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**Civil Society, Canada, Ukraine and Issues in the Education of
Deaf Children**

The state shall ensure the establishment of a democratic system of education by promoting the creation of links between education and society, thus strengthening the role of local government bodies. This policy will stimulate the participation of professional and public organizations in planning the economic, upbringing and methodological priorities of educational establishments; in forecasting the progress of their development; and in expert assessment of the quality of education being delivered.

Education is the foundation for developing the individual, society, and the state. It assures the future. Education is one of the most important national sectors and comprises political, social, economic, cultural and scientific organizations. It involves about one third of the population. Education is the means of creating and ensuring the growth of the intellectual and spiritual moral potential of a nation as well as educating citizens. Education is essential for modernizing a society and raising the economic, political and humanitarian status of a country internationally.
Lashchivsky, V. (2001)

Philosophical Base

The ideals incorporated into the National Doctrine for Educational Development in Ukraine in the 21st century are no different from those of Canadian education, and, indeed, many other countries. What makes Ukraine and Canada different is their incorporation into these ideals into the democratic structure of a Civil Society. The work of the Institute of Special Education, The Western Canadian Centre for Studies in Deafness and our associated post-secondary institutions has provided a model for the

effective involvement and partnership which was cemented by the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Institute and the Academy and University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan Community College. I find it a singularly significant honor and responsibility that I have a formal status in all four of these organizations. It reflects our friendships, but it also reflects an intellectual allegiance in which we can attain the goals and objectives for achieving a "civil society: in both Ukraine and Canada. I really believe it presents in a small way a model for the "War on Terrorism" to be replaced by a movement for peace as we find that our linguistic, ideological, political, administrative and educational communities share common humanitarian goals and social objectives. All of us are teachers and all of us are students. So what can the work of the "Ukraine Project" for deaf children, their teachers and their parents in Ukraine teach us as researchers, academics and administrators?

1. The model of cooperation

The model of cooperation is predicated on respect for each other's skills and resources, but not only as professionals. It also includes students, parents and administrators, as well as local community resources. If the dialogue excludes any of the stakeholders and does not achieve an effective compromise, it will not be successful. In particular, parents and students are as much the agents of educational change as they are the recipients of services. Interestingly, it is special education, including the education of deaf and hard of hearing students, that has shown the most responsiveness to this need. Regular education has tended to lag behind. I see this pattern being repeated in Ukraine. I do not have time to analyze why, but, in summary, I think it reflects the needs of parents. We cannot pose as "all knowing" professionals when our students and the parents have far greater experience of their learning, social and educational needs than we can ever have. We may be valuable resources to the families and teachers we work with in Ukraine, but we do not fully understand their experiences and their needs/nor could we every do so. This inability does not diminish our role as educators, indeed, it enhances it. It makes lifelong and cooperative learning a reality.

2. Systems of education

Ukraine is unusual in that, unlike Canada and most of the "Western" democracies, it has retained its comprehensive system of special schools for disabled students. These schools are repositories of knowledge and expertise about these disabilities. Ukraine has also retained the system of employment opportunities for deaf people in "factories" providing for their employment. It is true that these factories face tremendous economic challenges/ but they do provide an excellent model for supporting deaf and hard of hearing adults. They allow them the dignity of "work", as opposed to the high unemployment rates which are characteristic of many but not all communities in Canada.

Ukraine is now challenged to adopt policies of inclusive education. There is much that is good, positive and educationally appropriate for students in an inclusive education program. But it is not appropriate for all students, and it is not appropriate for all students all of the time. In the "Ukraine Project: we have tried to impact nationally, but also through regional centres, which you have now also begun to introduce into selected schools under the direction of the Institute of Special Education. Deafness is a "low incidence" disability (even more so is blindness). It can be a lonely and terrifying experience for a Deaf student placed in a large hearing school with little or no supports and little or no ability to communicate with other students and teachers. Such students desperately need the supports that can come from centralizing sources into regional schools (or centers). Such facilities would integrate services for one or more disabilities, and short- or long term residential facilities could be available.

You and your child can do anything!

The family is the core unit of our society and the first unit of socialization of most children. It can breakdown, but, for most children, it manages to provide a nurturing environment in which they can develop. Unfortunately, for many deaf children, the basic core need of child and parent to communicate is a fractured and uncertain process. Research has

shown that parents who are themselves deaf can be more comfortable with their children's disability since they have communication through American Sign Language or its equivalent from birth. However, it is not the use of sign language alone; it is the similarity of experiences that makes it easier for them to develop this strong bond. For hearing parents this is much more a process of learning, but if they can accommodate to this need, they can, like deaf parents, become advocates for their children and participating partners in the educational process. Parents of non-disabled students can and should also take this role, but it is more important for parents of disabled students to do so. Their children's perspective of the world is, in part, uniquely determined by their disability. Ukraine already has an organization of deaf teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students. You now need a parent's organization to form a triumvirate of teachers, parents and students.

Language and language systems

The issues of language use and language teaching for deaf and severely hard of hearing students philosophically date back to Aristotle and as a question of educational methodology to Ponce de Leon in the 16th century in Spain. The divisions in Ukrainian practices and theories are no different from these which exist in Canada and elsewhere. They have existed for 500 years and will probably be around for another 500 years.

However/ there have been major steps forward which have mitigated some of the negative effects of past differences of values which masqueraded as differences of theories and of opinions. They are:

1. The virtually universal acceptance of "sign language" as a language and of its status as a natural language of Deaf people.
2. The shift in focus from universal solutions to children's learning to individual assessment and prescription of learning strategies.
3. The growth of technology which has allowed for a better understanding of how "methods" of communication can be better adapted to individual needs, both visually and auditorially.

The end product, "Bilingual (ASL and English) / bicultural (Deaf and hearing) education" and the separate development of educational streams such as the "auditory verbal" method, is a more realistic understanding of what are the issues in educating deaf children. We cannot even begin to solve these issues at this conference, but we do not need to. What we do have to do is ensure that in the Civil Society we accept multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism, and respect the integrity of the partners in the debate. Most of all, the resolution lies not in the collectivism of education, but in its individualism. Each child is unique and there will be different groups of students with different needs.

Postscript

In summary, the challenges I have tried to describe in the alliance we have forged between Ukraine and Canada transcend our national and international boundaries. However, we should never lose focus on the children and young people who should be the beneficiaries of our endeavors and discussions. Yes, we are here to raise economic, political and humanitarian status of both our countries internationally. But just as the horrors of war focus on vivid visual images of the victims of atrocities, so the focus I suggest for peace for individuals, communities, countries and the global village should have a provide vivid images on the quality of life we can provide for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. My colleague, Mary Ann Bibby was in Zimbabwe earlier this year. I think she will agree that deaf and hard of hearing children of Zimbabwe are no different in their basic needs than those of Canada, Ukraine, Russia, Holland, France or Germany. The symptoms are different the etiology and the solutions are the same.

I will leave you with one last thought. Many of my friends and colleagues have heard me use this quotation, but it is worth repeating and never forgetting. It was Margaret Mead, a famous Western anthropologist, who said "Never believe that a few dedicated individuals cannot change the world. Ineed, it is the only that that ever has/" We are a much larger group than in 1999, but we are still small enough to "change the world" and bring the Civil Society to the Global Village.