

Resources for teachers to teach reading to DHH learners

Emmie Wienhoven, Kentalis, **Generous Kazinda**, Uganda, and **Ezra Nathanael Ntazoya**, Tanzania, share details of their recent pilot project in Uganda and Tanzania

In 2015 Royal Dutch Kentalis embarked on a pilot project with the aim of improving literacy skills of Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children in low and middle income countries, where Teachers of the Deaf are not trained in deaf-specific reading instruction. Partners from several countries had asked for a reading-specific intervention, due to low literacy levels of DHH learners. Together with partners in Uganda and Tanzania we started a pilot project to develop a resource for teachers that would help them teach more effectively.

The resources are based on the knowledge and expertise of Kentalis in teaching literacy to DHH learners and were co-developed during the pilot, allowing input and feedback throughout the project from local consultants, curriculum authorities, and teachers themselves. This allowed the Kentalis team to incorporate many of the lessons learned during training and implementation into the final Teacher's Guide (Ugandan title)/Toolkit (Tanzanian title) and the training guides.

The final material and training supports teachers in delivering the national curriculum while using DHH specific strategies for teaching. There is a focus on general teaching strategies (establishing a positive learning environment), tools for building language skills (language and concept development in sign language ensuring that learners build language skills before they learn to read), and tools for reading instruction.

Reading coaches are trained to support the teachers in implementation, and through video interaction guidance. In a regional/national roll-out of the project the reading coaches would also be trained to become master trainers.

The situation for DHH children in Uganda and Tanzania is comparable in the sense that children enter school when they are around seven years old. Many schools for the Deaf offer pre-school allowing some children to come to school from age five or six. This means that DHH children come to school with severe language delays.



Kentalis Expert coaching teacher at school



A teacher in Uganda is teaching specific words that he has underlined in the text. He has created a story and a variety of visual aids to support his lesson

Uganda uses a thematic curriculum in which children transition in the first three years of primary education from mother tongue education to English as the language of instruction. This is challenging for teachers of DHH learners because, although this is very beneficial to hearing learners, this does not benefit DHH learners. Therefore DHH learners are learning to read in English, rather than one of the local languages. In Tanzania the language in primary education is Kiswahili, which means that DHH learners learn to read in Kiswahili, just like their hearing peers. In both countries the national sign language is the language of instruction.

Teachers were very enthusiastic about the training and valued practical aspects of the training. The training is more action and result orientated than what teachers were used to. This resulted in involved and enthusiastic teachers who would leave the training highly motivated and with the confidence to apply their new knowledge and skills in their own classroom environment. There are few DHH specific training courses available to teachers, thus teachers were eager to learn new strategies, techniques and methods that would actually change the way they engage with their learners in the learning process.

The video interaction guidance has been highly valued by both teachers and reading coaches. As the coaching is

based on positive reinforcement and feedback, it gave reading coaches the tools to build confidence in teachers and engage teachers in a positive way in their own learning process. One of the reading coaches in Uganda said, "We used to focus on fault-finding during observations, now we engage in positive feedback".

The training package implemented was an eye opener in their classroom instruction, since it allowed them to move away from (only) sounds-based instruction to DHH specific methods. They learned to build language skills first and create a meaningful context through stories and strong visual learning materials. Then they could teach reading of the target words, building on this strong foundation.

The aim was not only to equip teachers with strong resources in the form of a teacher's guide and skills, but also to give them the confidence to apply the learned theory and skills.

School visits show that teachers are planning and preparing their lessons better and they develop and use stronger visual instruction material. Learners are more involved during the lessons and they interact with the instruction material more.

As part of the Covid-19 response teachers from the pilot schools in Uganda have been involved in filming lessons for distance learning for DHH learners. Administrators and



Story writing workshop

teachers from mainstream education have shown great interest in aspects of the techniques applied and have requested that the knowledge on the method will be shared with them as well, showing that many of the tools offered can be part of a universal design for teaching.

In both Uganda and Tanzania we aim to ensure that these developed resources are able to reach all teachers of

young DHH learners, through collaboration with current and new partners. The material is in the process of being approved in Uganda. In Tanzania we are in the stage of the last school visits, after which the resources can be updated with the final input from teachers. In both countries we are carrying out research to be able to show the impact of the resources on the situation in the classrooms. ■



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