

Conrad

Psychologist working with deaf children; Trustee of the Deaf Studies Trust

Reuben Conrad's studies in Psychology were interrupted by the Second World War and like many others, his career development had to wait for some years. He started work at the Applied Psychology Unit in Cambridge in the 1950s and published his research on memory describing a new process of acoustic coding. In 1968, he turned to the issue of hearing loss and in systematically exploring the topic, even spent time teaching at the Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital in London. His major work on deaf children really began in the 1970s with several published studies of a new idea that internal cognitive processing required speech (particularly in tasks which involved reading) and that this finding might have implications for deaf children.

He hypothesised that deaf children might not be able to learn to read. From 1974, this work, funded by the Medical Research Council, took him and his team (Jim Kyle, Anne Morris, and Morag McKenzie) to almost all deaf schools and mainstream units in England and Wales. The memory tests confirmed deaf children's lack of inner speech but also (referring to psycholinguistic theories) that deaf children might be able to use an alternative code such as sign language.

His major work, the book, "The Deaf School Child" appeared in 1979. It challenged the field of Deaf Education because of the poor performance nationally of deaf school leavers, in speech, lip-reading and reading. A paper which followed, "Let the children choose" suggested that sign language should be an option for all deaf children in education. The work and ideas were widely shared in educational circles and created the foundation for the sign bilingual movement among teachers. The development of the academic field of Deaf Studies, which sought to understand the world from a deaf cognitive and linguistic perspective, came as a direct result of the discussion which Conrad created.

Conrad retired in the early 1980s but became a founding Trustee of the Deaf Studies Trust in 1984. He continued his interest in the work on sign language acquisition with the projects which the Trust undertook from 1984 onwards. He has now reached the age of 100 (in 2016).

Throughout, Conrad's work was careful, methodical and precise. He applied his cognitive analysis to what was a pressing educational and social problem. He challenged the thinking of the time and made an enormous difference to a generation of deaf children.

References

Conrad R (1979) *The Deaf School Child*, London Harper & Row

Conrad R (1980) Let the children choose, *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology*, [Volume 1, Issue 4](#), February, Pages 317-329

For more detail on Conrad's life read

Bishop D (2016) Quality and Longevity, *The Psychologist*, *volume 29*, July, pp 578-579