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College of Liberal  
Arts & Sciences

Gladys Tang  
Centre for Sign Linguistics & Deaf Studies  
Chinese University of Hong Kong

Dear Gladys,

I was delighted to visit the Jockey Club Sign Bilingualism and Co-enrolment in Deaf Education Programme in Hong Kong in May, 2013. I have heard and read about this program in many places, agreeing with the philosophy of providing education for Deaf children in a fully bilingual environment. Still, actually seeing the program and meeting some of the students involved made a big impact on me. In the classroom I observed, Deaf and hearing students interacted casually and productively, using Hong Kong Sign Language and Chinese. In fact, when I visited the students were having a lesson in English – which they also understood very well – discussing different types of pollution.

One reason I was so impressed by the program was the ease and naturalness I observed when the hearing and Deaf students interacted with each other. All the students use HKSL to discuss their schoolwork, negotiate their responses to the in-class exercise, or reply to the Deaf teacher. Likewise, the Deaf and hearing teacher seemed to work together seamlessly, sharing responsibility for communication and education. Just as people who are multilingual can easily switch between their languages and use them in the appropriate contexts, the students and teachers in the Jockey Club Sign Bilingualism programme seem to be facile with their multiple languages, despite the difference in modality between signed and spoken languages.

In a small group session with a few of the students, I found out that they like learning in multiple languages – Deaf and hearing alike. The co-enrollment concept has allowed them to make Deaf and hearing friends, to be truly integrated. Those who are graduating want to continue using HKSL in their next school. This program is making great strides in education, and I hope to see it continue to do so for a long time.

*Diane Lillo-Martin*

Diane Lillo-Martin  
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