

Developing reading with deaf pupils

Since the Rose review and the publication of the revised Literacy strategy in 2006, phonics has been catapulted into the forefront of learning to read. As a result I have often been asked to speak to ToDs about the development of phonic skills with deaf pupils following my article “Flippin’ Phonics” in BATOD magazine.

Of course phonics has always been a part of learning to read for deaf children as well as hearing. But everyone recognises that there is far more to reading than blending sounds. Attitudes and “higher order” comprehension skills also need to be developed through an English curriculum that is rich in language and a wide range of literacy experiences.

Nevertheless, for the vast majority of children (including deaf children), linking sounds and letters is an essential tool in decoding words as they read and spelling them as they write. Whilst there are a few documented cases of deaf children learning to read without these skills, they are rare and the strategies that these pupils use are little understood and therefore cannot be effectively utilised with other deaf pupils.

As deaf children learn their phonics skills, teachers need to take account of:

- Audiological factors – hearing levels and effective amplification in all learning situations
- Listening and language skills
- Acoustic phonetics
- Developmental phonology
- Any additional learning needs

The specific information and advice for each pupil will be made by teachers of the deaf who need to be well-informed and up-to-date in all these aspects as well as approaches to reading used by schools. Based on this advice suitable adaptations will be made to whichever phonics scheme is in use by the school.

In 2009, a group led by NDCS wrote guidance on the development of phonic skills with deaf children. The group included representatives from NDCS, BATOD, the Ewing Foundation and the Ear Foundation. The guidance was aimed at mainstream teachers and was published in April 2010. It is in two parts. The first part outlines general considerations and the second part suggests a graduated approach to some of the specific modifications that might be made to Letters and sounds - the phonics programme that was developed to meet the requirements of the Literacy Strategy. Although

schools are no longer required to follow the strategy, many will continue to use the aspects, resources and guidance that they have found useful, including Sounds and Letters.

Nevertheless, phonics is only a starting point. Successful readers will understand what they reading and use a variety of strategies to read fluently. They will understand how different genres of narrative and other forms of writing are used; they will be able to inference meanings and understand non-literal language. **Pathways to Literacy** is a DVD which shows successful teaching of these other aspects of reading. The pack also contains detailed training notes that teachers of the deaf can use when supporting and advising mainstream teachers whether through formal training or informal discussions and written advice.