

Cued Speech and sign languages - achieving full bilingualism



Complete spoken language
through vision

Information Sheet 9a

Cued Speech is based on a simple hypothesis: if all the essential sounds (phonemes) of our spoken language look clearly different from each other on the mouth of the speaker, even a completely deaf child can learn language in much the same way as a hearing child but through vision rather than audition.

Cued Speech is used to give deaf children and adults access to spoken language, (in the UK, usually English) without ambiguity or strain. Because it is a system not a language it is relatively easy to learn and parents of deaf children can master the basics in a matter of days.

90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents and many choose to help their children to understand and use the home spoken language - often using only oral/aural practices. However, if children cannot hear all the sounds of speech with hearing aids it can be very difficult for them to fully understand complete spoken language and in these cases Cued Speech can be used to clarify the lip patterns of speech.

Cued Speech will allow hearing parents to use their own language in a visual form and in its entirety - and thus allow deaf children full access to the English language from a very early age. This has huge advantages: children see a complete, grammatically correct language and can use it to communicate. Their full understanding can then be used to prime literacy skills and to help

speech and lipreading.

Some hearing parents of deaf children make the choice to use a sign language, in the UK, British Sign Language (BSL), as the primary means of communication. This has the advantage that the deaf child can fit fully into the deaf community but has the disadvantage that parents may take years before they become proficient in sign. An additional problem is that a sign language is not an easy route to full literacy. Bilingualism in spoken language (but often only in its written form) and sign language is a goal which seeks to combine the advantages of both languages. However, without Cued Speech, it remains difficult for many deaf children to fully understand spoken and written language.

In the past twenty years there have been many deaf people who have used Cued Speech to become proficient in spoken and written language(s) and who also use sign language. They have become truly bi- or multi-lingual. There are a number of case studies and articles about individuals and families which are available from the Cued Speech Association UK. No educational programme in the UK uses Cued Speech in this way, but the inside pages contains a very brief summary of the principles behind such a programme in the USA. The final page contains excerpts from the story of one English family who are using both Cued Speech and Sign Language.

Cued Speech is a simple sound-based system comprising eight handshapes used in four positions near the mouth together with the lip patterns of normal speech so as to make all the sounds of spoken language fully comprehensible to deaf babies, children and adults

More information?

Video, booklet and more information sheets available.

Learn to Cue

Regular courses (some residential) are arranged, with low cost or free tuition.

Contact us at:

Cued Speech Association UK
Tel, voice and text: 01803 832 784
Fax: 01803 835 311
E-mail: info@cuedspeech.co.uk
Web: www.cuedspeech.co.uk

Call an experienced user now to discuss the benefits of Cued Speech

Bilingualism through American Sign Language and Cued English

The following is taken from the 12-page article: 'A DIFFERENT BILINGUAL APPROACH TO THE EDUCATION OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN' by Kitri Larson Kylo, Assistant Director, in collaboration with Karen Doenges, Speech/Language Pathologist, both of Intermediate School District 917, Rosemount, Minnesota, USA.

The purpose of the article is to explain the development and implementation of their programme. It also looks at the alternatives to their approach and at the use of cued English¹ in more detail.

The full article is available from the Cued Speech Association UK.

The authors write that for learners who are deaf or hard of hearing, the programme is committed to the importance of acquiring proficiency in both American Sign Language (ASL) and in reading and writing English.

The devisors of the programme believe that the following must be present to develop proficiency in any language:

- ⇒ 'Clear access and exposure to language in the early language learning years (Children are most receptive to language acquisition from birth to three; the critical years for language acquisition and development are birth to eight.)
- ⇒ Constant and consistent exposure to (i.e. 'immersion' in) the target language through natural, meaningful communication with adults and others who are fluent language models in that target language.
- ⇒ Exposure to complete representations of language to develop the necessary linguistic foundation necessary for life-long learning.
- ⇒ Learning the language through natural, face-to-face discourse. Conversation provides the opportunity for practice and 'trial and error' in the target language for children until they acquire internally the rules of that target language.'

Having accepted the above as prerequisites to developing language proficiency, they addressed the following issues:

- 1) 'The lack of accessibility to ASL or their own home language for deaf and hard of hearing children of hearing parents. It is not possible for ASL to be the native language of children where proficient ASL models are not available in the home, and where ASL is not the native language of the family.' They state that 'this is not intended to criticize or minimize the valiant efforts of the many hearing parents who learn to sign', but that 'it points out the difficulty of adults learning a second language and conveying it

in a fluent, complete form to children'.

- 2) 'The inadequate levels of English literacy among deaf and hard of hearing children, even among Deaf² children of Deaf parents.'

Observations led them to believe that the use of cued English provides a very effective way for deaf and hard of hearing children to learn English and that:

- ⇒ 'learning to read and write English fluently requires a phonemic awareness of the English language, which cannot be learned through ASL since it is a completely different language than English, and does not have the phonemic structure of English.'
- ⇒ 'acquiring proficiency in reading and writing requires acquiring internal mastery of the English language before a child comes to the task of having to decode and encode that language in print in reading and writing tasks.'
- ⇒ 'acquiring internal mastery of English linguistic structures requires immersion and direct discourse in that target language, that children do not learn a language by having it explained to them in another language, nor do they learn a language effectively or efficiently through just the printed form.'

ACCESS TO THE HOME LANGUAGE

They believe that it is 'of paramount importance for deaf and hard of hearing learners to have access to a language beginning at birth, or as soon as it is learned there is a hearing loss.' They write: 'This means the major caregivers (usually the child's parents) must be able to provide a rich language model to their child in their home language in order to provide a language base and general knowledge of the world as the necessary foundation for all subsequent learning.'

'Hearing parents are able to be excellent English (or other home language) models to their child by using a means which translates their syllable-based language into a visually complete medium. This is what cued English (or cued language) does. Cueing their home language allows parents to be rich, fluent, proficient language models in their native language almost immediately, and allows them to provide a language and knowledge of the world to their child, both critical prerequisites for academic and social/emotional development.'

CUED ENGLISH

'We did not allow the theoretical framework alone to convince us of the merits of cued English. We visited cued English programmes out-of-state and saw the reading and writing skills of profoundly deaf children of

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hearing parents that were at or above grade level. These were not “cream of the crop” children, but children who came from a wide range of socio-economic levels and different levels of language support in the home. Several of the children had started in “total communication” signing programs. After a time in the cueing program, their English skills became close to, at, or above grade level, depending on the amount of exposure to English through cueing they had received. We read research articles and met “cue kids” and their parents. The 15-year-old children we met had passed the Basic Skills Test with flying colors ... and had post high school reading levels. We had teachers and speech/language pathologists on staff who were seeing marked improvements in our program’s deaf students’ English acquisition through instruction in cued English.’

BILINGUAL IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

‘We recognize the parents’ right to make the decision regarding the language of instruction that is to be used with their child in the school setting. What we are trying to achieve in our program is unambiguous access to, and immersion in the languages of both American Sign Language and English. Emphasis on the word “language” above is critical here. It is paramount to the program decisions and practices we have chosen.

‘The amount of exposure to one or both of the languages of ASL and English for a given period of time is determined through parent and staff discussion and the IEP [Individual Education Plan] process in a language plan for the child...’ ‘Our goal is to have bilingual development during the critical language-learning years. We do not necessarily start at age one or two exposing a child to both languages immediately. The starting point is based on the home language, whether it is ASL, or English (or another home language, e.g. Spanish) through cueing. Exposure to the second language begins after a good foundation in the first language has been established. Some children have most or all of their school day in American Sign Language and some have most or all of their school day in English via cued English. Others have a balance of American Sign Language and English in their school day. Establishing the “first language” of the child is a major consideration in the discussions with parents. Another consideration is that there must be a thrust on the acquisition of the English language during the early childhood years due to the urgency to be ready for reading and writing in the early elementary years.’

‘We believe acquisition of language needs to be the primary focus, and that the acquisition of speech skills occurs much more readily and successfully when paired with complete access to the language. Speech is a medium to convey language, but it is not language in itself. All children must have language to be successful learners.’

‘We believe speech is more effectively achieved when paired with the use of cued language.’ In addition it does not endanger ‘the child’s critical need of acquiring a language in its complete form during the critical language-learning years’.

‘Daniel Koo, who is profoundly deaf and a child of hearing parents, is fluent in ASL and English. He wrote the following in his article, “Cued Speech: What’s the Big Deal?” (*Volta Voices*, July-Aug., 1994, vol. 1, p33-34), “Cued Speech [gives] me unmitigated and unequivocal access to English. Spoken English that has not been able to reach my ears has now found a new channel into my head. It is through Cued Speech that I am able to see spoken language clearly, without any doubt in ambiguous passages that could be misread through lipreading alone...”

‘Cueing English with deaf and hard of hearing children allows a complete mapping of the phonemic structure of English to be imprinted in the brain through vision just as speech allows a complete mapping of the phonemic structure of English to be imprinted in the brain through hearing with hearing children. Cued language allows deaf and hard of hearing children to bring the same phonemic imprint of the consonant-vowel structure of English to the reading/writing process that spoken language allows hearing children to bring to the reading/writing process.’

CONCLUSION

‘Let us put aside our “ASL-first/only” and “English-first/only” debates and disagreements and shift the focus to the paramount importance of providing opportunities and access to rich ‘first’ language acquisition at an early age in the home language in whatever linguistically complete and unambiguously accessible language and medium can be provided to deaf and hard of hearing children.

‘We believe deaf and hard of hearing children CAN be bilingual in ASL and English with parental support, and that they CAN have reading and writing skills on or near grade level with their hearing peers. Access to a rich ‘first’ language and immersion in English through cueing at an early age provides learners the internal mastery of English before they have to read and write it in the printed form.’

Notes

¹ *Cued Speech is the name of the system devised by Dr Cornett to clarify spoken languages. It has been adapted into over 50 different languages and dialects. The term cued English is used to describe the use of Cued Speech with the English language.*

² *The use of the capital in the word Deaf denotes a deaf person who uses sign language as their first language and who considers themselves to be part of the Deaf signing community.*

Trilingualism in English and French through Cued Speech and French Sign Language

Pearl - seven-years old and profoundly deaf but fluent in French and English with the help of Cued Speech.

Pearl, who is profoundly deaf, lives with her English parents and younger brother in France. Now 7 years old, she is fluent in spoken French and English. She has age-appropriate reading age in French and is starting to read in English. She has achieved this through a combination of good audiological support and unambiguous access to both spoken languages through Cued Speech. She also uses French sign language.

Her mother Tracey explains: 'When our children were born we naturally communicated in English, however Pearl and Eugene (now 5 ½) were exposed to French outside the family. Pearl was finally diagnosed deaf at the age of 2 and we had to make the difficult choice of how to communicate with her. We received much conflicting advice – mum and dad should speak French at home ... just mum should speak her native language and dad French ... use LPC (French equivalent of Cued Speech) and no signing ... use sign-supported French ... the choice was confusing, to say the least.

We chose to follow our instincts, stick mainly with our native language and be guided by Pearl and the way she progressed. As well as starting to learn French Sign Language we also learnt LPC, the French version of Cued Speech, which we inadequately adapted to English.

Pearl has always been very vocal and started to utter recognisable words 6 months after being fitted with hearing aids. We contacted the Cued Speech Association UK to learn English Cued Speech and to our relief, (after attending their brilliant course in Exeter as a family, where grandma also learnt the basics) realised that we could cue anything we said. Like other bilingual cueing families we decided to cue in French with our left hands and in English with our right – to give Pearl an immediate visual support and a clue as to what language we were using. This has proved to be successful, and although Pearl can cue both languages (choosing only her right hand!) she usually communicates using speech.

Pearl enjoys her school work; in the early stages she was moved up a year as she was in advance of her hearing peers. She has an age-appropriate reading age. She is taught in French, with LPC (Cued Speech) and sign-supported French and an additional 3 sessions per week in pure Sign Language one-to-one with a deaf teacher. The French signs we use are an efficient and constant way of bridging spoken English and French. For example, we could sign 'dog' and explain at school they say 'chien' and at home we say 'dog'.

Pearl is tri-lingual and adapts her language to the person she is with. I watch her signing with deaf children and see the skills of a natural signer – spatial awareness, expression, fluidity, intensity etc. At home however, she prefers English, clarified by Cued Speech, especially for bedtime stories. Despite her deafness she has a strong auditory memory and loves to find rhyming words. She is also an excellent lip-reader and likes to play guessing games with us – mouthing sentences and we all have to guess and take turns. Of course Pearl wins hands down.

Both our children switch from one language to another with complete ease. We have noticed that their English is not yet as sophisticated as that of their cousins in England – I suppose because they speak it only with mum and dad. Conjugations get mixed up or past tenses are based on regular verbs – 'I broked it'. In French, gender tends to be confused, 'Is it LE or LA bouteille?' This doesn't worry me, it is such a pleasure to hear Pearl saying a perfect sentence like 'I chose that, it's exactly the same as Mina's' or 'Eugene did you do that? It's not allowed!' and I am confident that it will sort itself out.

Cued Speech has allowed Pearl to understand both English and French. There are drawbacks and advantages to being brought up to be tri-lingual, but I see these languages as a gift and if has to make a choice then she has the means to do so.'

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