

A "Visible" Woman: Learning with a Student who is Deaf-blind at University

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Abstract: This article presents a case study of an undergraduate student with Deaf-blindness working with an interpreter and an academic skills adviser to develop her writing for the disciplines. It highlights the mutual learning this involves: about strategies for communication, issues of inclusion, and perspectives on disability.

Key Words: deaf-blind, disability, voice

For people who are Deaf-blind to undertake university study requires the involvement of a wide range of people, including (in addition to their subject lecturers) technicians who provide texts in an accessible form, sign language interpreters, librarians, and, if possible, academic skills advisers to help with composing and editing. It is usual to refer to these as support “services,” but as participants we find this concept inadequate to encompass the kinds of mutual engagement that can develop as staff members in various roles accompany students through their course of study. The literature on studying with a dual sensory impairment does not as yet offer an account of what staff and students have learned from one another, as far as we are aware. We would like to move the discussion from *service* to *learning* by recounting the experience of one such student – Elizabeth – and the staff involved in her efforts to learn how to write for the purposes, and in the discourses, of a Bachelor of Arts degree course in an Australian university. This piece is narrated by Kay, the academic skills adviser for Elizabeth’s Humanities and Social Science Faculty, in concert with Elizabeth and Sarah, our Deaf and Disability Liaison Officer, and drawing on interviews with technical staff and subject lecturers who have taught Elizabeth. She has, with the utmost good humour, unsettled our assumptions, expanded our knowledge, and improved our practice. One lecturer told me she had learned “that adjusting teaching/learning experiences for a student with special needs is beneficial for everybody’s learning and interactions in the classroom. There are many ways of learning, and sometimes students are the best guides ...”

We would like to develop two themes which reflect the two kinds of learning in which we have been engaged. First, as we have grappled with the practicalities of sustaining participation without sight or hearing, we have found ourselves questioning common assumptions about the boundaries of our professional roles. The other theme traces the development of Elizabeth’s thinking about issues of difference or diversity, discrimination or inclusion, as she has moved through her course. Her continuity of focus on such related issues is a product of Elizabeth’s self-consciousness as a person with a disability, which drives her to make connections among diverse kinds of marginalisation and self-assertion. Selecting from subjects offered in the BA – in English, history, sociology, and gender and diversity studies -- Elizabeth has constructed a curriculum which has introduced her to ways of seeing these issues through different disciplinary lenses and with reference to different bodies of knowledge, while she has enriched each subject with her expert knowledge of disability.

Elizabeth’s Education as a Person who is Deaf-blind

Elizabeth was born prematurely in 1958, and the oxygen administered to keep her alive damaged her retinas. She attended Blind School up to year seven, and during that time, ear infections and cholesteatoma also damaged her hearing. Elizabeth speaks of her frustration with the methods of education for people with her disabilities (her terminology reflecting usage at that time).

“[In the] 1960s [and] 70s, it was ... [decided] that Braille would no longer be taught to children with partial sight and they started using tape recorders, [and] large print, no matter how little vision you had. [Also at this time] oralism education for Deaf children was being taught [based on the idea that Deaf people should learn to speak, and to comprehend speech by lip reading]; and cued speech and signed English, which is a hearing person’s means of sign language, became popular for teachers of the Deaf [rather than sign languages developed by Deaf people themselves].

Children’s expectations were very low. For example it was felt that I should go to Blind rehabilitation services at...16 ... [and] then into the sheltered work shops for the blind. This [was] frustrating ...because I knew I could do a lot better for myself. ... academic expectations of my abilities [were not] very high. In fact, I did very little reading and writing because I thought that was only for school and ... I had a very unhappy childhood at school being away from my family -- apart from music, [which] was one thing I really excelled at. I would lock myself into one of the practice rooms at school to lock the outside world away.”

Moving to England, Elizabeth studied music at the Royal National College for the Blind, and graduated with credits. However, her hearing deteriorated until in 1992 she was given one of the early cochlear implants. She says:

“During this time I was working for Guide Dogs Victoria in Public Relations and Fundraising. And I had to learn Auslan (Australian Sign Language) very quickly because I had no means of communication.

In 1993 I worked for The Deaf-blind Association as Community Liaisons Officer. During this time I went to many schools teaching children about Deaf-blindness, and my time in Public Relations and Community Education gave me a love for teaching children.

It was not until 1998 that my friend Andrea encouraged me to read for relaxation. It would take me ages to read a large print book. It was at this time [that] I started to use some Braille.”

In 2005 Elizabeth took an online course designed for students with Deafness to improve their English, and then studied senior secondary level English, followed by a Diploma course to improve her Auslan so she could go on to further study. Elizabeth says, “[If you search,] you will find many things on Deaf-blind children’s education but not much on University or tertiary education for adults. This is because the expectations of Deaf-blind people are still quite low in many people’s views.”

People who are Deaf-Blind in Higher Education

Indeed, there is little information about people who are Deaf-blind in higher education. According to Everson and Enos (1995), “[a]lthough many young adults who are Deaf-blind could potentially benefit from postsecondary education, currently very few” enroll, and “very little has been written or researched about students who are Deaf-blind and their postsecondary education experiences” (p. 1). There are, however, some documents that offer advice to prospective students about assessing the suitability of institutions they may be considering, and advice to staff about meeting the needs of students who are Deaf-blind (e.g. Enos & Jordan, n.d.; Transition guide for students who are Deaf-blind, n.d.; Jordan, 2001; Everson & Enos, 1995; Talbot-Williams, 1996; Ingraham, Belanich, & Lascek, 1998; Orlando, 1998; Lago-Avery, 2001).

Spiers and Hammett (1995) have written a very useful paper addressed to students, lecturers, administrators and disability support staff, explaining the causes, kinds, and combinations of impairment that come under the general description of Deaf-blindness, and recommending services and accommodations to support their studies. They emphasise that each person is different in the degree of their impairment of either kind, when and how they acquired it, their cultural identification, if any, with the Deaf community, their awareness about their own disability, and their awareness of services. Conway concurs: “In my case, the answer to the question ‘What do you need?’ cannot be achieved simply by skimming down the list of what to provide for people who are blind and what to provide for people who are deaf. . . . Vision loss plus hearing loss manifests itself differently for each individual” (Stodden & Conway, 2003, p. 5; cf. Spiers & Hammett, 1995, p. 2).

The “individual nature of each student’s accommodation needs” is similarly stressed by Anindya Bhattacharyya (1997) in his address to the Sixth Helen Keller World Conference (online). He emphasizes the importance of (1) consultation to determine how a student prefers to access and communicate information in texts, lectures, and discussions (2) forward planning, to ensure that texts are made available in accessible formats, and that interpreters and note-takers, if needed, are available and (3) arrangements for orientation and mobility training, so that students know their way around campus. Bhattacharyya (1997) understands the initial difficulty, for most institutions, of working out accommodations when “they have not yet experienced serving this unique population of students.”

It is not only support staff who must rise to this challenge, as Bhattacharyya (1997) notes, but teaching staff as well:

”When first exposed to a post secondary environment, a Deaf-blind student presents unique challenges for support services to meet his or her needs. Faculty are also challenged with learning effective methods to help Deaf-blind students to successfully complete academic endeavours.”

Nor does this encompass the full constellation of people involved in any student’s efforts to succeed at university. Enos and Jordan (n.d.) point out, in *A guide for students who are Deaf-blind considering college*, that “All college students have a support network, which can include family members, academic advisors, study partners, tutors, and friends. Often students take a team approach to completing a course, relying on the assistance of these and other supports.”

Their advice, at this point, resonates strongly with our own experience: “By taking this team approach to your entire college experience, you will help ensure your success.”

Elizabeth’s Team

Elizabeth uses our university’s alternate format service, which provides the readings she needs in formats that she can access; the note-taker service, which provides a record of lectures and tutorials; the university librarians’ assistance in finding readings; and the interpreting service, which provides tactile sign Auslan interpreters in settings requiring real time, face-to-face communication. The Deaf and Disability Liaison Officer, Sarah, arranges the provision of all of these services, as well as liaising with teaching staff to provide information about Elizabeth’s needs and how to accommodate them and to set up meetings as needed with teachers, the academic skills adviser, or the technical staff.

The alternate format staff welcomes Elizabeth’s feedback to tell them what works for her and what does not, and they are very flexible about converting texts quickly. As Elizabeth’s vision and hearing have deteriorated during the course of her studies, her preferences for different formats have changed from large print to Braille, because, as she says, “reading is extremely stressful for the little vision I have. And I am so pleased I made that decision.” An attachment to her computer keyboard turns whatever is on the screen into Braille under Elizabeth’s fingers, allowing her to read materials that have been scanned into the computer as well as those that are already available in electronic form, on websites or as e-books (Ingraham, Belanich & Lascek, 1998; for more on technology, see Pasupathy, 2006).

To communicate with others, Elizabeth has the options of typing (to email other people, and to produce assignments), or signing, or speaking, and in conversation she switches between sign and speech or uses them simultaneously. Elizabeth is fluent in English, because she was not Deaf at birth, and her speech is not noticeably affected by her Deafness except when she is also signing, as often happens. Then, her speech adapts itself to the morphology and syntax of Auslan (for information on this, see Johnston & Schembri, 2007). This has the effect of simplifying spoken utterances, because much of the meaning of Auslan is conveyed in non-lexical ways, such as use of space or facial expression, or shared knowledge of context. Elizabeth is aware of differences between English and Auslan, and has told me that she used to think in longer concepts, but now she “tend[s] to think in short Auslan concepts, then fill in the gaps”. This suggests that her written composition, as well as her conversation, may be affected by the change to thinking in her additional language.

With Sarah, Elizabeth meets regularly with her lecturers, to check her understanding, and they help her to choose readings or films relevant to her assignments (for film, an interpreter watches with Elizabeth and signs what is on the screen). During these sessions with lecturers, Elizabeth can let them know what is unclear to her, and keep them informed of her ideas for her assignments. These meetings serve to keep Elizabeth “on track,” conceptually and practically. For example, when her interpreter missed a lecture, she got the lecturer’s notes to fill that gap.

Then, Elizabeth and Sarah and I also meet each week, and Elizabeth tells me what her lecturers have emphasised as important in her assignments. Elizabeth often refocuses a question

to allow scope for her to use and to extend what she knows about disability, which in turn enriches the learning of her fellow students and her lecturers. For example, for the History subject “Myth, Memory and History,” which touches on oral traditions, Elizabeth designed her own topic, “What significance does the history of oralism have in relation to Deaf politics and identity in the present?” For her subject in “Writing Fiction,” she wrote a tale of “reversals,” about lost travellers who encounter a community where it is normal to be born with Usher’s Syndrome – a condition of deteriorating vision and hearing – and the few people who have sight and hearing are kept as slaves to serve the dominant Usher population (for an extract from this story, see Appendix One). In most cases, this strategy of focusing on disability to explore her subjects’ themes of division, inequality, or construction of identity works well, but her lecturers are mindful that her studies should also take her beyond what she already knows, so negotiating the focus and scope of each assignment involves considerations of flexibility, inclusivity, and standards.

Blurring the Boundaries between “Support” and “Direction”

In our weekly meetings, we talk about the readings and the lectures, and in this respect, the way I work with Elizabeth is different from the way I work with students who can see. With a sighted student, we make brief notes of what the student says, for him to elaborate on later. He will do that with his books and notes all around him, drawing evidence and quotations from this or that different source and putting them together in an outline plan or a mind map where he can see, at every stage, what he is compiling, how all the bits relate to each other, where the gaps are, and so on. Lacking this visual dimension, Elizabeth finds it helpful to talk while I function rather like a mind map, noting ideas and examples as she recalls them, asking her how they relate to each other, identifying gaps where I ask her to elaborate, or contradictions which she will need to resolve. Then I email a summary of the session to Elizabeth, to remind her of what we said, and to pass on to her lecturers if she wants to check that we are on the right track.

Some readers may be uncomfortable about the amount of direction offered in these sessions, contrasting with the non-directive ethos prominent in writing tutoring. Writing tutors generally try to focus on *how* students write, not *what* they write; if we venture into matters of content, we may be suspected of misleading the student (because we know too little), or of leading them (because we know too much). (For this debate, see Clark, 1990 and 2001; Harris, 1990.) However, directive teaching does not have to give answers; it can encourage habits of questioning that will help students to succeed in the kinds of enquiry fostered by their disciplines. Those who fear that this is likely to make students dependent on their tutors may be reassured by Elizabeth’s experience. She has told me that increasingly, when she is working by herself, she asks herself questions because she has got used to me asking so many when I am with her (for more on this, see Chanock, 2010).

Sarah’s role, similarly, often goes beyond the limits of exact translation that interpreters are conventionally bound to observe. She asks occasional questions of her own (beyond the questions about arrangements which are her responsibility) or suggests a new approach. For example, when Elizabeth could not find a way into understanding how poetry works – “maybe,” she said, “because it’s so visual” – Sarah suggested that she use what she knew about music. Right away, we could talk about stress and rhythm, the structure of verse, and recurring themes

("like a melody"). Sarah also draws Elizabeth back to the central focus of discussion when she wanders, and if Elizabeth's response to one of my questions suggests that the purpose of the question has not been understood, Sarah says to me, "That's not what you meant, is it?" and rephrases the question. Without this collaboration, I would be much less effective, because despite taking a brief beginner's course in Auslan, which introduced me to the ways in which signs express ideas, I have very limited understanding of the range of ways in which my utterances might be given meaning in the language.

In these sessions, we cannot do close work on drafts, as I would with a hearing student, saying "This bit here, where you say [blah blah blah], it's a bit unclear...." To do this in a session with Elizabeth and Sarah, I have to wait while she signs every word of the passage I want to talk about, and Elizabeth has to hold it in memory at the same time as receiving and considering the question I want to ask her about it. Usually, therefore, I save this for our electronic exchange of drafts and comments.

Commenting on Writing

How to comment upon drafts when a student cannot see was a problem for Elizabeth's lecturers as well as for me, and our methods have evolved, as we have learned more about how Elizabeth works. When I began working with Elizabeth, I found it difficult to move beyond my previous experience of working with students with a vision or hearing impairment. I responded to the challenges of her situation not with imagination or resourcefulness, but only, initially, with dismay. I had learned ways of working with students with a hearing impairment, such as using the "track changes" tool on my computer to comment on their drafts, making mind maps, and constructing written conversations as we sat side by side, looking at their essay plans; but these were no good to Elizabeth, as they depended upon vision. Conversely, the methods I had learned to work with students with vision impairment were no use either, as they relied on hearing: for example, I might read a student's work aloud and comment on it, or recommend that he use screen-reading software at home to hear what he was writing as he wrote it. Working with Elizabeth, I could no longer rely on the strategy of shifting the load from one sense to another.

At first, because Elizabeth still had some, albeit very limited, vision and hearing when she began her studies, I tried to use "track changes," as did her lecturers. However, it relies on colour to flag corrections, and it puts comments in the margin where a student who is blind cannot easily find them. Fortunately, as Elizabeth's sight deteriorated, she switched to the Braille display on her computer, which does not use vision at all, and our communications improved as I was forced to find a way to put comments where they were needed, in such a way that they were readily noticed and easily understood. The key, I have learned, is simplicity. What I want Elizabeth to consider may be complex, but the way I express this request should be as simple as possible. I decided to place corrections in square brackets immediately after the thing that they referred to, and to use a few consistent directions such as *add*, *delete*, *change*, or *replace*. Where it is a comment or a question, rather than a correction, I begin each one with "Elizabeth", to flag the difference. At various times we have worked on topic sentences, cohesive devices, and transitional phrases, and I have modeled the phrasing and location of these in academic writing. Over time, Elizabeth asked me to use capitals for my interjections, so that she could tell them apart from her own writing:

“Deaf people were made to feel unequal and lesser to [CHANGE TO TO THAN] their hearing counterparts under the education of oralism, [CHANGE COMMA TO FULL STOP AND CAPITALISE NEXT WORD] because they couldn’t learn to speak, they were placed in a category of intellectually disabled which is particularly true for the children who were pre-lingually Deaf.

...The knowledge of suppression of Deaf people arises from the reading of histories such as [ADD THAT OF] oralism which has in turn proceeded [ELIZABETH, DID YOU MEAN PRODUCED?] a mission of Deaf empowerment and the resistance of Dominant cultural forces. It is the History itself that catalyses social [ADD AND] political change.”

Once we had worked out this method, I suggested that Elizabeth circulate it to her lecturers and to her peers in the fiction writing subject when they were workshopping her drafts, so all of them became more aware of how Elizabeth works and what they could do to help.

Faults or Strategies?

When I notice a pattern of errors, like incomplete sentences or apostrophes, I write an extended message to Elizabeth, explaining the problem and solution with examples from her draft. One pattern that lecturers have noted as a fault is Elizabeth’s use of repetitions and redundancies, and clichés. But I have wondered whether we ought to look at these from another perspective if they are characteristic of the writing of a person who is Deaf-blind. They are, after all, commonplace rhetorical devices in oral traditions, where redundancy serves to maintain the prominence of themes as the composition proceeds, and to remind listeners (and, no doubt, speakers) of events recounted earlier in the piece. In oral traditions, repetition is an aid to memory, rather than an irritation, and clichés, too, have their uses. Homer used epithets such as “wily Odysseus” and “wine-dark sea” to conjure character and scene economically, by drawing upon listeners’ familiarity with the phrases. We might reflect that the world of the Deaf is like an oral culture, in its reliance on ephemeral signs, and that stock phrases and repetition may serve similar purposes in preserving its traditions. If so, we might see their appearance in Elizabeth’s writing as rhetorical devices, rather than faults to be overcome.

Faculty Response to Challenges of Inclusion

For the faculty who teach Elizabeth, it is not only her written work that challenges them to think about the implications of disability for inclusive thinking and practice. Having Elizabeth in their classes has stimulated a good deal of creative adaptation. In answer to my interview question, “What challenges have you encountered in this work [with Elizabeth],” a Gender and Diversity Studies lecturer volunteered:

“I use a lot of audio/visual material in lectures in particular, so I needed to think of ways for Elizabeth to access this information....In lectures, I got students to describe visuals, before I spoke to them. This would also set [the] context for interpreters before I launched into explanations. This worked well for everyone. Elizabeth and [the] interpreters were very proactive if clarification was needed, and we also met outside of

lecture/tutorial time. . . . Documentaries [and films] were the biggest challenge, particularly if they did not follow a straightforward narrative. Sometimes what is going on visually is different from what is being spoken, and can also be different from subtitles.”

To facilitate communication more generally, this lecturer found that “It is very important to send interpreters the lectures ahead of time. It was also helpful to meet with the student and interpreters outside of lecture/tutorial time, to check in on what is going on.”

Similarly, another lecturer felt that “It was really valuable to have an introductory session with Sarah and Elizabeth at the start of the semester -- half an hour chatting about Elizabeth’s background and needs, etc.” Both lecturers mentioned that they would have liked to learn a few signs, to be able to greet Elizabeth in Auslan, and that they did learn this eventually.

Social Challenges of Communications in the Classroom

Thus far we have been looking at the roles of various staff members in working with Elizabeth, but fellow students are another important part of the learning community, and they need guidance, too, in how to make it work. Isolation can be a problem for people who are Deaf-blind, as others do not know, at first, how much they perceive or how best to communicate with them. One student who is Deaf-blind attending an Art college in Britain recalls that her peers did not initially make the effort to include her:

“They had not seemed to realise that when they got up and said generally ‘Let’s go to the pub,’ that I could not hear what was going on. I seemed to be the last person to know what was going on. In a group I would feel left out, but I do try my best to make an effort and get involved. Another time when I felt left out was when we had essays and other students would get ideas from each other or hear useful tips, while I tried to struggle on in my own way. Now I have built up my self-confidence and directly ask friends more” (Emma Hancock, interviewed by Sarah Talbot-Williams, 1996, p. 25).

This student’s advice to others was “Make good friendships/relationships with tutors and students. . . . Be bold” (p. 26). Similarly, a student in the U.S. who is Deaf-blind advises others to “learn to educate people not familiar with vision/hearing losses. . . . and let friends know now – not later – what you need” (Erik Hammer, quoted in Everson & Enos, 1995, p. 6). While self-advocacy is strongly emphasized by writers in this field, including students who are Deaf-blind themselves (see Stodden & Conway, 2003, p. 2), it is also helpful if lecturers and peers do their part in facilitating the full participation of a student who is Deaf-blind in the life of the class. Elizabeth’s lecturer who worked at mediating the challenges of audio and visual materials was also concerned to work out ways of managing classroom communications so that Elizabeth would be included. She got:

“...all students to adjust the speed in which they speak and identify who they are before they speak (for interpreters). . . . As time went on, I got more of an idea of what needed to be finger spelt, and so would spell out the words [or] names that I thought would have no

sign. If I forgot, an interpreter would remind me. In tutorials, I would repeat what students would say, to give interpreters more time to translate.”

Another lecturer found that her students were “a little uncertain about how to interact with Elizabeth early on in the semester,” but that “they eventually learned more about Elizabeth over the semester through experience,” and “by the end of the semester, most of the other students understood Elizabeth, and interacted with her easily.” She notes that “the real breakthrough with the other students came after Elizabeth gave a tutorial paper. They finally saw her expressing herself in relation to the course, and this led to greater understanding.”

Our Learning about Inclusion

This brings us to what Elizabeth has learned, and taught us all, about inclusion. So far we have highlighted many things that Elizabeth has taught us about herself and her own situation. More broadly, however, Elizabeth has pursued her interest in inclusion – or the lack of it – through her choice of subjects and her sustained focus on what each subject could teach her about this. In sociology, she has learned about divisions in society along fault lines of class, race, culture and ethnicity, gender, and generation, as well as disability, and she carried those concepts into her other subjects, where she learned about discrimination and about the construction of identity not only by one’s own community, but by outsiders via stereotyping and “othering” – a familiar experience to a person with a disability. In Gender and Diversity studies, Anthropology, History, and English, Elizabeth’s understanding of the experience of disability was expanded by the concepts she was learning. At the same time, because she applied them to the topic of disability in her writing, her lecturers, as well as Sarah and I, were able to benefit from her insights and the information she presented. When she made oral presentations to her class, her peers too were included in her learning, as the lecturer noted above.

In Elizabeth’s English essay on Ralph Ellison’s (1952) novel about racism in America, *Invisible Man*, we find these sorts of connections again. The essay was about race, not disability, but in her final section, having dealt with race in the novel, Elizabeth reflects upon its relevance to disability. She writes:

“...In the sort of society where black people were discriminated against, the only way for black people to get along was to deny their blackness and live as white people. Similarly people have tried to make deaf children who were born pre-lingually deaf learn oralism to try to become involved in the hearing world. This is similar to black people denying their background. Their real culture and their real identity is exactly the same as Ellison’s character – invisible.”

For all of us, Elizabeth has made disability visible.

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Appendix

Extract from Elizabeth's Story about Pilots Crash-landing in a Community Dominated by People with Usher's Syndrome

As we accompanied the Usherians to their village we felt so amazed how the Deaf-blind community was normal in every way. They are the insiders, and we are the outsiders and we with hearing and sight were the ones with a disability.

As we walked through the streets, looking into the shops, everyone was using this strange language they call tactile sign language. As the Usherians were told of our presence they were very unsure about us. As we saw a car come from around the corner, driven by one of the Deaf-blind people, we both immediately stopped to let him pass. I asked our host, "How can a Deaf-

blind person drive a car?” This made me feel quite mystified. She explained, “We have developed cars that have inbuilt navigation systems and the person uses a special on-board navigation computer which automatically drives the car for them.” “Why do you need the hearing and sighted people to guide you around?” I asked her. Our host went on to say, “We must keep our hearing and sighted people to be our servants and they are here to accomplish our every need. If we do not give them a job they will get bored and sit round and waste away. We have special hearing and sighted centres where they learn to be integrated into the Deaf-blind community.”

The Usherian said, “Come on, I am going to be late for the Doctor’s appointment.” Jones wondered, “Are you sick?” The Usherian answered, “No, one of our children is visiting the doctor to see if he will be normal or have a disability of hearing and sight. We will ask one of our hearing people to interpret for you”.

We both were amazed to learn even their Doctors are Deaf-blind; they carry out their duties with the assistance of their hearing and sighted servants.

The doctor greeted the parents. We have never seen a doctor use sign language before. I was astonished to see how the conversation flowed. The language seemed so natural and it was not out of place. “Hello,” the doctor said. “We have the results back from your child’s test, and I have some very bad news.” The parents’ faces turned white, “Oh no what is it?” The doctor went on to say, “Unfortunately your child is hearing and seeing.” The parents replied in a shocked manner, “Oh no that is terrible news – really?” The doctor said, “Yes I’m afraid so, however we can help your child to lead a normal life. He will go to a special school just for Hearing and sighted children; they will learn a special language known as English. It will not interfere with their usual sign language.” The parents wondered whether they will have to go and learn this special language known as E.N.G.L.I.S.H. The Doctor added, “I will ask the visiting teacher for the hearing and sighted to visit your home so she can begin to teach you how to communicate through English”. The doctor was quite firm in explaining to them, “It is important that their primary language must be sign language so they can be as normal as possible.”

The doctor continued, “They will even learn how to communicate with each other by using English, and we have special teachers who will help them to be as normal as possible.” The parents seemed amazed there could be so much help available for the newly disabled child. The parents left the Doctor’s room and we accompanied the Usherian to see if we could find a way to get help.