

[special needs]

Montessori and Cued Speech



Diane Therriault

Diane Therriault's life changed forever after a car accident

By Karen Brenner

Diane was a Montessori teacher who specialized in teaching children who are deaf or communication disordered at Alexander Graham Bell Montessori School. While turning onto a familiar neighborhood road, Diane's car was struck broadside by a speeding automobile.

One moment, Diane was a wife, mother, Montessori teacher. The next moment she was no one. Sustaining frontal lobe damage in the accident, Diane lost much of her cognitive ability. She could speak, but could not understand the meaning of many common words. Diane did not remember much of her past life, nor did she understand how to use money, how to find her way home, how to carry on a conversation. She had, essentially, lost herself. There were only two things that truly resonated with her. One was music, which suddenly took on a rich and meaningful role in her life. The other was the Montessori classroom; the materials,

the children and Cued Speech, the communication modality used with the children. Diane felt comfortable in the Montessori classroom because the Montessori Materials and Cued Speech are both learned through the hands, through repetitive muscle or procedural memory. This muscle memory allowed Diane, even with traumatic brain injury, to remember much of the Montessori apparatus, as well as remembering how to cue!

Cued Speech makes all the phonemes (sound-based units) of speech visible by using eight hand shapes in four positions near the mouth in combination with the lip shapes of speech. Cued Speech is not a language of its own, as is American or British Sign Language, but rather a communication tool that can be used with any language. It is the combination of the hand shape, the hand position and the lip shape that makes every sound of spoken language clear. Cued Speech is also a valuable tool in teaching reading. Because Cued Speech has a phonetic base, it dovetails nicely with the phonetic approach used in the Montessori classroom, and has been proven to greatly increase the literacy of people who are deaf.

It was these tools, the Montessori Materials and Cued Speech that began to guide Diane back to herself. Learning

with the children, Diane used the Montessori Materials to re-learn basic skills. Using her hands to cue the words she struggled to understand, the meaning of language began to slowly return. Diane also began to understand at a much deeper level the struggle of those children who are deaf or communication disordered; she began to understand the power of seeing the words through the use of Cued Speech, of understanding the world through the use of the Montessori Materials.

Today, Diane has recovered her life, her personality and her abilities. Diane credits much of her remarkable recovery to the powerful combination of the use of Cued Speech with the Montessori Materials and the encouragement and patience of the children in her classroom.

Contact Information:

To learn more about Cued Speech in the UK:
<http://www.cuedspeech.co.uk/home.htm>
E-mail: info@cuedspeech.co.uk

Cued Speech in the US:

<http://www.cuedspeech.org/sub/general/>

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Pictured above; Left: Nikolai from Russia. Centre: (left to right) Brandt, Drake from China, Andrew and Christopher. Right: Josselin from Honduras.