

Access to Phonics and Literacy

An article by Anne Worsfold, first published by the magazine of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf in 2010.

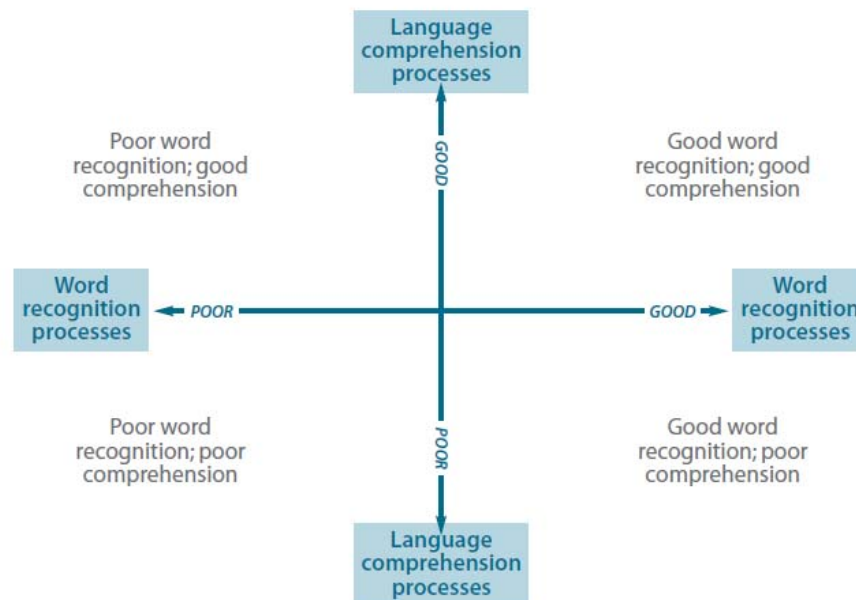
Over the years Teachers of the Deaf have tried to give their pupils full literacy – but with varied success. But what do children need in order to become literate?

According to the Rose Report (Jim Rose's 'Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading') children need two different but connected 'skills' or 'areas of knowledge':

1. 'language comprehension processes' and
2. 'word recognition processes' or phonics.

See the diagram below:

Different patterns of performance



Good readers fit into the top right-hand quadrant; they have 'good word recognition' and 'good comprehension'. Poor readers may have problems with either word recognition or language comprehension. But the most disadvantaged children are those in the bottom left hand quadrant with problems in both areas.

It is immediately apparent why most deaf children struggle with reading; with a lower than normal understanding of both language and phonics they are firmly in the most disadvantaged quarter. No wonder they have literacy problems! Their deafness cuts them off from both spoken language in its entirety and - inevitably – the sounds which are the building blocks of spoken language.

So how can this be changed? What ways do Teachers of the Deaf use to give deaf children access to language **and** phonics?

Using BSL will give deaf children a language which they can use to think, but it has no direct relationship with spoken or written language. Users of BSL will have no day-to-day knowledge of phonics. Although various systems of 'visual phonics' can teach the sounds of English, BSL-users cannot apply these sounds to the (sign) language they use because it's a totally different language. Like finger spelling, visual phonics cannot be used on a whole language level.

The combination of visual phonics and BSL can give deaf children some 'word recognition' and 'comprehension' – but 'word recognition' is in English and 'comprehension' is in BSL! The two do not tie up, which is surely the whole point of learning phonics.

Deaf children need a way to fully access and understand all of the sound-based spoken English in day to day interaction **and** one which also ties in with the individual sounds of spoken English. **They need 'good word recognition' and 'good comprehension' in the same language.** This is a prescription for Cued Speech.

Using eight handshapes in four positions Cued Speech conveys whole language sound by sound and in real time by clarifying the ambiguous or invisible lip-patterns of speech. Through Cued Speech deaf children can learn and understand the whole of the English language - acquired naturally in the same way as hearing children acquire language – but visually. They can then bring this understanding to learning to read; they can make the association between the words they already know and the sounds these words contain.

Cued Speech can be used on a whole language level and on a phonetic level. Deaf children brought up with Cued Speech have 'good word recognition' and 'good comprehension'; they fit firmly into Jim Rose's top right hand quadrant – the best readers! It is not surprising therefore that research shows that children brought up with Cued Speech have reading levels which equal those of hearing children.

The success of Cued Speech in giving access to whole language is long-documented. It can be used from babyhood and will give deaf children the ability to think in English. Also research shows that deaf children brought up with Cued Speech learn to read using phonics in the same way as hearing children.

A parent whose son was born profoundly deaf and who started to use Cued Speech when her son was just a few months old recently wrote:

'Just after my son's second birthday he received a cochlear implant. I think this was when I really began to marvel at what Cued Speech had given him. Just 5 days after 'switch on' he began to respond to sound that had simply not been accessible to him before. Within a couple of months he had literally mapped the new sound onto the Cued Speech that he was used to seeing. I found that day by day I was able to cue less and less. He was already completely familiar with seeing English through Cued Speech and quickly became used to hearing it. He didn't have to learn English from scratch. He had already internalised it. It was literally just a few weeks before he started talking and at just one year post implant had caught up the language gap and had age appropriate expressive and receptive language. I don't doubt that without Cued Speech he would not have been in that situation.

'At two and a half he started to notice letters and words around him and his big brother's 'Jolly Phonics' homework and school reading books. I put each written sound his older brother was learning on the kitchen wall and then added a cued graphic to each one too. By three years old Z. knew all his letter sounds and names; again he seemed to simply map the visual representation of a sound he had through Cued Speech onto a new visual representation of the written letter. By three years old he had started sounding out consonant-vowel-consonant words for himself and was able to read them. I remember being amazed at the time by what he was able to do; and again by what Cued Speech had given him easy access to. My amazement just continued to grow however as he quickly started reading more complicated words and over a period of six months zoomed through the 'Jolly Phonics' using Cued Speech. He has now become an amazing little reader far exceeding everything my two hearing children were able to do at that age. When Z. was first diagnosed as deaf, one of my greatest fears was about whether he would be able to learn to read. As it turned out I really had nothing to worry about. Z. at three years seven months has just had a reading test with an Educational Psychologist and has come out with a reading age of seven and a half! If I hadn't witnessed it myself I'm not sure if I'd actually believe it possible. Undoubtedly Z. has a love of and talent for the written word, but I know this talent would not have been realised if he hadn't had access to Cued Speech.'

Although designed to give whole language access, Cued Speech is very efficient at giving access to phonics and some teachers have used it specifically with phonics work in the classroom. It has a number of advantages over other systems:

- There are only 12 cues for the 44 sounds (the rest of the information being on the lips) so it is easy to learn.
- It very clearly shows the difference between consonants (shown by handshapes) and vowels (shown by position); this instantly gives pupils extra information about the composition of language.
- Children pick it up quickly and easily.
- Research shows dramatic improvements in phonetic awareness with little input in terms of time.
- It can be used to build into whole words and sentences – in real-time.
- Because lip-reading is an integral part of the system deaf children familiar with Cued Speech are more skilled at lip-reading people who do not cue.

Used at a whole language level it will also give the information about the stress and duration of words and phrases that are so important for speech and lip-reading.

Would you like more information about how Cued Speech can give your pupils access to both whole language and phonics? The Cued Speech Association UK, a national charity which provides information about and training in Cued Speech, are offering low-cost one-day workshops. The workshops will cover the basics of the Cued Speech system, the research which proves its success, information about how to use Cued Speech and will introduce our e-learning programme.

The one-day workshops are suitable for:

- parents and professionals who just want a 'taster' in order to decide if they want to use or recommend Cued Speech
- parents and professionals who wish to learn Cued Speech primarily through our e-learning website: www.learntocue.co.uk
- professionals who need to know about Cued Speech in order to ensure that

they pass on accurate information to parents.

Contact:

To enquire about low-cost workshops or to arrange one for your group contact:
kim@cuedspeech.co.uk

To discuss Cued Speech use, contact: anne@cuedspeech.co.uk.

For more general information about Cued Speech or research details, go to
www.cuedspeech.co.uk or email info@cuedspeech.co.uk

Our e-learning programme can be found at: www.learntocue.co.uk
(Please note that we strongly recommend attendance at a one-day workshop
BEFORE using this website to learn to cue.)

OR, phone us on 01803 832784

Anne Worsfold, Executive Director, Cued Speech Association UK, Dec 2009

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