Update on DCAL research
Deaf Children Development Conference
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Conference Blog
Stay involved: visit the conference blog
http://blogs.city.ac.uk/deafchildsdevelopment

We have set up a blog so everyone attending the conference can carry on their conversations and so people who can’t make the event can get involved. We’re keen for people from a wide range of backgrounds to contribute to the blog and to let us know what they think about our work.

A blog is nothing without comment, so please get involved.

You can also tweet your thoughts on the conference using the hashtag #deafchildsdevelopment

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**Important research findings:**

**language acquisition**

- Acquisition of a first language within the normal time frame is crucial; delay has long-term serious consequences for both language and cognition.
- Acquisition of vocabulary in BSL is correlated with motor development and wider language development, especially BSL receptive grammar skills.
- Early parent-child interaction at 24 months is strongly correlated with deaf children’s Theory of Mind abilities. This is apparent on non-verbal measures. Sign language use by parents is a protective factor in deaf children’s ToM development.

**language impairments**

- As with some hearing children, a small number of deaf children who sign have more extreme difficulties learning language than would be expected.
- Language impairments in deaf signing children may affect some or many different aspects of language, e.g. narrative skills, vocabulary, grammar, use of language.
- It is important to regularly check deaf children’s BSL development to identify children who might have an additional language impairment. We need more language assessments and more research to look into the best ways of helping.

**lipreading and reading**

- Lipreading skill correlates with reading skill in deaf children and adults. Our colleagues have also shown that early lipreading skill is also a good ‘predictor’ of how well a deaf child will be able to read later on.
- On a computerised test of lip-reading we developed, deaf adults were better lipreaders than hearing adults. However, on a version of the test for children (5-12yr olds) – there was no difference between deaf and hearing groups. This suggests lipreading skill might improve over time and with more experience.

**learning sign language**

- Learning signs that visually resemble properties of objects and actions (iconicity) is easier than learning signs that do not bear any visual resemblance.
- Iconicity aids understanding and producing language in adults. This finding may have implications for developing training programmes for language impairments.
- When signing BSL, English mouthings are often produced. Our research shows that BSL manual signs and English mouthings are treated independently despite being produced simultaneously. This suggests that learning BSL in childhood does not interfere with learning English.

**important research findings:**

- When signing BSL, English mouthings are often produced. Our research shows that BSL manual signs and English mouthings are treated independently despite being produced simultaneously. This suggests that learning BSL in childhood does not interfere with learning English.
- Similar brain systems are used when deaf and hearing people make decisions about the structure of words (e.g., do the words rhyme?) and also the structure of signs (e.g., are the signs made at the same location?). This suggests that sign and speech processing in the brain are very similar even at this level of ‘phonology’. We know that speech phonology is important for reading.