use TTY's in preparation for it's launch next year.



Another topic that has been very worthwhile this year was making 'Formal Presentations'. This topic was integrated with the classroom programmes in English, Social Studies and Information Technology. The students were required to give a speech on a particular topic about 'Deaf issues'. To do this, students had to practise interviewing and questioning skills with Deaf community members including myself! The presentations were based on Deaf History, famous Deaf people in NZ and Deaf Culture. The students also learnt how to do powerpoint presentations in class and practised culturally appropriate ways of gathering information. I was really proud to see the students from all levels doing this, and learning new things in the process. Well done VADEC students - you are all winners in this!

### HUMOUR AND CULTURE

People often pity Deaf people because their culture has taught them that we are born with five senses and of course, Deaf people have only four. Many people see this as deprivation. This is a fallacy because Deaf people have an added sense- a sense of humour and therefore all five senses are intact!

Humour is almost a necessity- like water, air or fire we need humour to survive. Humour is also one way that people share their perceptions of the world, express different levels of intimacy and find comfort in knowing that others share their beliefs and in their sense of humour. Deaf culture has flourished for decades and through NZSL their history, values, cultural norms and heritage have been transmitted by storytelling and Deaf humour.

This humour tends to be based around:

- the visual nature of humour
- humour based on deafness as an inability to hear
- humour from a linguistic perspective
- humour as a response to oppression

### THE VISUAL NATURE OF HUMOUR

It is no surprise that NZSL humour has a visual base as visual communication is central to all Deaf languages. NZSL jokes are often visually funny but do not carry the same wit when spoken. Likewise, Hearing people find things funny in the aural mode that Deaf people cannot relate to. It is not uncommon to find a Deaf couple laughing hysterically at an inappropriate moment in a movie, e.g. the screen may have an image of people screaming in terror with scary music playing - but to the deaf people it is funny because of the overacting and reactions of the actors.



Hearing people sometimes view the 'taking off' of every facial feature of a person or his/ her mannerisms as offensive. The Deaf 'audience' is of course delighting in the language's precision to convey these characteristics accurately.

### HUMOUR BASED ON DEAFNESS AS AN INABILITY TO HEAR

Deaf people do not lament the hearing loss, so the following piece of humour might be funny from a Hearing person's perspective but probably not from a Deaf cultural perspective.

*A deaf person is having a difficult time vacuuming the carpet. He goes over the same spot of dirt repeatedly, to no avail. In a fit of frustration, he turns around and notices that the machine is unplugged.*

This of course would never happen because a Deaf person would naturally feel the inactive motor and respond immediately! However, this is an example that would be considered funny:

*A Deaf couple has just arrived at the motel for their honeymoon. They start unpacking for the night and then the nervous husband goes out to get a drink. When he returns to the motel, he realises that he has forgotten his room number. Because it is dark outside and all the rooms look alike, he walks out to his car and continues to honk the horn until the rooms start lighting up with angry hearing people who were awakened by the noise- all but one room, where his Deaf wife is waiting for him!*



## HUMOUR FROM A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Check out the irony in this joke:

*A huge giant is stalking through a small village of wee people, who are scattering through the streets, trying to escape the ugly creature. The giant notices one particularly beautiful blonde-haired girl scampering down the cobblestone street. He stretches out his clumsy arm and sweeps up the girl, then stares at her in wonder at the slight shivering figure in his palm. "you are so beautiful!" he exclaims. The young woman looks up in fear. "I would never hurt you," he signs. "I love you, I think we should get MARRIED." With the production of the sign MARRY, of course, the beautiful mistress is crushed. The giant then laments, "See, ORALISM is better"*



## HUMOUR AS A RESPONSE TO OPPRESSION

It is no secret that Deaf people are an oppressed minority and one way that cultures often deal with this oppression is through humour. This category of humour is sometimes called 'zap' stories and usually feature Deaf people getting even. Sometimes characters in the jokes are Hearing people who have Deaf parents or a Deaf person with excellent speech who 'trick' the hearing people. Take a look at this one:

*A group of Deaf people are at a restaurant, chatting away. At the table next to them is a group of Hearing people, who are rudely mimicking their signs and behaviours. One particularly bright Deaf woman decides she has had enough of this abuse. She leaves the table, walks to a nearby phone booth, picks up the receiver and puts coins into the machine, making sure she is being observed by the Hearing group. After a short pause, she starts signing into the receiver, using natural expression and pausing for the person on the other end to respond. When she has completed her call, she hangs up and strolls back to the table to resume her conversation. Needless to say, the Hearing people are dumbfounded and unable to move, much less ridicule the Deaf crowd. When the Deaf group leaves the restaurant, they watch as the Hearing people run over to inspect the phone.*



Laughter is the best medicine and is often the response to cope with the frustration and tedium of our everyday lives. Share these jokes with your students and check out their response!

We would really like to hear about how useful you have found this newsletter. We would also like to include your ideas from the regions to include in future issues.

Please contact:



**James Townshend -**  
**[jtownshend@vanasch.school.nz](mailto:jtownshend@vanasch.school.nz)**

*Specialist Resource Teacher -  
Visual Communication*

or

**Paul Buzzard -**  
**[pbuzzard@vanasch.school.nz](mailto:pbuzzard@vanasch.school.nz)**  
*Deaf Resource Coordinator*



*This article has been condensed from 'Reflections of Deaf Culture in Deaf Humour' by M.J. Bienvenu from 'The Deaf Way - Perspectives from the International conference on Deaf Culture'- Gallaudet University Press - Washington DC 1994.*