

# IDEaLs

**Becky Fenton-Ree, Daniel Hogan and Karolis Jaškus** provide an insight to their programme for International Deaf Learners at Oak Lodge School

Within the Language and Communication Team, we have had a need to design bespoke learning packages for the increasing numbers of international deaf learners that are arriving within our provision, Oak Lodge School (OLS) (a secondary specialist D/deaf school).

Our IDEaLs (International Deaf Learners) arrive at OLS from all over the world for a variety of reasons (eg refugees, relocation to the UK) and with wide-ranging competency levels in their first sign language, from very little expressive skills to some level of fluency in their first language. However, our most common attendees are the IDEaLs (teenagers) with severe language deprivation meaning they arrive with some basic gestures and pointing, but don't have a first signed/spoken language. Some arrive stating that they have 'international signs' but sometimes these are just gestures and home-lect signs (signs that are created in the home). They often have had very little/inaccessible previous educational experience.

Initially we have found the need to ascertain current abilities/strengths. Undertaking BSL assessments would not be appropriate as they do not have BSL, so we devised our own bespoke ones. These are:

- 1) To test cognitive processing, we ask them to sequence a simple story (it cannot have any culturally-bound inferences, so we use a story about a child crossing a river)
- 2) To test for understanding (or the potential to understand) spatial language, we give a simple iconic video of a 'cup' classifiers and matching pictures.

If they have completed these successfully, then we move on to:

- 3) A picture (inspired from the Test of Abstract Language Comprehension (TALC) assessments) and a BSL user signing the picture three different ways with clear differences of negation, plurals, classifiers etc to test their (potential) ability to identify iconic grammatical features.

We also undertake a simple maths assessment to check their numeracy skills. This is provided by the Specialist Maths ToD.

When these assessments have been undertaken, we can then design a bespoke timetable. We prioritise the need for language immersion as well as many opportunities to socialise with their peers as Olsen (2018) states the importance of this. For some IDEaLs, we would keep them within the IDEaLs class before evaluating whether they are able to undertake some lessons with their peers. Some of the first subjects that we integrate them into are BSL, Maths, Food Technology and Physical Education classes.

Teaching resources for refugees are often designed for spoken language refugees and assumed a first language basis; not reflective of our IDEaLs. This is not uncommon as Olsen (2018) states that specialist resources are not available. There is also no data showing progress (ibid)

either so our bespoke program can only be evaluated on the successful anecdotal stories that we have.

For this reason, we have included a web link ([vimeo.com/860422533/0239658fb2?share=copy](https://vimeo.com/860422533/0239658fb2?share=copy)) showing our IDEaLs stories on our school website for you to watch (it has voice over so accessible to all).

We support additional inclusion by placing them in an appropriate pastoral group. Currently, we have integrated four males into the sixth form group of eight where all but one is an IDEaL (and all are male). The pastoral teacher is a male Deaf QToD and the group has found that this has been the perfect opportunity to ask him questions that explore personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) topics. One particular area of surprise was the fact that some couples were not married and still have children, so this enables them to explore topics in an informal setting amongst peers. This has been an essential element to help them widen their knowledge of British culture and values. They all share a love of sport which also helps.

## What have we learnt:

- 1) Inclusion within a signing environment is crucial. Mainstreaming IDEaL teenagers with a communication support worker (CSW) may not be an ideal learning environment for late learners. Specialist language teachers/multi-lingual BSL tutors are needed to navigate language barriers.
- 2) Life skills are very limited; therefore, regular field trips are essential.
- 3) Cultural conflicts are likely especially from countries where equality and diversity are not embraced; therefore, a specialist programme to support their knowledge and acceptance into the British system is essential. It is essential to have an informal safe language environment (such as a pastoral group) with an appropriate Deaf role model.
- 4) Many have been isolated their entire lives for many reasons. These could include being in a non-signing family, no school attendance, no involvement in the Deaf community or never meeting another Deaf person. Often, they have made decisions about the world around them to be true: from watching media without understanding of the context/genre: eg expecting to see zombies in a graveyard at night. Therefore, we often need to unpick their misconceptions of the world.
- 5) For some of our IDEaLs, they have only had hearing aids recently and so we need to support them in the world by developing their listening skills. Due to no shared language at home, this is something that cannot be taught there.
- 6) We film the BSL learning undertaken during the day (eg using the SWIVL recording device) or film straight into 'Seesaw' which is our secure learning platform. Our IDEaLs are the most studious students and will review their

- learning in the evenings which expedites the learning.
- 7) We document the first time they 'tease' us. A common one is that they're not coming the next day because they are off to a party! However, when they have this, we feel that they are developing some theory of mind as they know something that we don't know and so can play along with the tease. When we see this in our IDeaLs, we see it as a milestone.
  - 8) We track progress using our adapted Fengray (BSL and language communication) tracker so that we can track and evaluate progress to ascertain when they are ready to begin attending class.

9) Many have no Deaf identity and can feel ashamed of their Deafness. It is imperative that they develop a sense of Deaf identity for inclusion into the wider Deaf community.

Teaching these students over the last three years has meant we have successfully developed strategies. As the numbers of IDeaLs are becoming increasingly common, there is a need to share good practice to enable them to prepare and integrate them into a British life. Therefore, we will be holding a 'Sharing Good Practice with IDeaLs' in the Autumn Term (2023). If you are interested in attending, please email [bsl@oaklodge.wandsworth.sch.uk](mailto:bsl@oaklodge.wandsworth.sch.uk)



Becky Fenton-Ree is a Qualified and Registered Sign Language Interpreter (postgraduate route), a QToD. She also holds an MA (with Distinction) in 'Materials Development for Language Teaching' and a Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education (PGCE). Becky has been signing since 1990 and currently works part-time for Oak Lodge in the Language and Communication Department. She also works as a freelance Interpreter. She oversees and leads the IDeaLs program.

Daniel Hogan is a Deaf ToD (currently on the ToD course). He teaches maths and PE and is the pastoral teacher. Daniel is a former international football player for England and Great Britain Deaf team. When he isn't teaching or studying, he can be found on the court as an assistant manager for the England Deaf International Futsal men's team (EDIF).

Karolis Jaškus is a Level 6 Deaf HLTA who teaches the IDeaLs and plans the trips. His knowledge of four signed languages supports his communication and teaching with the IDeaLs. Karolis' is working towards becoming a BSL tutor.



## Visual Communication and Reading Development Project - University College London

What is the role of visual language inputs in reading development in deaf children?

Our research project aims to address this question in all deaf children – regardless of whether they use BSL, English or both languages.

**We have already recruited 58 children who started Reception in 2022 and 2023!**

**Please can you help us recruit more children for this important project?  
Share information with parents of deaf children at your school!  
Encourage them to sign up!**

We are recruiting deaf children who:

- started Reception in 2023 (approx. 4yrs old)
- or will start Reception in 2024
- were diagnosed as severely or profoundly deaf before 3yrs old
- have lived in the UK for at least 6 months
- are able to complete 10-15mins of tasks on a computer



**For a draft email to send to parents, further information about the project & how to sign up please visit:**

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/icn/research/research-groups/visual-communication/visual-communication-reading-development-project> - also accessible by scanning the QR code below. Information is available in English and BSL.

**Or email us at - [visualcr@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:visualcr@ucl.ac.uk)**

**DCAL**

Deafness, Cognition and Language Research Centre



## BATOD Magazine

This article was published in the Sept 2023 issue.

© BATOD 2023



Thank you to this edition's advertisers

