Inclusion facilitated by visual access to spoken English

We are all familiar with the problems of inclusion: Does this scenario sound familiar? A profoundly deaf, BSL-using deaf boy aged about 9 - we'll call him B. - is placed in a mainstream class with a CSW who has level 2 BSL. The class teacher uses spoken English; the CSW translates (partially because of the gaps in her vocabulary) into BSL; and then B is required to produce work in written English. English is also used for most social activities to which B only has second-language access.

Or this scenario? A severely deaf girl of the same age who has been brought up orally – we'll call her O – is struggling in mainstream. She requires pre- and post-teaching, additional help with grammar and has limited access to whole-class teaching. O. also has problems with informal teaching situations and social activities if there are significant amounts of background noise.

Both of these common situations have inherent problems but there is an alternative. Q., a profoundly deaf boy, is a Cued Speech user and has a Cued Speech Transliterator (CST) in mainstream class. The teacher – of course – uses spoken English; his CST transliterates into cued English and he produces work in written English. The written English and cued English match phoneme for phoneme and Q. can learn to read using phonetics in the same way as his peers. There is no necessity for Q to translate from one language to another as B does and - unlike O. - he has easy, stress-free access to complete English, sound-by-sound in real-time.

A CST uses Cued Speech without voice to clarify the speech of a third person in real-time. They serve a similar function to that of a translator but, rather than translating from one language to another, the CST transliterates the same language from one medium (sound-based spoken English) to another medium (vision-based cued English). Provided that deaf consumers are able to receive a verbatim service, transliterators cue everything that is said in the mainstream environment. This includes what the teacher says, student comments, jokes, inappropriate remarks, correct and incorrect answers, and even profanity. The objective of the transliterator is to facilitate (not replace) communication between deaf and hearing people.

There are many advantages to accessing education through a CST. Because it gives complete and unambiguous access to spoken English[1] deaf children brought up with it have English language development which echoes that of hearing children[2]. They achieve reading scores which equal hearing children[3] and can develop an internal phonological model of spoken language, including good rhyming skills[4], which enables them to learn to read using the same techniques as hearing children[5]. In addition, case studies suggest that Cued Speech is a great help with speech and enables deaf children familiar with it to more easily lipread those who do not cue.

There are also practical advantages. Cued Speech is comparatively easy to learn. CSTs can be fluent in months rather than years and once the system has been learnt any word can be cued, including specialist vocabulary.

Are there any problems with using CSTs in education? These appear to be minimal. There is of course the issue, which is shared with visual languages, that the deaf child is unable to access language visually whilst simultaneously looking at a task and the class will need to be managed effectively so that this is minimised.

However CSTs need adequate training. The basics of CS can be taught in a 20-hour Foundation course but many hours of practise are needed to become fluent. The Cued Speech Association also offers Intermediate and Advanced courses to build fluency but CSTs need to be more than fast, accurate cuers. In both America and France, where CS is much more widely used, there is specific training for CSTs leading to nationally recognised qualifications. Subjects covered include how to cue non-speech and environmental sounds, recognising occasions when verbatim transliteration is not appropriate, and the ethics of transliteration. At present similar training is not available in the UK but the Cued Speech Association plans to have the first course running in 2006.

For more information about how Cued Speech could help your pupils or to register for a course contact:

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(1) Research showed that 96% of spoken language can be lipread accurately with Cued Speech, Nicholls, G. (1979) 'Cued Speech & the Reception of Spoken Language.' Master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal.
(2) Berendt, H., Krupnik-Goldman, B. & Rupp, K. (1990) 'Receptive & expressive language abilities of hearing-impaired children who use Cued Speech.' Master's thesis, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, USA.
(3) Wandel, Jean E. (1989) 'Use of internal Speech in Reading by Hearing & Hearing Impaired Students in Oral, Total Communication , and Cued Speech Programs.' Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Teacher's College, Columbia University USA.
(4) LaSasso, C., Crain, K. & Leybaert , J. (2003) 'Rhyme Generation in Deaf Students: The effect of exposure to Cued Speech' published in Journal of Deaf Studies & Deaf Education Vol 8 no. 3, Oxford University Press.
(5) Alegria, J., Dejean, C., Capouillez, JM. & Leybaert, J. (1989) 'Role played by the Cued Speech in the identification of written words encountered for the first time by deaf children.' Annual meeting of Belgian Psychological Society, Louvain-la-Neuve.

For full references contact the Cued Speech Association UK.

In a box? Cued Speech – complete spoken language through vision.
Cued Speech uses eight handshapes in
four positions near the mouth
together with the lip-patterns of normal speech to
clarify every phoneme of speech.