

The Power of “AND” in Deaf Education

Language and the Brain at School

More language
exposure = **more** brain
development.



Signed language
fluency **supports** spoken
language acquisition.



Deaf children exposed to sign
language (L1) early use that
knowledge to **develop skills**
in other languages (L2) on par
with their CODA siblings.



Early and effortless access, and
consistent sign language **use in**
the home, even if parents are not
fluent signers, promotes
language and academic success.



The least restrictive
environment for deaf children
is one in which they have **direct**
instruction and full access to
adult language models and
social peer groups.



“The brain does not discriminate between visual and auditory modalities; it simply needs and thrives on early, abundant, effortless, and fully accessible language exposure.”

~ Wyattte Hall

“Deaf education has long seemed to prioritize (spoken) communication before cognition, but it should be the other way around. If deaf children learn how to think first, they will learn how to communicate in many different ways. All humans learn how to think through full and effortless access to a natural language; for many deaf children, that effortless access first comes through a signed language.”

~ Wyattte Hall



VLAA LAB
Visual Language
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There is no evidence that learning multiple languages in different modalities harms development. There is a lot of evidence that delayed and inconsistent exposure to fully accessible language(s) can negatively impact brain and overall healthy development.

(Skotara et al., 2012; Pénicaud et al., 2013; Kral et al., 2016; Cheng, Halgren, & Mayberry, 2018; Mayberry et al., 2018; Hall, Hall, & Caselli, 2019)



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Deaf children who are signers before they receive a cochlear implant outperform non-signing children with cochlear implants. Cochlear implants are reliable sound access devices, but they are not reliable first language acquisition devices.

(NIParko et al., 2010; Delcenserie, Genesee, & Champoux, 2024; Hassanzadeh, 2012; Davidson, Lillo-Martin, & Chen Pichler, 2014)



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Deaf children’s signed and spoken language abilities can look like those of their CODA siblings when they are given signed language access from birth and eventually a cochlear implant.

(Davidson et al., 2014)



Hearing parents beginning to learn signs with their deaf baby can promote timely language development with and without the cochlear implant. Continue to support and encourage the use of sign language at home.

(Caselli, Pyers & Lieberman, 2021; Pontecorvo et al., 2023; Delcenserie, Genesee, & Champoux, 2024)



Schools for the deaf often receive their largest group of students as late transfers from mainstream public schools around sixth grade with avoidable language and social delays. Instead, earlier enrollment in language-rich environments maximizes academic, social, and language success.

(Finton et al., 2024)



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