

Deaf Education NEWS

Language Development Can be Win-Win for Deaf Children

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“The most important focus for parents and professionals who work with children who cannot hear or cannot hear well must be early (immediate) language acquisition (development).

Regardless of the variety of communication techniques and advancements in both technology and medicine, America has been educating children who cannot hear well for almost 200 years and these children still trail behind their peers who can hear in reading ability which in turn places achievement in all areas of life in jeopardy.

We must afford children who cannot hear well EVERY opportunity available for acquiring language (visually and auditorily) to allow them to blossom as they utilize the methods that work best for them. The worst case scenario is that the child’s language development and self-worth are not comprised as they develop bilingual communication skills!”

...Barbara Garrison
MSD Superintendent

According to many experts, the critical period for a child to acquire language is from birth to five. Most hearing children acquire language effortlessly, through both direct communication with care givers and incidental language in their environment.

Parents, who are deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL), communicate with their children from birth with the expectation that they will acquire sign language at a normal developmental rate. English is taught as a second language later using the first language, ASL, to teach the second.

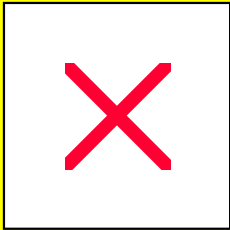
Hearing parents face a more difficult decision. Naturally they want to do everything possible to help their children live in the “hearing world”. That explains the popularity of cochlear implants and learning to speak and use auditory skills to communicate. These parents are faced with a controversy between oral and sign language approaches to language acquisition, which complicate the decisions they must make. Many professionals advocate for an auditory/oral only approach to language development. They fear that exposing a hearing-impaired child to sign language will prevent the development of speech and auditory skills. Research with hearing infants taught sign language does not support this view.¹ In contrast, the researches found that “. . . symbolic gesturing facilitates the early stages of verbal language development.”² Since hearing parents are seldom familiar with sign language, they may view the auditory/oral only approach as the best way to educate their child and help him or her fit into the “hearing world.” The digital revolution in hearing aids, the increasing use of cochlear implants, and intensive speech/language therapy has made this goal achievable for some but not all hearing-impaired children. Even with cochlear implants and intensive therapy, some of these children fail to make expected progress. By the time parents and educators become concerned, early language development may be delayed and precious time lost. For a child struggling to make sense of his world, such a delay in developing a language is unacceptable.

Perhaps if we set aside the controversy between the auditory/oral and sign language methods, we could see the benefits of a bilingual approach. Why should we, as parents or educators, confine ourselves to an all-or-nothing method? A child who arrives at kindergarten without a natural language, auditory or signed, cannot start his or her education until a language base is developed, yet the critical language window is beginning to close. Deaf children deserve the opportunity to develop communication skills, as early as possible, through an accessible language. Sign language is accessible and can be learned by infants. A child can have the benefit of an accessible visual language and also develop auditory/oral skills as individually appropriate. Language development does not have to be a “win/lose” situation between ideologies. If we take advantage of all language development opportunities, it can be “win/win” for deaf children.

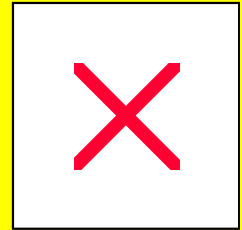
¹ Goodwyn, Acredolo, and Brown, “Impact of Symbolic Gesturing on Early Language Development”, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 24, 81-103

² Ibid, p. 17

Upcoming Events



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DEAF EDUCATION



Since the Missouri Deaf Education Conference was cancelled this year, MSD is exploring alternate ways of providing professional development hours and information on Deaf Education free of charge to local school districts.

Two ideas that we are exploring are:

1. **On-line professional development opportunities in Deaf Education**
2. **A one-day "Teacher Share"**

Teachers with technology, software, materials, strategies, etc. that have worked well who are willing to share them with other teachers, please contact:

Larry Hoard, Director

Deaf Resource Center

larry.hoard@msd.dese.mo.gov

PEPNET-MIDWEST AND MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

presents

A REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

Friday, August 7, 2009

Missouri State University campus in Springfield, MO

This all-day event is designed to provide up to date information for those working with Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing individuals in any secondary or postsecondary environment. This includes rehabilitation professionals.

If you are interested in attending, please fill out the short survey at the link below by April 1, 2009. Feedback will be used to set the agenda for the day. Filling out the survey does not mean you must attend. You will receive a separate mailing at a later date announcing the day's agenda along with a registration form.

Survey Link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=yI3hdieU3r8aC5No8gB8Cg_3d_3d

If you have questions, please contact bambi.riehl@pepnet.org

Frequently Asked Questions

HOW IS AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SIGN LANGUAGE

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) is a language that developed naturally in North America over several centuries. It is a visual language made up of specific hand movements, gestures, facial expressions, and body postures. ASL is a complete language with its own grammatical rules and meanings. Complex ideas and emotions can be expressed through American Sign Language. Many Deaf adults use ASL exclusively when communicating among themselves. ASL is quite different than English and cannot be used with English in simultaneous communication.

SIGNED ENGLISH is an "artificial signing system combining the signs of ASL and the grammatical structure of English. It is normally not used in day-to-day conversations among deaf adults."¹ Forms of Signed English include Seeing Exact English (SEE1) and Signing Exact English (SEE2). In these systems a word has only one sign regardless of the intended meaning. Specific sign markers are also used to communicate the grammatical features of English.

PIDGIN SIGNED ENGLISH (PSE) "combines the signs of ASL with a mixed grammar of English and ASL. It also includes a variety of initialized signs. Initialized signs typically involve a single sign made with various letter handshapes that give it several different but related meanings."²

SIMULTANEOUS COMMUNICATION is not a sign language but a communication method. It refers to producing signs and speech at the same time. Signs used by this method may be borrowed from ASL or other sign systems and follow the grammatical structure of English. It may include facial expressions and body postures to clarify meaning. This is the most common form of signed communication used in educational settings. (Note) If used by an interpreter, words will be mouthed silently, not voiced.

¹ Marc Marschark, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child*, 1997, p. 50

² Ibid, p. 64-65

"Parents should introduce deaf children to language as early as possible. The earlier any child is exposed to and begins to acquire language, the better that child's communication skills will become. Research suggests that the first six months are the most crucial to a child's development of language skills. All newborns should be screened for deafness or hearing loss before they leave the hospital or within the first month of life. Very early discovery of a child's hearing loss or deafness provides parents with an opportunity to learn about communication options. Parents can then start their child's language learning process during this important stage of development."

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders: American Sign Language—
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/asl.asp>

MISSOURI SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

505 E. Fifth Street
Fulton, Missouri 65251

Phone: 573-592-4000
Fax: 573-592-2570
www.msd.k12.mo.us



First Choice, Not Last Resort!

Missouri provides a well-rounded educational program for the deaf children of the state through the facilities and services of the Missouri School for the Deaf. The Missouri Legislature established MSD in 1851, and it is the oldest state supported school of its kind west of the Mississippi River.

Separate programs are provided for elementary, middle and high school students. The facilities occupy a campus of nearly 90 acres. Students are prepared for the world of work and for post-secondary education opportunities, according to each individual's potential.

Resource Center on Deafness

The Resource Center on Deafness (RCD) at the Missouri School for the Deaf in Fulton, serves as an information source for teachers, principals, and special education directors who work with deaf and hard-of-hearing children and their families. These services are provided at no charge.

Professional Development

"Educating Children Who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing" is a free in-service presentation available through the Missouri School for the Deaf. The presentation is approximately one hour in length and covers

For further information or to schedule a presentation at your school, please contact the MSD Resource Center.

RESOURCE CENTER ON DEAFNESS

Missouri School for the Deaf

573-592-2543 or 2544 (V/TTY)

rcd@msd.dese.mo.gov

FAMILIES FIRST Early Intervention Program

