

The Power of “AND” in Deaf Education

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Early accessible language drives development. Deaf and hard of hearing children thrive when they have access to sign language acquisition and learning in rich, accessible environments. It's not one or the other; both language acquisition AND language learning are needed.

What this means:

- **Language access must happen early and consistently.**
- **Sign language does not hinder spoken language development.**
- **Early access = decreased risk of language deprivation.**
- **Children need language as a living, interactive experience.**

Checklist for Educators

Use this checklist to reflect on your current practices and identify opportunities to better support deaf and hard of hearing students' language development. Review it individually or with your team during planning. Check off items that are already in place and use remaining items as goals.

- ☐ **Design language-rich, visually accessible classrooms.**
Ensure your environment supports visual language access: clear sightlines, good lighting, prominent use of ASL, and print-rich displays that reflect both English and ASL in addition to Deaf cultural content.
- ☐ **Provide opportunities for both language acquisition and language learning.**
Create space for natural, immersive language acquisition (e.g., conversation, storytelling, peer interaction) alongside explicit language instruction. Both are essential and complementary.
- ☐ **Avoid delaying sign language exposure while waiting for speech outcomes.**
Research does not support withholding sign language until speech milestones are met. Introduce sign language early and consistently; it supports, not hinders, spoken language development.



These resources were developed through a collaborative partnership between the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center and the Deaf Center at Boston University. The content reflects a shared commitment to advancing language access, Deaf education, and language-rich learning environments for deaf and hard of hearing children.