

Cued Speech and Literacy

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A conversation between Ann Underwood, (BAToD editor) and Anne Worsfold (Cued Speech Association UK, CSAUK):

Ann (BAToD) *“An article about Cued Speech and literacy?”*

Anne (CSAUK), excitedly: *“I’ve got a really interesting summary of international research looking at the way deaf children brought up with CS can use phonics and ……”*

Ann: *“I was thinking lighter, maybe even cartoon-y”*

Anne: *“Oh!……. OK.”*

To start: Anne’s sons’ story – learning to read

A long time ago I was a mother of two profoundly deaf children, one a baby and one a (very lively) toddler. Both were aided early but did not initially appear to benefit. I was frequently trapped in our small, half-built, four-floor old town house by my exhaustion. Too tired to go out I often sat with my older son looking at books and chatting about the pictures. I always cued everything I said. When he was nearing his third birthday I thought he had enough vocabulary to understand if I read from the books; to show that I was reading rather than chatting I ran my fingers under the words. He was very interested in this. One day he noticed the phrase ‘oh, boo hoo hoo, what a t’ do’ and he pointed to the ‘o’ and cued ‘oo’. The next week we went to the zoo and again he pointed to and cued the ‘oo’ on the sign above the gate. Then he noticed the letters that made up his name – and that of his brother. He started to try to decode words containing the letters he knew and I began to teach him some new letters.

By three he could read some simple, regular words. Although he could hear very little (average 108Db loss over the speech range) Cued Speech gave him an awareness of all the phonemes. So that he did not lose momentum, and recalling my extreme confusion when learning to read (remember ‘look and say’?), I made a ‘book of sounds’ in which I wrote the different spellings for the phonemes (cues) as we came across them. It worked like this: each page represented one sound, so for example the /aw/ page might start with ‘or’ (for), then ‘our’ (four), and ‘ore’ (more), ‘aw’ (paw) and so on. The book was never finished because by the time he was four he had cracked the code – he could make the association between the sound he knew existed but could not hear and the letter or group of letters. He could read any word in his vocabulary. He usually read silently and chatted about what he read afterwards but he would read aloud if requested although his diction was poor. When he started local, mainstream school at 4½ he was so far ahead that his teacher got his reading books from class three. She was not happy about this; she said he was not ‘reading ready’. His younger brother followed much the same path. Tests by the ToD put both boys’ reading ages, and their understanding of grammar, about two years ahead their hearing peers.

I think this story is important because:

- he was a profoundly deaf child who learnt to read through phonics – without being able to hear most of the sounds
- he learnt to read very quickly and very easily
- he learnt to read with, initially, a VERY small vocabulary

Also worth noting are the facts that he learnt from a parent who was making it up as she went along and that the scrappy, unfinished 'book of sounds' had similarities with current Thrass teaching materials. In addition he appeared to learn new vocabulary through reading at a very early age. I have since spoken to other cueing parents with similar experiences.

Research shows that the children who have early, consistent access to spoken language through Cued Speech in the home have the best results, so one of the most effective strategies for ToDs is to encourage families to cue.

Older children (and a cartoon)

Cued Speech can also be very effectively used to support literacy teaching within schools. With Cued Speech the teaching of phonics to deaf children is not only possible but simple. No other system can be used in real-time to show the sounds of speech and how they combine into words, phrases and sentences.

Teachers and support staff can learn to cue in about 20 hours and the CSAUK arranges courses in different formats. A learn to cue website in the final stage of development is expected to significantly cut face-to-face tuition time.

Materials are available to support literacy teaching in the classroom. *Cued Speech Activities for Children*, is a brand new, comprehensive CD-ROM of printable teaching materials by June Dixon-Millar, founder of CSAUK, designed to be compatible with any reading scheme. This 400-page resource aims to teach deaf children the sounds of English and their spelling forms through Cued Speech activities, pictures, games, flash cards and simple vocabulary. Also included are activities designed to accelerate the language of deaf children who have not had the benefit of Cued Speech from infancy and who consequently have delayed language and reading levels.

Materials include:

- activities to enable deaf children to decode and encode language
- games such as Cued Speech snap, pairs and clock patience
- pictorial as well as word-based charts to provide a dependable reference base for all consonant, vowel, diphthong and triphthong sounds
- spelling forms of phonemes
- certificates of achievement for the children at different stages.

A version using the International Phonetic Alphabet should be finished shortly. The current bargain price of either CD-ROM is £12.

Also available is a booklet written by Sheila Skillings, primarily for deaf 7-10 year olds but suitable for any age, to teach Cued Speech to children. This tried and tested booklet uses 'Jolly Phonics' script and costs £6.

Equal Access

Ruth Kelly has said: "I am clear that synthetic phonics should be the first strategy in teaching all children to read". There is no reason why, with Cued Speech, deaf children cannot be taught alongside their hearing peers and with equal success.

Finally - research

Research shows that deaf children brought up with Cued Speech have reading levels equal to hearing children and can learn to read through phonics. The summary of international research into Cued Speech and literacy by Dr Kelly Crain Ph D, of the University of South Florida, is on our website at www.cuedspeech.co.uk under the heading 'news'.

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