



Developing literacy using Cued Speech

Cate Calder stresses the benefits of using cueing to enrich the literacy skills of deaf children

Cued Speech (CS) is a simple way to support lip-reading that enables a deaf child – regardless of their level of hearing loss – to ‘see’ every sound in every word as it is spoken. This means that a language of sound, such as English, becomes as naturally accessible through vision as a language of signs such as BSL. The hypothesis

behind Cued Speech is that if deaf children are given visual access to speech (either to clarify what they can hear or to replace listening entirely) then they can develop a full mental model of that language. It has been proved repeatedly to be the case, that when cued to consistently, deaf children **can** think in a language

they may never hear, or only partially hear.

Using just eight hand-shapes in four positions around the mouth in combination with the natural lip patterns of speech, the ‘cuer’ is able to create a consistent visual code of everything they are saying, in real time. They are able to entirely differentiate the ambiguous lip patterns that make English impossible to lip-read otherwise and fluent



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users can speak at a perfectly normal rate while cueing.

You can learn the basics in four hours and master the system in twenty. One of the great benefits of CS is that it is **content** rich from the start; this is because you are simply learning a code for the language you are already using – rather like learning short hand. It is not like learning another language where you need to discover, practise and remember every word as well as mastering the grammar – with cueing you can quickly say anything you want. It is also perfectly possible to take a bi-lingual approach and use cueing alongside signing.

How does this impact on literacy for deaf children? We know that to be fully literate children it is vital to have two skills in place:

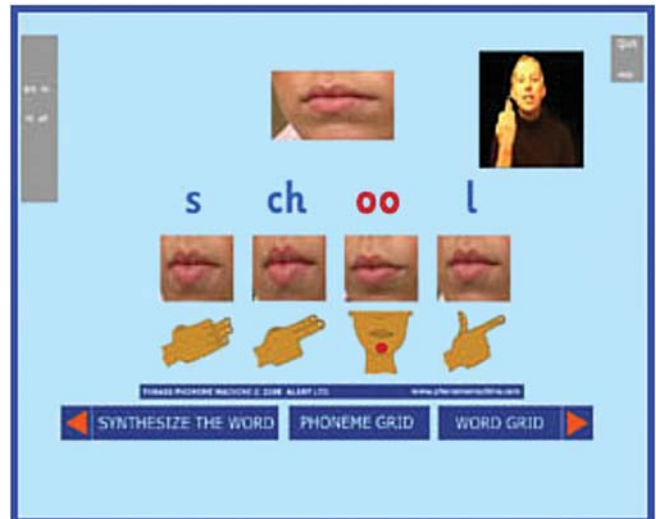
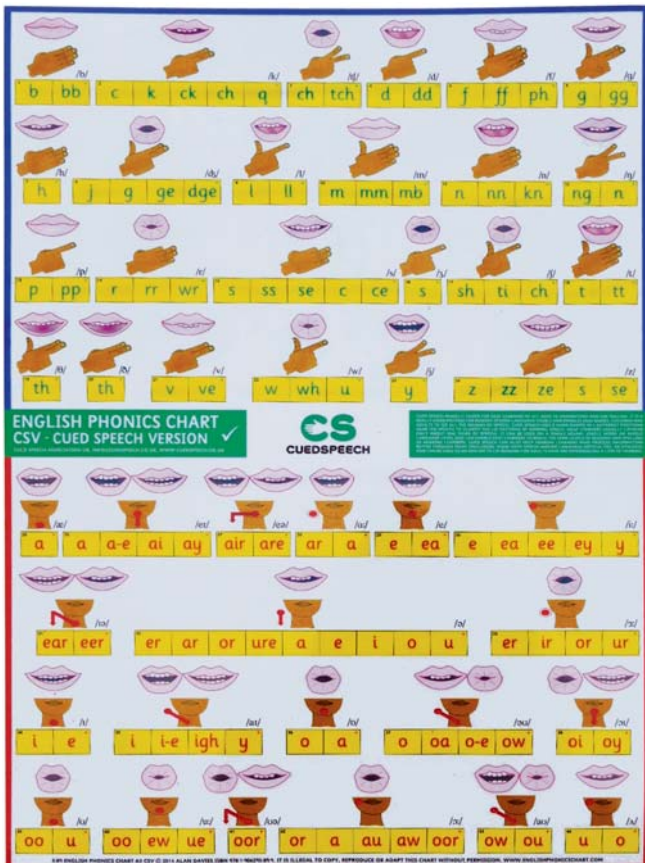
- i. Good language comprehension
- ii. Good word recognition; in other words – phonics.

Good Language Comprehension

Deaf children who have been exposed to cued language from an early age have these two skills. Their journey with literacy matches that of their hearing peers; in fact, in our experience they are ahead of the game. Here are some quotes from three profoundly deaf adults about learning to read, two of them long before starting school:

Mark (cued to from birth): *‘I can’t actually remember not being able to read’*

Daniel (cued to from 18 months): *‘As I grew up with Cued Speech, it meant that I picked up English spoken in real time and in context ... I started reading before I can really remember’*



THRASS Phoneme Machine – free software program

Will (cued to from 2 yrs): *“ actually found it easier to learn to read than my brothers who are both hearing”.*

Good word recognition – phonics

Children like Mark, Will and Daniel were quickly able to use their knowledge of the phonetic make-up of cued words. When you see a word being cued, the individual phonemes are implicit in the ‘whole’ in such a way it is easy to see how to synthesise/blend those phonemes and link them to spelling choices, key skills in learning to read and write.

I worked with school-age deaf children who are effectively pre-lingual in English, and my mission was to teach them word recognition skills. We combined Cued Speech with synthetic phonics materials from THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills) (see illustration on this page), whose charts and software give a visual memory aid for the 44 phonemes and the common spelling choices. Whilst access to the English language remains an issue for these children (and this need could certainly be met by cueing at language level) the growth of their word recognition skills has been striking. Below are examples of some of the results after only 28 to 114 hours of exposure to CS over nine months:

- Phonetic Awareness improved by 2 years and 3 months overall and the average Phonetic Awareness Age improved by 44 months (one subject made a 6 year 5 month leap in nine months).
- Literacy improved by six months, with reading by three months and spelling by six months.
- Lip-reading improved by 66%.
- Lip-pattern production improved by 40.1%.

Cued Speech is the only system to give unambiguous, visual access to both phonemes and the whole of the English language. As such it is uniquely beneficial for literacy.

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