

## **Deaf children in mainstream learning Modern Foreign Languages (MFL).**

When the government launched the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in 2011, the Department for Education's website announced: "The subjects we have included are designed to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to study a broad core of subjects, ensuring that doors are not closed off to them in terms of future progression". The Ebacc subjects are – mathematics, English, physics, biology, chemistry, geography, history and languages.

As students and those who support them are all working hard to ensure that doors are held firmly open, how can we give deaf children studying the full curriculum equal access to languages and a chance to obtain GCSEs in foreign languages and the English Baccalaureate?

Even with greatest will in the world and the best technology available, the problem for deaf students is always going to be around access to the very foundation of spoken language; the sound. Deaf children typically have restricted exposure to spoken English even when it is their home language, so the chance of starting French classes with knowledge and experience of how it sounds, is greatly reduced.

However, this situation could be a great opportunity to introduce the sounds or phonemes of a new language in a totally accessible way, by teaching them visually. The introduction of a visual and kinaesthetic cue could also help hearing pupils too. The French teacher could be blue in the face before the average 11 year-old in class truly believes that 'rue' and 'roue' sound *complètement différent*, but they could see in an instant the difference of a hand being placed at the chin or at the throat to demonstrate it. By 'seeing the sound', the pupil starts to build a mental picture of the language and the process of learning and internalising it can really start.

There are several manual systems in use but only Cued Speech has been adapted from its original American English form into over 60 languages and dialects. A cued language system uses a combination of (typically 7-8) handshapes to represent the consonants and (typically 4-5) positions near the face for the vowel sounds.

This adaptation into other languages means that common sounds between languages normally have the same handshape or position. A quick look at the French 'code LPC' <http://www.alpc.asso.fr/code01-c.htm#02> shows that 19 of the 24 consonants are exactly the same in French and English! By teaching French with the help of 'le code LPC' it becomes equally accessible for deaf children and possibly a whole lot easier for hearing children too.

### **Good practice in the classroom**

First the 'cues' of the target language will need to be learnt, usually by the Communication Support Worker or the Teaching Assistant supporting the deaf pupil(s) in the class. Alternatively, as said before, the cues can be learnt by the class teacher who can then integrate them as a teaching tool to benefit everyone.

The cues can be used at different levels: to clarify a specific phoneme and to distinguish one word from another (e.g. 'rue' from 'roue'), or for complete access to what is being said (e.g. the teacher talking, a pre-recorded listening exercise, pupils speaking, etc).

Moreover, students who have Cued Speech support in class can also benefit from it for the listening and speaking parts of their exams too. An experienced cuer who cues the voice of the speaker/examiner is called a Transliterator. Inevitably it takes many months to reach a level of 'cueing' to be able to transliterate. Win Burton of the Cued Speech Association is a fluent cuer in English and French and in February 2012 she supported a profoundly deaf girl in the speaking part of the pupil's French GCSE. She says; "My role was fairly straightforward as the student had prepared very well. I was there to make sure she 'saw' every sound of every word said by the examiner." The pupil attained an A\*.

My experience tells me that enthusiastic teachers and support workers don't shy away from learning something new, but rather they embrace it and are excited by it. Cued Speech doesn't necessarily take long to learn either. Research in the Spanish version, '*la palabra complementada*' found that a novice cuer reached a fluent level in just 3 months<sup>1</sup>. So if you have already got experience in a 2<sup>nd</sup> language, learning to cue in it could turn out to be absolutely invaluable to a deaf child you know.

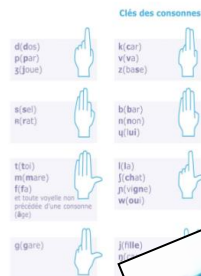
## Beyond the classroom

Of course some children are growing up in a household with more than one language. Cued language means profoundly deaf children don't have to miss out, as there is no need to lower expectations around linguistic goals, even when the child's hearing isn't fully restored through an implant or hearing aids.

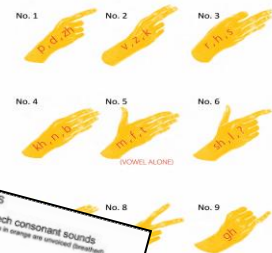
Tina Kirwin is a qualified teacher of deaf children (B.Ed Hons/Ad Dip Ed) and has been the Literacy Co-ordinator and Senior Teacher within the Management Team of the Manchester Hearing Needs Service for the last 7 years. In 2009 she said; "In Manchester, Cued Speech is successfully used with pupils aged from 6 months to sixteen years both in schools and in the home. The pupils' home languages include British Sign Language (BSL), Polish, Arabic, Nigerian dialects, Somalian and Urdu. The benefits include: improved lip reading of both their home language and English and the production of spoken English."

So, deaf children can have it all. They can grow up in the spoken language of the home and learn other languages at school. In fact they can successfully learn as many languages as they like; they just need someone to show them.

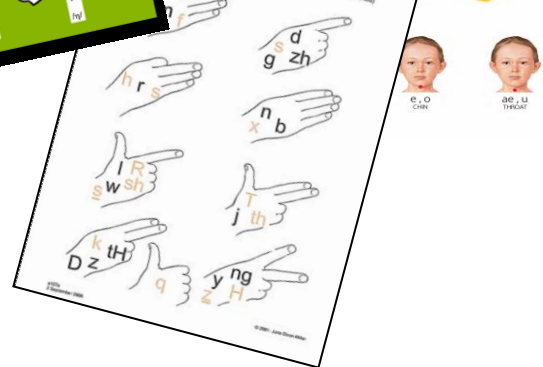
### Les clés du code LPC



### Persian Cued Speech



### Arabic and Standard English FS



Nicholas Orpin – written and illustrated by me March 2012

<sup>i</sup> Torres, S. Torres-Moreno, I. Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation of Linguistic Input Support to a Prelingually Deaf Child With Cued Speech: A Case Study (2006) Journal of deaf Studies and Deaf Education, 11, 438-44