

Communication for deaf children and young people

Ted Moore delves into the history of communication associated with deaf education

Creatures communicate with their own kind in many different ways; they use body language, sound, smell, touch and even chemical and electrical communication.

It appears that many have evolved specialised physical mechanisms for producing sounds for purposes of social communication. The sounds may have led to 'languages' being developed where a community has an agreed set of sounds that are articulated in specific ways.

'Our species unprecedented use of the tongue, lips and other moveable parts seems to place (human) speech in a quite separate category' (Wikipedia).
(I don't know about budgies and parrots!)

The outcome of using sounds is an agreed set becomes a system of communication used by a particular country or community.

"The primary uses of language are informative, expressive, and directive in nature. Language is used to reason, to express ideas, argue a point, provide directions, and much more" (Wikipedia).

However, a language can also be developed by using hand, face and body gestures to communicate feelings and ideas, although in general, across the world, speech has become the default modality for human language.

Presumably, over a long period of time, a sound system of a community became highly developed. At the same time, those who were unable to hear were not capable of accessing what was going on around them. They were unable to communicate their own thoughts and wants in an acceptable manner. 'Consequently the social condition of the Deaf and Dumb for thousands of years was one of hopeless ignorance and general neglect' (Arnold, 1881).

The earliest written record of hearing loss is believed to have come from Ancient Egypt (6th century BCE). But about 1000 BC, it is recorded that Hebrew law (the Talmud) did not allow deaf people to own property.

The book of Exodus (4:11) written in the 6th century BCE states: "And the Lord said unto him (Moses) 'Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind?'"

A few hundred years later, 427–347 BC, "Plato's philosophy of innate intelligence did not help the plight of the deaf. He felt that all intelligence was present at birth and all people were born with perfect abstracts, ideas and language in their minds and they only required time to demonstrate their intelligence. Without speech there was no outward sign of intelligence, so deaf people must not be capable of ideas or language" (Lee, 2004)

In addition, Aristotle, 384–322 BC, believed that people

could not be educated without hearing and, thus, deaf people could not learn. According to Aristotle, Greek was the perfect language and all those who did not speak Greek were considered Barbarians. Since the deaf could not speak Greek, they were unintelligent and generally 'retarded'.

St Augustine (circa 384–430 AD) stated deafness was the result of sins of the parents that were visited on their children; therefore, 'afflicted' children were a sign of God's anger or punishment for parents' secret sins. And that "If a child is deaf then this is the result of the sins of the parents or the family. If a child is deaf and can't speak then this is God's will and one must not change what God has done".

Until the 19th century most people lived in scattered villages and towns. Consequently, when a baby was born deaf, the family had to create signs in order to create exchanges of information. It seems highly likely that different families spontaneously came up with the same sign for actions such as 'eat' and 'drink'. Deaf children had no one outside the family to communicate with, no one to explain what was going on and consequently, there was a very limited exchange of information and social contact. This led to girls who were deaf being used as housemaids while deaf boys laboured in the fields or undertook menial manual tasks.

From 1500 AD

During the Middle Ages, deaf people were barred from attending church due to the widespread belief that the souls of the deaf could not find salvation, since deaf people were unable to 'hear the Word of God'.

However, amidst all this there were some signs of change. The first documented use of a manual alphabet and sign language in Britain appeared from a marriage ceremony in 1576 in Leicester (Lee, 2004).

Traditionally, the Church, which was a very powerful institution, excluded deaf people from taking part in religious worship and their status as human beings was as uneducable and on a level with 'imbeciles'. One of the consequences of having such a low status was that for many years 'deaf and dumb' people were not allowed to make a will or to inherit property from their families.

There was also, for a long time, the myth that there was no connection between deafness and 'dumbness'.

Schooling

There were virtually no schools for 'handicapped' children before the end of the 18th century. However, there was some individual teaching of deaf children who were usually from aristocratic backgrounds. For example, in 16th century Spain there were problems over inheritance. Those who couldn't speak couldn't inherit. One way round

this was for the rich to employ a tutor (eg Pedro Ponce de Leon [c.1520–1584]) who could teach speech to the deaf heir.

Henry Baker was the first teacher of deaf children in Britain to set up a private 'school' (his home) in about 1720.

Then Thomas Braidwood in 1760–1776 started a school for deaf children in Edinburgh. He subsequently moved his academy to Hackney (London) in 1783.

The first free school for the deaf (the third in the world) was the Royal School for Deaf children, which was founded in 1792 and known as the Asylum for the deaf and dumb children of the poor.

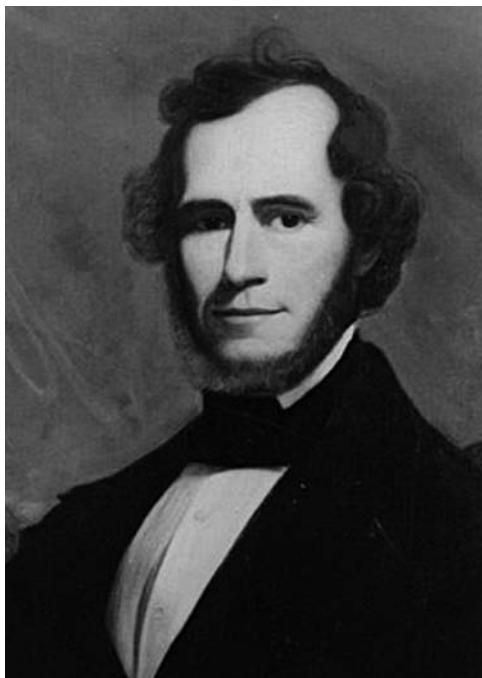
Perhaps amongst those who sought to help 'the deaf' there was an idea that money could be made out of opening a school for deaf children. So, between 1792 and 1850, 17 schools for the deaf were opened. In most cases British Sign Language (BSL) became an established language. The schools opened independently in different regions. There was considerable communication between the schools, and teachers often moved between schools. However, there was no central training in BSL, so a wide range of regional dialects developed. With time, the growth of towns in Britain enabled large numbers of deaf people to meet together and to form their own communities with their own language.

In 1800 the average life expectancy was about 40 years. What was it like for deaf people/children? Think of disease, syndromes, birth difficulties, lack of food and isolation. We know very little of the deaf community prior to the opening of deaf schools. Without a community, a culture would have been hard to sustain and a language would be unstable.

One wider benefit of teaching deaf children was that some of the ingrained prejudice started to be reversed. For example, lawyers were able to argue in court that a 'deaf-mute' who had learnt to speak was no longer a 'deaf-mute' and should be allowed to inherit family property. Medical opinion consequently concluded that those 'deaf-mutes' who could be taught to speak represented a special type of 'deaf-mute' whose tongues



Henry Baker



Thomas Braidwood

were not damaged!

But by the 1870's the big manual schools for the deaf in Europe and Britain were publicly scrutinised, and their work, the living conditions, the academic achievements, the calibre and training of their teachers, and their methods of instruction (manual) were found wanting (Markides, 1985). So, at the (second) International Congress for the Deaf (Milan, 1880), the representatives from all over Europe and some (five) from the USA passed the following resolutions:

- considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of the language, the Congress declares that the oral method ought to be preferred to that of signs for the education and instruction of the deaf and dumb
- and considering that the simultaneous use of speech and signs has the disadvantage of injuring speech, lipreading and precision of ideas, declare that the pure oral method ought to be preferred.

By 1900 there were 139 schools for the deaf in the USA, 160 in France and 87 in Britain. Sign language was forbidden for all.

In fact "For over 95 years after Milan, signs were banned in schools for the deaf in Britain and sign language barely survived in the world outside school. It was kept

going by those who found 'oralism' to be of no use to them" (Lee, 2004).

1900–1960s

Deaf education and deaf people in general were strongly affected by the methods of teaching, the rise in the number of schools for the deaf, the two World Wars and the 'Depression' (ie lack of employment opportunities). The introduction (1947) of partially hearing units in London and Manchester came about to provide education for those deaf children (deafness mild to severe), who through increasingly improving services could go to local schools near their home rather than boarding schools (and save the local councils' finances!)

The children and placements were affected by the improvements in technology (audiometers and hearing aids) and by advances in medical care. The Ewings



Father van Uden

(Alexander, Irene and Ethel) developed a very strong and influential Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) training course at Manchester University. Their teaching was based on an oral approach, with emphasis on lipreading and a gradual move towards the use of auditory methods. The use of sign continued to be frowned upon.

Technology advanced to include powerful group hearing aids, post aural hearing aids, audiometers, and overhead projectors.

Medicine advanced to include vaccinations for smallpox, rubella, meningitis, chicken pox, measles, mumps, etc.

Attitudes towards disability advanced to include more understanding of the nature of deafness and a greater tolerance of disabilities.

But gradually, especially after 1945 people began to question the feasibility of the 'oral approach' for all deaf children. There became a realisation that as the 1944 Act had stated that 'every child should receive an education suited to its age, ability and aptitude'.

Slowly, finger spelling and basic signs were used to supplement the spoken word. In the 1960s total communication (TC) was introduced to the field of deaf education. TC utilises all modalities of communication (spoken, signed, and written), as well as lipreading and gestures in the education of deaf children. Note, it wasn't until 2003 that BSL was recognised as a minority language.

Many people looked at the oral provision provided and felt that some form of sign or carefully designed oral sessions would help to clarify speech. So we got not only TC, but also:

- Cued Speech (1966 USA, 1970s England)
- Paget Gorman Signed Speech (PGSS) (1930s but used in the UK from the 1960s)
- Signing Exact English (SSE) (1970s)

- Signed English (1970s)
- Makaton (1979)

In addition, there were language development programmes (oral and written):

- The Maternal Reflective Method (the Netherlands, 1968) (Father Van Uden) and A World of Language for Deaf Children
- Auditory Verbal Therapy (1965 USA, 1999 UK)
- Guidelines: English Language Course UK (1970s)

But what is happening now?

Positive changes: newborn hearing screening; cochlear implants; smaller, more powerful and internet-connected hearing aids; more visual presentations: TV and digital projectors.

Negatives: local authorities (LAs) underfunded for special educational needs and disability (SEND). Consequently, an insufficient number of qualified ToDs. This means that services for deaf children and young people are limited in terms of school and home visits. Very slow delivery of education health and care plans by LAs.

Improvements needed – my four selections

- More help for deaf children with English as an additional language (EAL); so ... more ToDs
- Better listening conditions in schools (soundproof facilities)
- Courses for ToDs to understand more or become qualified to teach those children with other SEND besides deafness – maybe, in particular, deafness and autism
- More individual teaching from ToDs, which would include speech teaching (as appropriate). This would involve more qualified staff. The downside is that individual tuition means children missing lessons (if in mainstream).

Does this edition of the magazine come up with the answers?

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BATOD Magazine

This article was published in the Nov 2021 issue.

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BATOD
British Association of
Teachers of the Deaf

MAGAZINE • Nov 2021 • ISSN 1336-0799 • www.batod.org.uk

Communication

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The cover features a collage of five photographs: two women standing outdoors, a boy and a woman at a table with cards, a man signing, a woman with a child, and a child holding dolls.