

# DCAL



ESRC DEAFNESS COGNITION AND LANGUAGE RESEARCH CENTRE

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## Welcome to DCAL's eNewsletter

# IMPACT

# The BIG idea

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# Our focus on making an impact

**This edition of the DCAL newsletter focuses on DCALs impact. Here at DCAL we want to make sure our research makes a difference.**

Research that changes people's lives in an academic context is known as having 'impact'. The latest Research Assessment Framework (REF) gives 20% of its coverage to this topic. The funding that DCAL receives from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is also linked to impact. To show we have made an impact it is not enough that we highlight that our research has been excellent, or that people acknowledge the findings, we must demonstrate that our research is being used.

DCAL's work has obvious implications for the lives of deaf children and adults so it is important that we communicate with as many people as possible who can benefit professionally or personally from an understanding of our research. In schools, the work place and even the home DCAL's research is having an impact. Professionals working in fields as diverse as mental health interpreting and child care have all improved their practice through finding out about DCAL research. Here are some of the things that people said when we asked them at last year's Deaf Children Development Conference about DCAL's impact:

**'The study on iconicity will influence my practice when recommending early signs for deaf children. I will recommend more iconic signs first! The study on SLI in deaf signers has prompted me to seek advice regarding a child's BSL development as routine practice.'**

**'We are currently developing an evidence-based care pathway for our Speech & Language Therapy service for deaf children and babies. We are already using the findings and the views of the professionals to try to push for working with younger deaf babies. Currently the teacher of the deaf works with babies and only refers to speech & language therapy if they feel this is necessary later. We are now pushing to automatically be involved in the input for deaf babies, and advice to parents about early communication.'**

**'Sign language should be recommendation for teachers of the deaf - at the minimum of level 2 or beyond.'**

**'I will use the research to inform Language & Communication Policy, Audiology Policy and Deaf Studies Policy. I will also be sharing this information with the National Deaf Studies Working Group who will then disseminate this information to their children, parents and staff.'**

**'.....will assist me with advice and support I give to parents. For example in how they should communicate with their children (such as using words like 'dream' etc) to support their child developing empathy. That particular aspect of the research was very interesting to me.'**

**'I will be providing feedback from the conference to the teachers at my primary school with the aim to help them apply the knowledge in their practice with deaf children.'**

We always are looking for new ways of sharing our research. If you have a good idea or can think how we can reach more people who work with deaf adults or children, please get in touch.

# Impact on children's development

One major way we can ensure our work makes a difference to the lives of deaf children is through research based training and education. DCAL actively supports organisations in the public and third sector to develop and deliver training to improve outcomes for deaf children based on our research.

## Family Sign Language Curriculum Research

DCAL researchers have been looking for several years at the acquisition of language in deaf children. Based on this evidence we supported the NDCS to create a family sign language curriculum and run a course called 'Train the Trainers' (these are family support workers who deliver the family sign language curriculum to families with deaf children), which consists of an introduction to BSL Linguistics, Sign Language Acquisition, Bilingualism and Storytelling.

The family sign language curriculum is aimed at children from 0-5 years of age, which is a crucial time for language development. Several research studies have shown the importance of early language acquisition for literacy, educational attainment and mental well-being.

DCAL researchers Katherine Rowley and Gary Morgan have delivered this course in many locations around the UK including Glasgow, Manchester, London and Birmingham. Further courses are scheduled to take place in Newcastle, Brighton and some other locations. The aim of the course is to equip family support workers with the knowledge and tools needed to provide families with deaf children the best support possible. Feedback from attendees has been extremely positive, with family support workers expressing that the knowledge gained from the courses are of great benefit to families they work with. If you wish to know more about these courses, please contact Helen Foulkes at [helen.foulkes@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:helen.foulkes@ndcs.org.uk)

- **90% of deaf children are born to hearing families.**
- **Most of the early communication a child is exposed to is in the family.**
- **Families with a deaf child need to learn signs for nursery rhymes, stories, games and child-centred activities. Traditional BSL don't provide this content.**



## Training professionals to use the BSL production test.

One major need identified by people working with deaf people is developing assessment tests. One of the most needed test is BSL production skills. DCAL researchers Bencie Woll, Gary Morgan and Ros Herman from City University London and UCL have just run another successful training course for the BSL Production Test which looks at deaf children's story telling skills in BSL. The course was attended by deaf and hearing professionals working with deaf children who sign. Our research into language development informs the content of the training course and we deliver the linguistics and language development training in BSL.

**For more information on DCAL research follow us on twitter @DCAL\_UCL or visit the media section of our website**

# History of BSL exhibition a fantastic success



Over the summer DCAL hosted an exhibition funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) that traced the history of British Sign Language over the ages.

The exhibition highlighted how sign language developed in Britain from its earliest known beginnings. It revealed a story with many twists and turns. Visitors got the chance to see firsthand how the forces of religion, education and royal patronage have all influenced the development of BSL over hundreds of years.

The exhibition showcased rare books, pamphlets and early films that chronicle the origins and history of sign language in Britain. These were brought



Image of Queen Victoria using finger spelling to communicate with a deaf woman

together for the first time in this unique exhibition, and enabled the visitor to experience objects and artefacts that have had an influence on this major British language.

The displays had something to amaze everyone, whatever their existing knowledge about sign language or Deaf culture. It appealed to the expert as well as those with a passing interest in Deaf people's culture, history and language.

***Fascinating to look at how BSL developed, especially that it's so different from ASL - Boston, USA***



Supported by  
**The National Lottery**  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



## On-line catalogue coming soon

DCAL is in the process of creating an online catalogue of the entire exhibition

Each section, object and installation will be accompanied by images, text and BSL translations

Check [www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk) for updates and launch date



# Speechreading

Speechreading (also known as lip reading) is the ability to understand speech in the absence of sound. For deaf children and adults, speechreading can be the main way to access spoken language.



Our collaborators, Prof. Margaret Harris (Oxford Brookes University) and Dr Fiona Kyle (City University London), have shown that deaf children with better speechreading skills tend to find it easier to learn to read. We think this is because when deaf children are learning about how written letters map on to sounds (e.g. the letter 'm' goes with the sound 'mmm'), they can use information from lip patterns (e.g. what the lips look like when you make the sound 'mmm') to help with this mapping process, especially when they find the sounds difficult to hear and tell apart.

Children who have better speechreading skills will be able to get more detailed information about speech from the lip patterns they see, and may be able to use this extra information to help them as they learn to read.

We and our collaborators have developed separate tests of speechreading ability of deaf children and adults. Results from a study conducted using the adult test suggested that profoundly deaf adults had better speechreading skills than hearing adults. However, this advantage for deaf participants was not found when the speechreading ability of deaf and hearing children was



assessed using the children's test. This pattern of results suggests that increased experience of understanding silent speech leads to improvements in speechreading ability, and therefore raises the possibility that we can train speechreading ability.

Recent studies with adults have suggested that it is indeed possible to improve speechreading ability through training. Children's brains respond much more flexibly to new inputs and learning experiences, so it is likely that speechreading training would be even more effective for them.

**DCAL (in partnership with Dr Kyle, Prof. Harris and Prof. Charles Hulme, UCL) are developing a new speechreading training programme for young deaf children aged 5-6 years, which will involve a suite of computer games specifically designed to be fun and engaging for this age-group. The games will aim to improve the children's speechreading skills and to help them use these speechreading skills to support their reading development.**

Next year we will be running a research study to systematically test whether this game successfully improves speechreading and reading skills in young deaf children. We will be looking for 5 and 6 year old children with severe or profound hearing loss in both ears to take part in this study at their schools. If you know any children who you think might be able to help out with this study, or you would like any further information about the research, please do get in touch:

**Dr Mairead MacSweeney:** [m.macsweeney@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.macsweeney@ucl.ac.uk)  
**Dr Hannah Pimperton:** [h.pimperton@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:h.pimperton@ucl.ac.uk)

# TISLR 11

This summer, DCAL successfully hosted the world's most important international conference for sign language studies. The 'Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research' (TISLR) conference, the conference of the Sign Language Linguistics Society is held every three years. DCAL hosted the 11<sup>th</sup> conference in the series.

TISLR conference provides a unique opportunity for academics to present their latest research on a wide range of areas within the field of sign language research.

Over 300 delegates from approximately 40 countries attended. TISLR was a great opportunity to network and learn about the latest research developments.



**For more information on the TSLR conference visit the DCAL website  
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/TISLR>**

# The Sign Language Researcher's Toolkit

Just before the TISLR conference DCAL also hosted a three-day summer school "The Sign Language Researcher's Toolkit". The aim of the summer school was to provide training in research methods in sign language linguistics, psychology and neuroscience to deaf and hearing research students and post-doctoral researchers from all over the world.

The summer school was attended by 51 students from 24 countries. Through grants from the ESRC and the EU, DCAL was able to provide funding for students/researchers who came from nations with little support for sign language research or where researchers were isolated from other sign language researchers. Bursaries were awarded to students from Brazil, Canada, China, Trinidad and Tobago, and Poland, with two bursaries awarded to deaf students.

**The TISLR summer school made an important contribution towards capacity building among young deaf researchers to become future leaders in sign language research.**

The summer school also created the opportunity for networking and exchange between DCAL students and our team of international experts.

## Yozo Yamao



The TISLR conference coincided with the 150th anniversary of Yozo Yamao arriving in Britain as one of the Choshu Five. These five young men were members of the Choshu clan in western Japan who secretly left the country during the turbulent times toward the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The purpose of their trip was to study at UCL and to increase knowledge of western nations.

Count Yozo, known as the 'father of Japanese engineering', is also credited with creating Japan's first schools for blind children and for deaf children. His interest in this field stems from his time in Glasgow where he met deaf people and saw workers signing at Napier's Shipyard.



To launch the TISLR conference DCAL hosted a reception and symposium on deaf education, sponsored by the Embassy of Japan to celebrate the life of Yozo Yamao.

The symposium included talks by Dr Suemori Akio and Mr Peter Jackson.

Dr Akio Suemori is Chief Researcher (Molecular Evolution Engineering) at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology in Japan. He is also an editor for the Kanto Group for Deaf History and President of the Japanese Association for Sign Language Studies. Dr Suemori spoke on deaf education in Japan, first introduced by Yozo Yamao of the Choshu Five.

Mr Peter Jackson is a former college lecturer and curriculum manager and following his retirement in 2009, he now acts as part-time chief of the British Deaf History Society and the Institute of British Sign Language. He is an author of numerous books on British Deaf history. Mr Jackson's lecture focussed on deaf education in the UK at the time of the Choshu Five.



# UKCoD Conference on Ageing and Deafness

## *Implications for Health and Social Care*



Professor Bencie Woll was a co-organiser of a conference on “**Ageing and Deafness: implications of health and social care**”. The conference, sponsored by the United Kingdom Council on Deafness, featured speakers from the public, private and voluntary sectors, including Jo Atkinson, from DCAL talking about the dementia research and memory clinic. The issues raised at the conference will form part of a debate in the House of Lords on health and social care.

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