

ERRATUM

The past three issues of the JRD (Volume 18, Nos. 1, 2, and 3) have carried Jack L. Cassell, Ph.D. and William E. Woodrick as Guest Editors. This is an error. Dr. Cassell and Mr. Woodrick were guest editors for Volume 18, No. 1, but not for Nos. 2 and 3. We are sorry we did not catch the error until now.

FORUM

Maybe it is just a heightened sensitivity, then again, maybe it is not, but we seem to be encountering the use of the term Total Communication to mean the use of signs with speech more and more frequently. To the best of our knowledge, the CEASD undertook to define Total Communication as a philosophy and we have not seen nor heard of any opposition to doing so. Consequently, we consider it to be just that, a philosophy.

A philosophy, as most of us know, is not a way of doing things, it is not a behavior; it is a reason or basis for behavior and never the behavior itself.

Signing/fingerspelling and talking at the same time IS a behavior and is not a philosophy, but it is indicative, usually, of the philosophy a person has. If one subscribes to the philosophy of Total Communication, his communication behavior with deaf persons will generally be signing/fingerspelling and speech (I am referring to hearing persons' behavior). If the individual subscribes to a different philosophy, his behavior should reveal it.

Generally, it is not possible for most of us to be able to use the communication modality or system or language which may be preferred by every deaf person. For example, there are relatively few persons, including interpreters, who are able to use simultaneous communication (signing/fingerspelling with speech), Ameslan, AND Cued Speech when communicating with deaf persons. Yet, some persons prefer one or another, generally, of the above. Still, if we subscribe to the Total Communication philosophy, we recognize that any or all of the above should be available to a deaf person depending upon his needs/desires.

We say all this to get to the point that we do not USE Total Communication to communicate with deaf persons (hearing to deaf or deaf to deaf), but many, many persons writing for publication use the term to mean signing with speech. We try to catch such usage in the JRD and to substitute, generally, the term "simultaneous method", or some similar form, to indicate the same thing. We reserve the use of the term "Total Communication" as a term which refers to a philosophy of communication which requires that we communicate with any deaf person according to his needs/desires.

Along with the apparent misuse of the term "Total Communication" is the constant confusion, again by persons writing for publication, between signing and sign language. It should be eminently evident that when we talk about sign language, we are speaking of a language other than English. Simply because one signs does not mean that he is using sign language. Usually, the person who is signing is using English, but borrowing from the lexicon of Ameslan to express himself IN English. Ameslan is a sign language. It is as different from English as Spanish.

We often read that a person who uses Total Communication is communicating using sign language and speech simultaneously. It is patently impossible to do this. For one thing, a primary characteristic of any sign language, to our knowledge, is that the language exists only in its signed form (recent efforts in sign writing notwithstanding). Sign languages are not capable of being transcribed in the same fashion, even, that English is transcribed (written). Sign language is totally incapable of being spoken. Sign language can only be signed. Consequently, it is simply impossible to speak a language which does not exist in a spoken form. Consequently, it is impossible to use sign language and speech at the same time, unless one is capable of producing two languages simultaneously. It would, in our view, be tantamount to one person speaking to two others who speak different languages and being perfectly understood by both (Tower of Babel?).

At any rate, we urge those of you who bother to read this to use such terms as Total Communication, signing, sign language, etc., properly and to make and understand the distinction between signing and sign language.