

My Second Speech: The Amazing Spelling Method

Speech by Jace Pooley

March 2024

[Watch on YouTube](#)

[Watch on my blog](#)

Today I'm going to share something life-changing with you. It's been life changing for me, how it's given me a voice and confidence and the best friends ever. And it's going to be life changing for you. Rights that I think are vital to society are not reaching millions of people. Rights that I think are essential to our humanity are not reaching millions of people. But we're going to change that!

I want you to imagine for a moment that all of a sudden you can't talk. Keep in mind that talking gets you what you need, it's how you can show understanding and intelligence, and it's entirely expected all of the time. Most other people judge you based on the things you say, but you can't say anything. Now imagine engaging in a conversation for the first time by writing with someone's help and people doubting the words are yours. Only an independent method is going to do it, but issues you have with motor control seem to make that impossible. Right when you are at your limit you discover a miracle: communication through spelling.

Are you hooked? I'm anticipating I'll keep you hooked as I tell you all about the spelling to communicate approach and ones like it. The genius lies in the fact that these methods all presume competence, which means that, unlike everyone else, they assume nonspeakers are smart and trying their best. Through coaching nonspeakers to point to letters on a stencil letterboard, then a laminated letterboard, then a keyboard, then a keyboard on a stand, these methods get spellers communicating independently. This process simultaneously helps nonspeakers myelinate new pathways in their brains, and get better at controlling their eyes and their bodies as they get more fluent as communicators. Absolutely brilliant!

But don't just take my word for it. My friend, [Vince](#), writes about how spelling unlocked his mind and more importantly his voice and personality. [Gregory](#) loves how it's made it possible for him to be an author and filmmaker. And [Aaron](#)

appreciates how it sees autistic nonspeakers not like puzzle pieces but like acorns, tough and full of potential.

You will be shocked to hear how much controversy and pushback these methods have generated. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, for example, issued a directive to speech-language pathologists saying that spelling to communicate “should not be used” and considers it to be a “discredited technique” that actually harms nonspeakers. Are you kidding me?!

Thankfully we now have a rigorous study debunking this awful position. “**Eye-tracking reveals agency in assisted autistic communication**” was published in the journal, *Scientific Reports*, in 2020. For this study, researchers used mounted cameras in order to track spellers’ eye movements when they pointed at letters. The authors found that spellers “actively generated their own text, fixating and pointing to letters that they selected themselves.” This was “a very different conclusion about [spellers’] ability to convey their own thoughts than has been suggested by previous research.” Two big takeaways from this are that “nonspeaking autistic people who communicate with assistance can indeed offer insight into their condition and lives” and that “the cognitive abilities of nonspeaking autistic people have been significantly underestimated.” Most speakers are catching on...finally!

And it’s a good thing! As the **eye-tracking study** authors point out, around one-third “of autistic children and adults have limited ability to communicate using speech” and “not having a way to communicate effectively using language is arguably the most significant aspect of their disability, severely limiting educational, social, and employment opportunities.” This makes spelling so important, especially because each and every one of us has the right to communicate. This right was first established by the United Nations in 1948. **Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” According to Sharynne McLeod in her **2018 overview of communication rights** for the *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, the “importance of communication rights is obvious, since they are included in almost every convention, declaration and covenant of the United Nations with few exceptions.” In 2014, the **Universal Declaration of Communication Rights** officially recognized “that the ability to communicate is a basic human right” and “that everyone has the potential to communicate” with “access to the support they

need.” If you combine that with Article 21 of 2006’s **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which argues that someone with a communication disorder has the right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice,” I have the clear right to spell!

I know that our time is running out, so let me get right to the things you need to remember. First, everyone has the right to communicate. Second, everyone gets to decide what way of communicating works best for them. And third, spelling to communicate and methods like it are proven ways to give nonspeakers like me a way to be heard. Thank you so much for listening to the powerful voice I have now!