

Press Release

22 October 2008

DEAF CHILDREN TO BE TAUGHT SYNTHETIC PHONICS USING GROUNDBREAKING FREE SOFTWARE

The THRASS synthetic phonics programme is widely accepted as having the potential to more than double the normal rate of progress for reading and spelling in English, and soon it will also be possible to use synthetic phonics to teach deaf children through a new Cued Speech version of the groundbreaking THRASS Phoneme Machine software.

The THRASS Phoneme Machine, which uses moving human lips to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) in hundreds of frequently used English words, is a key component of the THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) programme pioneered by British Educational Psychologist, Alan Davies. It is an excellent resource for parents and teachers for learning about, and also teaching, the fundamental building blocks of English in an entertaining and fun way.

The value of the Phoneme Machine was recognised in the September 2007 edition of Independent Talking Points, the magazine of the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice, in which Catherine Redmayne, the editor, wrote, "I would have paid just for some bits of this programme. Considering the whole thing was free to download, it was a wonderful offering from THRASS".

This latest version of the Phoneme Machine, version V6-CS, follows a request from Cued Speech Association UK to include a Cued Speech option, and is being developed by THRASS UK as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility Programme, which aims to improve the quality of life for the local community and society at large.

In Cued Speech, each sound (phoneme) has a visual representation. These sound-based units give deaf children access to spoken and written English. Cued Speech uses lip reading and eight hand-shapes in four different positions near the mouth to represent the 44 sounds of English. The combination of the hand shape, the hand

position and the lip shape makes every sound of spoken language clear, so that 96 per cent of spoken language can be lip-read accurately.

In version V6-CS, the shapes, positions and movements of the hands will be displayed alongside moving human lips, with the cueing for each of the 500 basewords of English demonstrated in a video box.

Cued Speech can clarify spoken language wherever it is used at home and in school and it is uniquely helpful with literacy. A wide body of international research shows that profoundly deaf children who have had constant access to Cued Speech achieve literacy levels equivalent to hearing children of the same age. They are able to read by applying their particular knowledge of phonemes, even if they have not heard them, to written language. There is much evidence that this phonological awareness is crucial to reading success and deaf children who are not aware of the sounds of spoken language cannot learn to read in this way.

Anne Worsfold, Executive Director, Cued Speech Association UK, is very excited about the new software, which is suitable for independent learning at home, as well as for training groups in homes or schools: "We are confident that this software is going to change the lives of many deaf children, their parents, relatives and friends, and their teachers by helping deaf children to learn English and to understand and use synthetic phonics. The software will help people to learn and practise their Cued Speech skills, resulting in more deaf children achieving literacy levels equivalent to hearing children. It perfectly complements our existing free e-learning provision".

Staff from Cued Speech Association UK and Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education have been involved in the development of the software. Everyone is looking forward to using the final version and to seeing the progress made by children from using the Cued Speech functions, both in the UK and other countries.

Lynette Diederichs, Cued Speech South Africa and a teacher at Kwa Thintwa School for the Deaf, where Zulu is the home language, already knows the benefits of combining Cued Speech with THRASS: "Our young children love finding the pictures on the picturechart and learning to cue the words. Language, reading and spelling skills have improved significantly. We can't wait to use this groundbreaking software".

The British Government considers 'high quality phonic work' the best means for teaching beginner readers how to read and spell, and the teaching of literacy through phonics is part of the National Curriculum. Deaf children brought up with Cued Speech use phonics strategies when they learn to read just as hearing children do, so that they can 'sound out' words they do not know, and also work out how to spell new words that they have seen cued. Version V6-CS will now make it possible for deaf children to work independently, both in school and at home, on the sounds and spelling choices in English words.

Version V6-CS will be available as a free download from the THRASS website within the territory that THRASS UK is licensed to serve but the plan is to make the software accessible to as many children as possible. Alan Davies and Anne Worsfold will therefore be seeking a meeting with Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, to demonstrate the new software and to request that each Local Authority appoints at least one 'Cued Speech Champion', who will work with all health centres, nurseries and schools to ensure that deaf children are not forgotten in the Government's Every Child A Talker programme - a programme that stresses the vital importance of good early communication skills in all children.

THRASS UK expects to launch the Phoneme Machine version V6-CS on 1 December. Anyone who wishes to be informed of when the software becomes available for download, should visit www.thrass.co.uk/cuedspeech.htm.

For information about Cued Speech and courses run by Cued Speech Association UK, visit www.cuedspeech.co.uk. To access Cued Speech e-learning visit: www.learntocue.co.uk

For information about the BBC's Appeal on behalf of the Cued Speech Association UK, in August 2008, visit http://www.bbc.co.uk/charityappeals/programmes/lifeline/lifeline_archive.shtml

Press Contacts

Mike Meade, Media Director, +44 1829 741413 Mob: +44 7970 151 738
mikemeade@thrass.co.uk

Chris Griffiths, International Development, +30 266 203 1207
chrisgriffiths@thrass.co.uk