

# Special Interest Article

## A REPORT FROM THE XIX CONGRESS OF THE I.A.L.P.<sup>1</sup> THE MAKATON VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Submitted by: Amy Fleming

The International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics Congress August 14-18 in Edinburgh, Scotland offered a wide variety of short papers from thirty-two different countries. One of the most interesting sessions I attended was a two hour introductory workshop on the Makaton Project which started in England and is spreading to other countries.

### BACKGROUND

To respond to the challenge of establishing communication, teachers and therapists in more than 80 per cent of the educationally subnormal schools in Great Britain are using signs from British Sign Language (B.S.L.). In the majority of these schools the B.S.L. is being taught in conjunction with a language programme called "The Makaton Vocabulary" used as an aid to developing language in those with severe communication impairments.

In 1972 in Surrey, England the Makaton Vocabulary began as a project to teach sign language to deaf mentally handicapped adults. The three individuals, Margaret, Kathy, and Tony, who started the project also gave their names to it. The system was revised to be used with children and has been designed to provide a controlled method of teaching approximately 350 B.S.L. signs in order to provide a basic means of communication; to encourage expressive speech/language; to develop language comprehension through the visual medium of the signs and the logical structure of the sign language.

The vocabulary is not meant to be a precise description of acquired vocabulary sequence for normal or multiply handicapped people. Instead, the vocabulary words/signs were developed through careful observation of normal vocabulary while applying it to children and adults with severe communication handicaps. It is an attempt to guide the acquisition of a core vocabulary of highly useful concepts/words which can be further combined into a wide range of phrases and sentences. The Makaton Vocabulary can also be used with symbols, pictures, objects, or any combination of alternative communication tools.

### TARGET POPULATION

The 1976 Revised Makaton Vocabulary is now used with:

- 1) mentally handicapped deaf and non-deaf children and adults who have little or no expressive speech and poor comprehension.
- 2) children and adults who are both physically and mentally handicapped.
- 3) those who are considered to be autistic.
- 4) some young deaf children in the normal intelligence range.
- 5) children with severe articulation or speech rhythm problems who need a temporary alternative.
- 6) certain normal adults with acquired communication problems.
- 7) young Down's syndrome babies.

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<sup>1</sup>Editor's Note: Amy, councillor from B.C., attended the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics Congress and was asked to write a report for Human Communication Canada.

## STAGE ONE OUTLINE

The Makaton programme is divided into nine vocabulary stages. For example, stage one - includes the words/concepts: mummy, daddy, drink (cup), dinner, toilet, bed, I, you, where, what, to eat (food), to look (see), good, bad, Good morning, goodbye and so on for a total of thirty-nine. Mrs. Walker recommended that one stage at a time be taught, regardless of the mental ability of the learner. Both comprehension and expression are goals, and the emphasis is on developing functional communication with a small number of signs. Signs within a stage may be taught in any order, and signs that aren't required by the learner can be omitted while a few signs especially needed by the learner can be added. When the learner understands all the words/signs in Stage 1 and is using about half of them expressively, instruction on the Stage two vocabulary can be started. Suggested equipment, including some specifically designed Makaton picture flash cards and other materials, as well as teaching methods accompany the programmes.

## TRAINING PROGRAMS

The training programmes for Makaton instructors have been extensive. The organization and energy of the volunteers has been impressive. In August 1983 the non-profit organization became a charity. Since 1976 some 30,000 professionals have been trained and there are 150 representatives of the Makaton Vocabulary Development Project throughout the United Kingdom. These representatives are available for ongoing consultation. Training is given at National Workshops (minimum 1 day in length).

Overseas Makaton Vocabulary Resource Centres are following the same training pattern. The workshops provide background information, signing instruction, and training in the recommended teaching procedures.

The first North America training workshop will be held in Omaha, Nebraska this winter.

For further information please contact:

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## REFERENCES:

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