Two Languages, One Goal: Developing a Strong Language Foundation for Life Long Learning

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Learning Outcomes

- Participants will be able to discuss the varying roles that sign language can play in a child’s life and how it may vary throughout their development.

- Participants will be able to discuss the current research about the brain and how children acquire language.

- Participants will be able to discuss several myths that surround the topic of bilingualism and how developing two languages impacts the education program for a young deaf learner.
All the pieces to a child’s intervention/education & early language acquisition...
What is SPEECH?

The sounds, words and sentences that we produce verbally.
What is Language?

How we express ourselves, and understand information that is presented to us (expressive language/receptive language).
What is Communication?

Using speech, language, facial expressions, eye contact, body language etc. to interact with others.
The Importance of Early Language

- Attachment with parents
  - A feeling of safety
  - Knowing they can share their feelings/wants
- Cognitive development
- Social emotional development
- Academic readiness
- Reading fluency
What do we know?

- First few years of life—critical language period
- The majority of deaf babies are born into hearing families
- Children with a severe - profound hearing loss are eligible for cochlear implantation
- Many children with cochlear implants will be educated in the mainstream successfully and/or accessing spoken language
- Sometimes a CI does not provide the benefits to a child that one may expect
- There are a variety of communication opportunities (modalities) for deaf children
We also know...

There are a variety of approaches, modalities, programs and languages that we can use with deaf and hard of hearing children

*We all have one goal—to encourage and ensure early language acquisition for lifelong learning*
“The human brain does not discriminate between the hands and the tongue. People discriminate, but not our biological human brain.”

It has been believed that the auditory cortex is only responsible for processing sound—which is crucial for language acquisition.

Dr. Petitto has found that the auditory cortex, once thought to be responsible for processing only sound and speech, processes BOTH signed and spoken languages. “…what was previously labeled ‘auditory tissue’ is set to highly specific patterns at the heart of all human language, be it language on the hands or the tongue.”

Why is this important....?

- The perception is that spoken language is superior to sign language and is imperative to stimulate this part of the brain.

- ...but it’s the pattern of language that stimulates this part of the brain and ASL has its own patterns.
Dr. Petitto’s lab has found that “the human brain performs better with early exposure to multiple languages.”

This is a great finding for Deaf children acquiring both ASL and English.

AND...Now we have research to prove that acquiring sign language before one has access to spoken language HELPS the brain.....it doesn’t hurt it.

What is the Research Saying?

Early language acquisition...

• has an impact on academic outcomes

• has a positive impact on reading achievement

Early access to a visual language has linguistic advantages for all deaf and hard of hearing children, even those with cochlear implants.

For children who use CIs, the use of a visual language and interacting with native signers has social emotional advantages as well.

Learning language through the visual system while stimulating spoken language allows us to ‘safeguard’ language acquisition. There is no delay during the critical language period.
The Research also says...

- Early access to a visual language has linguistic advantages for all deaf and hard of hearing children, even those with cochlear implants.

- For children who use CIs, the use of a visual language and interacting with native signers has social emotional advantages as well.

- Learning language through the visual system while stimulating spoken language allows us to ‘safeguard’ language acquisition. There is no delay during the critical language period.

What does this mean for early intervention?

- LANGUAGE is a priority!!

- Communication skills
  - Eye gaze
  - Joint attention
  - Play

- Speech/listening
  - if the child has emerging skills
  - if the child has a cochlear implant and/or hearing aids
  - if parents request the service
EI Programs Using ASL

Children awaiting cochlear implantation were exposed to ASL....

- Developed receptive language skills
  - Answering questions
  - Following simple directions

- Developed expressive language skills
  - Using simple signed utterances to express themselves

- Developed spoken language post surgery

*It is likely that the foundation of one language facilitated development of a 2nd language*

MythBuster

Myth: If you sign with your child, he/she will not develop spoken language

Evidence suggests:

- Proficiency in ASL has a positive impact on spoken language
- Proficiency in ASL has a positive impact on literacy development
- There is no evidence that sign language inhibits spoken language in deaf children

“It is language that facilitates spoken language, not the mode of communication.”

The first few years of life before a child can receive an implant are crucial for developing a language foundation.

Sign language can be used as a bridge to develop speech and spoken language understanding.

Great therapy tool—we can always be checking for comprehension.

We can be “imprinting” using speech and sign.
Auditory-Visual Continuum

Receptive

________________________________________________________________
A                      Av AV                  V

Expressive

_______________________________________________________________
Oral                Os OS                  So                      Sign


Receptive continuum adapted from McConkey-Robbins, Loud and Clear, Advanced Bionics, 2001
The Varying Roles of ASL

- Primary Language
- New information
- For review
- Routine information
- Complex listening environments
- As a bridge to spoken language
- Highlight key words
- As a support to spoken language
ASL often acts as a *bridge* to spoken language.
Language in Action
S: ....didn’t get a new iPad

T: I have a question for you. What did you and your brother play over vacation

S: I don’t know. He went to his husband house

T: His friend’s house?

S: Yea, but me and him go to his friend’s house

But somebody is my friend is a little girl

T: What’s her name?

S: I don’t know. I don’t know...

T: Was she nice?

S: I don’t know how to say it in English

T: How do you say it in Portuguese

S: Yeah, I just know how to say it in Portuguese

T: How do you say it in Portuguese? Your friend’s name. You don’t know how to say it?

What is it in Portuguese?

S: Now I can’t say it. I can just say it at my house

T: Oh when you are at your house and your mom and dad are speaking Portuguese and your friends are there
Early language development
Using language to read at home
The goal is....

LANGUAGE

To talk the talk, isn’t enough
We have to always check in for:

- **Clear communication**
- **Full comprehension**
- **Social interactions and peer relationships**
- **Personal identity and happiness 😊**
Using ASL.....
The Varying Roles of ASL... revisited....

Clarification

Highlighting key words

Sharing a detailed story with less familiar vocabulary
Why a Multi-Sensory Approach to Language Learning?

- Different pathways to the brain --- if the child’s auditory pathway is not working, then there is a visual avenue.

- Research shows there are positive cognitive outcomes for bilingual children (2 spoken languages or ASL & printed/spoken English).

Collaboration is Key

ASL

Spoken English
What did we notice?

- Child is using both signs and words
- He is receiving input auditorily and visually
- Signs are being used to support spoken language to help make connections
- This is not an example of ASL (but rather using signs to support spoken English)
- We know that he is demonstrating comprehension
Eye contact and Joint Attention
What did we see?

- He is engaged and has eye contact
- He is attending to the language that is happening between him and his communication partner
The Importance of Eye Gaze and Joint Attention

- Joint attention and eye gaze are the foundational communication skills
- Early access to sign language has lead to the development of skills related to shifting eye gaze from communication partner to the object
- Shifting eye gaze is an important part of the language acquisition process for deaf and hard of hearing children

What did we notice?

- He looks up for information when he needs it
- He is responding to questions presented to him
- He has visual information (the book) to provide context clues
- Less reliance on a visual language
- Clear language foundation has been established/developed
Summary

- Critical language period
- We want to avoid a delay in language access/exposure
- We don’t need to withhold a visual language while we wait for the child to have auditory access
- There is evidence that bilingualism has linguistic and cognitive advantages
- Developing one language can facilitate a 2nd language
- We can all work together to accomplish one goal: creating a language foundation for life long learning
Final note...

This is a **JOURNEY**, there will be **many** forks in the road and the **path can** and **will** change along the way.
Let’s Hear From You!

Any Questions??
Contact Information....

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Bibliography and Resources

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The Visual Language and Visual Learning Research Briefs

http://vl2.gallaudet.edu

http://vl2parentspackage.org/ask-faq/

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