

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Give a thumbs up to 'cued articulation'

This speech and language technique can boost phonics learning for all, so follow a primary teacher's top tips to use it effectively

CHARLOTTE HIBBS

IF YOU watched my class learning phonics, it would take some time before you noticed something was amiss. On the surface it would all be pretty familiar: the Jolly Phonics story, the mnemonics and the songs.

So far so usual – the Jolly Phonics method is used in thousands of schools. But then you'd see the actions being made, and suddenly all is not quite so normal. Instead of the usual Jolly Phonics action, the children do something quite different.

The method you would witness is called "cued articulation". It was devised in the late 1970s by a speech therapist called Jane Passy, originally to aid children with severe speech and language difficulties. Since then it has been shown to assist children with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL), and it is increasingly being used as a whole-class strategy.

I've been using cued articulation for four years and the impact has been huge. Children progress quicker,

they are more confident readers and they are more willing to try pronouncing new words before asking how.

How it works

We use cued articulation alongside Jolly Phonics to implement the Letters and Sounds programme. It works like this: the 49 phonemes each have an accompanying action made with the hand that relates to where in the mouth the sound is made (see panel, right).

So for the letter "g", the hand signal is to place two fingers (index finger and middle finger) together in a hook shape on your throat by your voice box. You then roll the two fingers forward as you say the sound.

For the letter "f", meanwhile, the hand signal is to place one finger (your index finger) horizontally under your bottom lip and move it downwards as you say the sound. This shows how the air travels out of your mouth as you say it.

For "unvoiced" letters, the action has one finger, but if it's

voiced, it has two. If children can produce a "p" sound, they should be able to say "b", because it requires the same "mechanics" in the mouth with the addition of the voice. The same goes for other pairs, such as "f" and "v", "c" and "g", and "t" and "d".

A five-step strategy

This is the sequence I use for teaching a new sound:

- Introduce the letter on a flash card and say its name – "p", for example.
- Pronounce the sound the letter makes, ensuring that all the children can say and repeat the sound.
- Teach the action.
- Encourage the children to say the sound with the action, and ensure they are able to do so correctly.
- Then move on to the Jolly Phonics mnemonic, story and song. Every time you hear the sound, get the class to say it and make the cued articulation action.

Enhancing other approaches

Teaching using cued articulation is surprisingly easy. I first came across the strategy in my final teaching practice at university. My placement school in Hampshire worked closely with speech therapist Marion Jones as part of the Andover Language Project. When I was told that they used cued articulation instead of the Jolly Phonics actions, my heart sank. I'd never heard of it.

However, within two weeks of participating in phonics lessons, I had learned all the cued articulation actions for Letters and Sounds Phase 2 – mainly from the children and their teacher. I then picked up all the Phase 3 sounds as I began to teach the children myself; I learned with them.

Each week, the children are taught a maximum of four sounds. These are added to their sound book. This involves putting the capital letter and lower case letter at the top of the page. Underneath that there is a diagram showing how to make the action, alongside a description to support parents in helping their child. Finally, there are six or so words containing the new sound for the children to read.

The effects on children – and their parents

Cued articulation has a huge impact on helping the children to make sounds correctly, and this in turn benefits their reading, writing and spelling skills. I strongly encourage my pupils to use the actions when sounding out words to read and also when sound talking (segmenting) words to spell.

When a child is reading with me or practising sounds but can't remember the sound a letter makes, I remind them to use their actions. Nine times out of 10, the action helps them remember how to say the correct sound.

In my view, cued articulation also works much better for EAL students than any other phonics strategy. There are some sounds in the English phonological system that are not in the phonological systems of other languages, such as "th". This can make it much harder for children who are new to the language to learn these particular sounds.

Cued articulation is particularly successful in helping EAL children and their parents, because it shows how and where the sound is made. Learners do not need to rely on their knowledge of the English language in order to understand how to make the sound – they can see the hand signal and copy it, thus learning how to say the letter.

Reap the benefits

After four years using the system, I have seen first-hand how effective cued articulation is for all students, and particularly those with EAL. Implementing it needn't involve a dramatic change to the way you are teaching, but it can bring significant benefits and boost results. ●

Charlotte Hibbs is a foundation stage teacher at Springhill Catholic Primary School in Southampton

What else?

For more information on cued articulation, see Jane Passy's website cuedarticulation.com

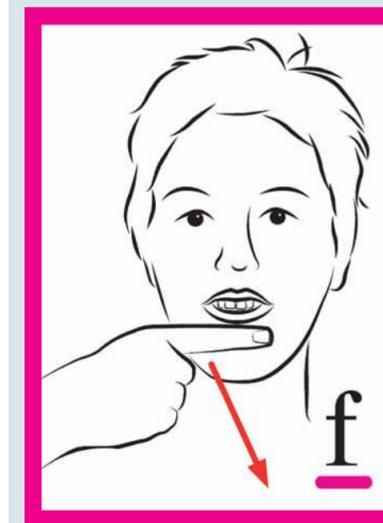
Children are more confident readers and are more willing to try pronouncing new words



Cued articulation in action

When the cued articulation actions are illustrated, colour-coding is used to aid understanding. Every consonant pair has a colour, and the consonant sound is underlined once or twice, depending on whether it is voiced or voiceless. "The colour-coding has been of great help to

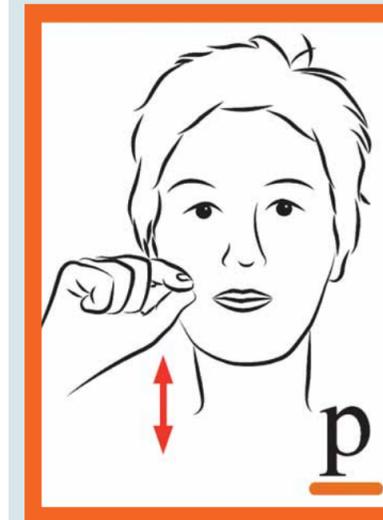
children with auditory problems, children who speak English as an additional language, and the dyslexic population," Jane Passy says, adding: "Because cued articulation is based on solid linguistic theory, it enables it to be used alongside many teaching schemes."



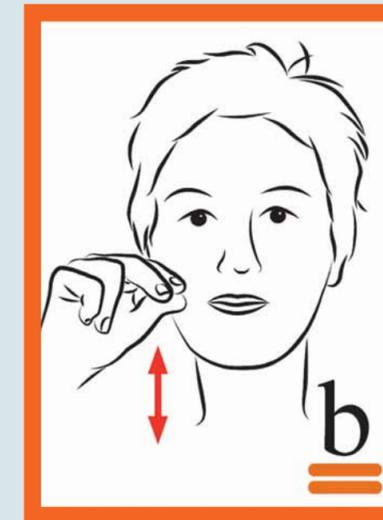
As the sound is made, the finger moves forwards and downwards in a long movement, showing that this is a long, continuous sound. Using one finger demonstrates that "f" is an unvoiced sound, ie, the vocal cords don't vibrate.



The fingers rotate forward in a short, jerky motion as the air is released at the back of the mouth. Because "g" is the voiced partner of "k", this action is the same as the "k" cue but made with two fingers.



The finger and thumb come together near the lips, and then pop open, showing that this sound is made by releasing a stoppage of air at the lips. It is a "stop" sound, so the movement is short.



The cue is the same as "p" except that you use two fingers to indicate that it is a voiced sound. Your students may be surprised to find that we say "b" in almost the same way as "p".

Source: the descriptions were provided by Helen Botham, speech and language therapist at www.soundsforliteracy.co.uk and the images have been reproduced with the kind permission of the Australian Council for Educational Research (www.acer.edu.au).