How Does Cued Speech Support Language Acquisition?
A Look at Pre and Post Assessment Data

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What is Cued Speech?

Cued Speech is a visual mode of communication in which mouth movements of speech combine with "cues" to make the sounds (phonemes) of traditional spoken languages look different. Cuing allows users who are deaf, hard of hearing or who have language / communication disorders to access the basic, fundamental properties of spoken languages through the use of vision.

Cued Speech uses eight handshapes in four different places near the face in combination with the mouth movements of speech. (National Cued Speech Association)

Is Reading Different for Deaf Individuals?


- For the purpose of learning to read, children must have an age-appropriate level of proficiency in the same language that is to be read and written.

- A core difficulty in learning to read manifests itself as a deficiency...in mastering phonological awareness skills.

- Early exposure to a communication system that makes the phonological aspects of the language accessible (i.e. Cued Speech) results in age-appropriate skill development in the areas of phonological awareness, reading, and spelling, although not necessarily vocabulary.

Mayer and Trezek conclude that NO, reading is not different for deaf individuals. "...phonology is an aspect of language acquisition....that provides the platform...for learning to read. It is these phonological skills that allow the reader to make the connections between "through-the-air" language and the print on the page...."

Reading Research

The National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) summarized several decades of scientific research that clearly shows effective reading instruction addresses five critical areas:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

Myth: Cued Speech was developed to replace ASL.
Fact: Cued Speech was developed for literacy.

Cued Speech and Reading

During the 2013-2014 school year at the Illinois School for the Deaf, two groups of students in grades 4-8 with similar demographics (cognitive functioning, various levels of hearing loss, secondary disabling conditions) were compared based on the mode of communication used for the academic instruction provided during their school day. Students in Group A were instructed using Cued Speech during the majority of their academic content. Students in Group B were instructed using American Sign Language and sign supported speech for the majority of their academic content. Progress was monitored using the Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress.

Group A – Cued Speech

- 5 total students
- 1:5 Teacher to student ratio
- 1 female/4 males
- 2 grade student, 1 7th grade student, 2 6th grade students, 1 4th grade student
- 0 primary ASL users
- 5 primary English users
- 2 students with secondary disabling conditions (OHI-ADHD, Speech/Language Impairment, Specific Learning Disability)
- Average NWEA RMAP Fall 2013 – 206.4
- Average NWEA RMAP Spring 2014 – 212.2
- Median NWEA RMAP Fall 2013 – 206
- Median NWEA RMAP Spring 2014 - 219

Group B – ASL/Sign Language

- 9 total students
- 1:4.5 Teacher to student ratio
- 6 female/3 male
- 4 8th grade students, 4 7th grade students, 1 6th grade student
- 6 primary English users
- 3 primary ASL users
- 4 students with secondary disabling conditions (OHI-ADHD, Specific Learning Disability)
- Average NWEA RMAP Fall 2013 – 206.4
- Average NWEA RMAP Spring 2014 – 211.44
- Median NWEA RMAP Fall 2013 – 206
- Median NWEA RMAP Spring 2014 - 212

Average Reading Growth

American Sign Language vs. English


- There are about 250,000 words in a standard unabridged English dictionary.
- About 50-75,000 are considered to be basic words, and the rest are derivations and inflections of basic words.
- The receptive vocabulary of the average 8-year-old hearing child is 25,000 words.
- There are an estimated 5,000 commonly used signs in ASL.

Myths & Facts

Myth: You can't cue to babies.
Fact: You CAN cue to babies.

Research shows you can cue, talk, and/or sign to babies. Cueing as early as possible maximizes opportunity for strong language development.

Myth: If you cue, a child won't learn to listen.
Fact: Cued Speech enables children to learn to listen.

Listening is easier than watching. Cuers have a visual model of spoken language and can "fill in the blanks" mishandled sentences due to strong language base.