

Cued Speech in Manchester Schools

By Tina Kirwin and Alison Paton

First published in the May edition of the BATOD magazine.

Teachers of the Deaf Tina Kirwin and Alison Paton were invited to give a workshop about Cued Speech at the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) Conference on 8th March 2008 and to submit an article detailing the workshop for the BATOD magazine.

We are teachers of the Deaf who have worked for the Manchester Service since the early 1990s. We have taught a wide variety of children of differing ages and abilities, but the majority of children have been profoundly deaf and with English as an additional language. Many have also arrived in Manchester only having had limited access to education and without access to hearing aids.

Anne Worsfold (Executive Director Cued Speech Association) was invited by Tina to give a talk to our Service in 2004. Anne spoke to our service about her own two profoundly deaf sons who had been introduced to Cued Speech at a very early age and had consequently both been able to read before they began school. Inspiring! Also research shows that deaf children who have been brought up using Cued Speech can attain age appropriate levels in literacy. Since then Tina has been unstinting in her efforts to enable as many children, parents and staff in Manchester as possible to learn and to use Cued Speech.

Anne was invited to deliver Cued Speech training to several of our staff and parents which she did with June Dixon-Millar in the summer term of 2004. Since then we have attended Cued Speech Summer Schools in Exeter and the Cued Speech Association have also kindly held refresher/update courses for our staff, parents and children. A cueing club for staff and parents has also been ongoing since that time. Cued Speech is now used as part of our communication programme from pre-school children through to secondary.

We find it gives profoundly deaf children access to phonics which they would not have through audition/ lipreading alone and that it can enable signing children to extend their vocabulary when there may not be a specific sign for the word – eg – the names of different flowers rather than using the generic sign for flower followed by the fingerspelt name of the flower. We also find that many children become more relaxed and confident when introduced to Cued Speech as it takes away much of the stress of lip reading and provides a very structured and simple gateway to what can be a puzzling maze of spoken language (in particular to children whose home language is not English).

At the BATOD workshop we showed a DVD from the Cued Speech Association which gives first hand accounts from parents of deaf children and young people brought up with Cued Speech. Cuers contribute an overview of Cued Speech and why it works. Quotes from the DVD included: “ I know that without Cued Speech I would never have understood the English language. I can only hear a few sounds such as vowel sounds but Cued Speech makes me aware of all the sounds I can’t hear.” (Profoundly Deaf 17 year old).

We also showed a DVD of children from our service – from reception through to secondary age – using Cued Speech. None of the children have English as their home language. It shows children using the system to identify initial letter sounds, to facilitate their

segmentation of phonemes to assist spelling and to enable lipreading of very similar looking numbers - eg six, sixteen, sixty.

Workshop participants also played a game in which they had to lipread various short words which contained the /ue/ sound; first without and then with Cued Speech to demonstrate the effectiveness of Cued Speech in improving lip reading ability.

Those attending the workshop also sang Old MacDonald - with signs - but cueing the animal sounds (which cannot really be signed and are lovely for introducing the sounds to profoundly deaf preschoolers). They also cued the ee i ee i o bit - partly to show how we use sign alongside Cued Speech but also to show how easy it can be to start using Cued Speech with deaf children!

We demonstrated how Cued Speech can visually reinforce rhyming in a way that lip reading and BSL cannot by signing and cueing simultaneously a simple rhyming story. This also showed how we are using Cued Speech alongside BSL.

Finally we read two letters from Manchester mums of profoundly deaf children who are using Cued Speech alongside BSL.

"I am a mother of a two year old child who is deaf in Manchester. I believe both sign language and Cued Speech is giving my child the extra support she needs to do well in life, as well as in education. I am currently learning Cued Speech and hope as I progress I can teach it to my child and it will help me and her to communicate.

I believe Cued Speech helps deaf children more than signing in their education, as I have witnessed this in my older children's school where there is a resource base for deaf children. From seeing the deaf children using Cued Speech in their education and seeing how much they are achieving it is amazing.

I was very worried at first but now seeing the children and their achievements, my confidence has grown. The teachers at MHNDS have all been very supportive and do a fantastic job"

(Bilingual parent in Manchester).

"I am one of the parents learning Cued Speech. Cued Speech was introduced to me 4 or 5 years ago when my son was 10 years old. Initially I thought 'its not going to work'. After a day's course going through the Cued Speech Association video and seeing people use it I was surprised. I started to develop an interest.

I did my foundation course and I passed. I also joined the Cued Speech club based at Alma Park, in order to interact and learn more about Cued Speech. I am using cueing at home with my son, he has not got any spoken language of his own, as he is profoundly deaf. Cued Speech is helping him a lot to develop his spoken language. He is gradually beginning to use his voice. He can say his name and some words, when he is looking at the cued handshape and the position of my hand. He is now able to say many words, such as come, tea, go, etc.

Cued Speech has really helped me a lot with his spelling too. Thanks to the person who introduced it and all the teachers using Cued Speech. Well done! It is a great achievement."

(A Yoruba speaking parent of a profoundly deaf 14 year old).