

Hearing Matters: What can we do to ensure that English Language Learners with a hearing loss can reach their full potential?

By Alison Winter

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I recently attended the IATEFL conference in Brighton and presented at a special interest group for Inclusive Practices and Special Educational Needs, the title of this event was 'Reaching Out to Learners with Social, Emotional, Behavioural and Sensory Needs'.

As a representative of Action on Hearing Loss I was there to discuss hearing loss in education. The statistics on hearing loss are quite shocking, according to the World Health Association

- 466 million people in the world have disabling hearing impairment.
- >1 billion young people (aged 12-35) are at risk of hearing loss due to recreational exposure to loud sounds.
- \$750 billion is the overall cost of unaddressed hearing loss globally.

In the UK we know that support for deaf students or students with a hearing loss is only getting worse. 50,000 young people in the UK are registered as deaf, of that 50,000 80% of them have little to no specialist provision. Specialist teachers or the deaf have been cut by 14% in the past 10 years, and for those who remain in the profession 60% of them are set to retire in the next 10-15 years. All the while demand for support is up 31%! It is therefore unsurprising that deaf students are seeing the attainment gap at GCSE widen between themselves and their hearing peers. When you add in to the mix that English may not be your first language the barriers to your education really start to add up.

It absolutely does not need to be this way, there are things that can be done to support these students so they can fully participate in classroom activities. Remember people are not disabled, it is society which disables them.

So what can be done? The solution ultimately depends on the individuals needs but here are a few ideas

Hearing Assistive technology:

Hearing assistive technology can make a world of difference to a child. A teacher could wear a microphone that transmits their voice directly into the hearing aid of the student so they can clearly hear instructions no matter where they are in the classroom.

Do you have a hearing loop in your school? Does it work? How do you know? It might be worth having it checked, you can purchase your own low cost device to test the quality of the output regularly so that hearing aid users have a pleasant experience in your school.

Improve accessibility with deaf awareness training

Our deaf awareness training will improve your communication skills and confidence, helping you to understand the challenges faced by pupils and staff who are deaf or have hearing loss. Afterwards you'll be able to:

- Identify situations in your school where people who are deaf or have hearing loss might face communication barriers
- Devise solutions to improve accessibility in your school
- Understand a range of communication methods used by people who are deaf or have hearing loss
- Demonstrate and build confidence in communicating with people who are deaf or have hearing loss

Remove barriers with Start to Sign course

Our Start to Sign course provides basic British Sign Language (BSL) skills to communicate with pupils who are deaf and use BSL. It's a fantastic introduction to BSL, giving you the opportunity to learn more than 150 signs in a day. By the end of the course you'll be able to:

- Recognise and apply basic grammatical structures in BSL
- Use appropriate greetings
- Communicate your job title / role in BSL
- Introduce yourself using fingerspelling
- Hold a brief conversation with a person who is deaf using everyday vocabulary

Boost literacy using SignSpell

SignSpell is a new initiative to improve communication, spelling and literacy for primary children of all ages and abilities. It uses aspects of British Sign Language (BSL) to teach new physical and practical ways to remember words and spelling. Where phonics will help children to pronounce and read words, SignSpell will help them associate a word with a sign, movement and meaning. No prior experience of sign language is required to teach it; children and teachers learn together. Resources include lesson plans, themed storybooks, fun activities, flashcards and an online video dictionary with 340 BSL signs and phrases.

Access auditing and the Louder than Words™ accreditation

If you do not know where to start this is a great thing to consider, have the accessibility in your school audited. Our assessors will give you a comprehensive assessment and guide to demonstrate what you have that works well, what could be improved and a clear action plan on how to get there.

Louder Than Words™ is a nationally-recognised accreditation for organisations that provide excellent accessibility for people who are deaf or living with hearing loss. Pupils with hearing loss often encounter communication barriers which can lead to isolation and under-achievement. Gaining the Louder than Words™ charter mark will demonstrate your commitment to providing inclusive and accessible education to pupils with hearing loss so they have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Help us to help you

Please complete our short survey to help us identify the current level of support available for pupils and staff living with deafness, hearing loss or tinnitus. The findings will be used to help improve deaf awareness at schools, colleges and universities across the UK.

<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/4032110/How-deaf-aware-is-the-education-sector-Action-on-Hearing-Loss>

Find out more

We have everything you need to make your school more accessible to students with hearing loss. Please contact me, Alison Winter, Education Development Specialist, for advice, training and support: