

Achieving Success

Personal experiences with Cued Speech

One mother tells the story of how Cued Speech allowed her to communicate with her son, how it gave him access to reading and how it allowed him to progress at the same rate as his peers.

“ Our son was born profoundly deaf. After the diagnosis, I read widely about deafness and was dismayed by the low achievements of deaf children, particularly their low reading ages, which seemed to stem from a lack of understanding of the English language itself. I felt that they had a right to understand the language of their own country and family and a right to be literate.

Cued Speech seemed to offer easily accessible English and in use it has been far more successful than I ever expected.

We started to learn Cued Speech when our son was about nine months old. Initially I couldn't cue fast enough to cue everything that I said. However, because Cued Speech is a phonemic system, once you have learnt the system you can say anything and conversational fluency comes with practice. As I cued, our son's receptive vocabulary grew very quickly. By the time he was two years old he understood a lot of simple sentences and by three years four months he was using sentences like: "I want to go downstairs to help Daddy." Typically, sentences would include all the 'little' words, but few, if any, consonants, and sentences would always be spoken not cued.

Some time before his third birthday I started to read directly to him from books rather than talking about pictures and he began to recognise a few words, like his name and that of his brother. He became particularly interested in words that were new to him, and he loved nonsense words. We had a 'eureka' moment with a phrase in a story book: 'Boo, hoo, hoo, what a to do' when he

realised that the cue for /oo/ sound tied in with the letters oo. He was then on the lookout for /oo/ words and found them in zoo, moo and poo. The letters 'm' and 'p' were also in his name and that of his brother and he suddenly realised that the English he saw cued and written English were based on the same units – and that there was a system linking them. He demanded to know how other letters and cues linked up and he very quickly made the association between the sounds that he could not hear, but knew existed because of the cues, and letters (or combination of letters like 'sh').

He started to read very early, around the age of three, and started school with a good understanding of language, nearly age appropriate. He attended his local hearing school and has had a full-time Cued Speech transliterator. His peripatetic teacher has regularly tested his reading age, vocabulary, and grammar. His reading age has continued to be one or two years ahead of his hearing contemporaries. When he started school he was about a year behind with his vocabulary but he caught up: by 9 years 7 months our son's vocabulary was equivalent to that of an 11 year old. Using the Trog test for the reception of grammar his understanding of grammar was found to be, at its best, 3 years ahead of the average for hearing children. My son has a hearing loss which his peripatetic teacher said averages about 105-108 dB across the speech range. He has useful hearing in the lower frequency ranges, and intelligible speech, but not enough hearing to be able to learn language by hearing it alone. He is an easy and confident conversationalist one-to-one but finds group conversations



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hard to follow. He now learns a large amount of new language through the written word. It is obvious from his conversation and writing that he has internalised written and spoken English. His understanding of spoken language is such that he rarely cues now, just talks; but I continue to cue new vocabulary and cue in any situation where lip-reading is likely to be a strain.

I do not think that his achievements would have been possible without the use of Cued Speech. I did feel driven in his pre-school days to try to ensure that his vocabulary was as near age-appropriate as possible, but once he started school I did virtually no extra work with him. Our household is not a “pushy” one and my child’s acquisition of language has been largely relaxed and unstructured. He is totally at home with the written word and has an enjoyment of the English language that would be a pleasure in a hearing child, let alone a deaf one. He continues to read a great deal for pleasure and is proud to now be reading ‘grown up’ books. His spoken language is accurate, full and expressive; his diction is, at its worst, understandable, and sometimes quite good!

One big advantage of Cued Speech for hearing parents is that it allows you to use your own language in a way that a deaf child can understand, using whatever vocabulary you want; you do not have to learn it first as hearing parents must do if they use BSL to communicate with their children. We are now all learning BSL, and while I think that bilingualism is very important I also think that it must be amazingly difficult to become truly literate, or truly bilingual, if access to written English is through sign. Before Cued Speech was devised it was necessary to approach

the learning of English circuitously; this is no longer the case because complete spoken language is now accessible in a visual form.

Our experiences of Cued Speech mirror those of other people and there is research which indicates that my child’s achievements are not unusual. The ease with which children exposed to Cued Speech learn to read is well documented and is partly because the phonemic nature of the cued language reflects the phonetic composition of written language.

From a very early age my son could phonetically ‘decode’ a written word he had never previously seen and match it with a word that he had never clearly heard, but had seen cued. He had internalised the spoken language, and it is this internalisation, together with the ability to match the phonetic make-up of the written word with that of the words in the mind, which makes independent reading easy for the Cued Speech child.



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We do not usually identify parents or children on our website because children may grow up and prefer anonymity, but we can give you the parents’ names if you enquire.

For training and more information about the use of Cued Speech please contact us:

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