Everything You Always Wanted to Know About
An ASL/English Bimodal Bilingual Approach

- *Bilingual* means the development and use of two or more languages.

- American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language and English a spoken and written language.

- The goal of this approach is for each child to develop linguistic proficiency in ASL and written English.

- Spoken English is a component of this approach. It is valued, encouraged, and incorporated and is specific to an individual child's characteristics and goals.

What Does *Bimodal* Mean in an ASL/English Bimodal Bilingual Approach?

- *Bimodal* refers to the development and use of language in more than one modality. ASL is a signed language and English is a spoken language (*spoken* and *signed* are the "modes" to which "bimodal" refers).

- Children must acquire language before they can learn to read and write English. Building language foundations in ASL and spoken English is critical to literacy development.

- Bimodal development will be unique to each child. All children who can see have access to ASL; however, access to spoken English will be specific to each child's hearing levels and use of technology.

Research Supporting the Use of an ASL/English Bimodal Bilingual Approach

- The brain has the capacity to acquire both a visual and a spoken language without detriment to either language.

- Sign language does not prevent the development of spoken language.

- Early accessible language (spoken or signed) is the best predictor of positive spoken language outcomes.

- Primarily focusing on spoken language (when a child does not have full access to spoken language) and not providing visual language may result in developmental delays.

Why Consider an ASL/English Bimodal Bilingual Approach?

- Visual language can provide children with complete access to language as early as possible.

- This approach respects individual spoken language access and outcomes.

- This approach has the potential to safeguard language development.

Bilingual Language Abilities

Language abilities are how an individual understands (receptive skills) and expresses (expressive skills) a language.

- ASL:
  - Receptive—watching/attending, finger-reading
  - Expressive—signing, fingerspelling

- English:
  - Receptive—listening, speechreading, reading
  - Expressive—speaking, mouthing, writing

Acquiring Bilingual Abilities

- Sequential—acquiring one language and then another. For example:
  - a child may acquire ASL first, then spoken English, and then later learn written English
  - a child may acquire spoken English first, then ASL, and then later learn written English

- Concurrent—acquiring two languages from birth. For example:
  - a child who has auditory access to spoken English (e.g., a hard of hearing child or a child who is fit with a cochlear implant at an early age) may acquire ASL and spoken English at the same time and then later learn written English.
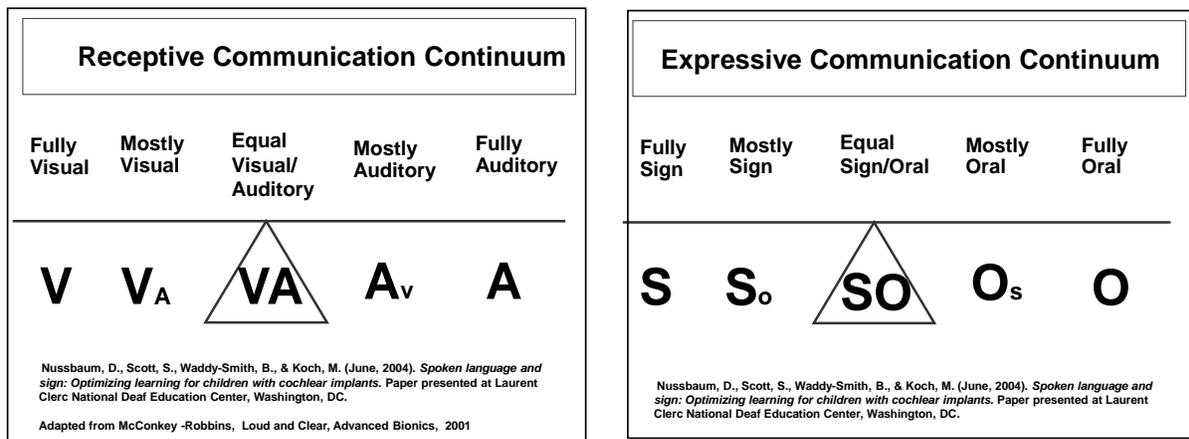
Raising a Bilingual Child

- Being bilingual in ASL and English is beneficial to deaf and hard of hearing children for establishing early communication with their parents, developing their cognitive abilities, acquiring world knowledge, communicating fully with the surrounding world, and acculturating into the world of hearing and of the Deaf (Grosjean, 2008).

- Demonstrating a positive attitude toward both ASL and English (spoken and written) can positively impact a deaf or hard of hearing child's development and use of all aspects of each language.

Understanding a Child's Abilities

Understanding how a child accesses information for communication and learning and how he or she expresses language is critical to bimodal bilingual development. We have found it helpful to use the following receptive continuum to describe how a child accesses language—visually, aurally, or somewhere in between; and expressive continuum to describe how a child expresses language—signed, spoken, or somewhere in between (Nussbaum & Scott, 2011).

Receptive Communication Continuum				
Fully Visual	Mostly Visual	Equal Visual/Auditory	Mostly Auditory	Fully Auditory
V	V_A	VA	A_v	A

Nussbaum, D., Scott, S., Waddy-Smith, B., & Koch, M. (June, 2004). *Spoken language and sign: Optimizing learning for children with cochlear implants.* Paper presented at Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, Washington, DC.

Adapted from McConkey -Robbins, Loud and Clear, Advanced Bionics, 2001

Expressive Communication Continuum				
Fully Sign	Mostly Sign	Equal Sign/Oral	Mostly Oral	Fully Oral
S	S_o	SO	O_s	O

Nussbaum, D., Scott, S., Waddy-Smith, B., & Koch, M. (June, 2004). *Spoken language and sign: Optimizing learning for children with cochlear implants.* Paper presented at Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, Washington, DC.

As placements within these continuums are incorporated into developing an individual child's language and communication plan, it is important to emphasize the following:

- How a child functions on either continuum may differ in varied settings (e.g., social settings, large classrooms, small groups, 1-1 situations, noisy environments, complicated fast-paced language situations). Language use decisions should reflect a child's needs in each of these settings.

- How a child functions in understanding either ASL or spoken language may differ from how he or she functions in generating either language. For example, a child may be able to readily understand spoken language or ASL; however, he or she may not demonstrate the ability to express him- or herself at the same level through either language.

Developing a Plan

It is beneficial to have an individualized plan. This plan should include:

- a description of how a child uses language,

- a guide for goal development for each language,

- a guideline for language use at home and in school, and

- a description of the recommended supports needed to facilitate development of both languages.

Note: Keep in mind that as the child grows and matures, the plan may need to be modified.

General Language and Communication Considerations

- The MOST important thing you can do for your child's early communication development is to have a warm and loving relationship, and to interact in ways that are meaningful and enjoyable for you and meaningful and accessible to your child.

- Keep the languages separate but whole.
  - Decide when and where you will use each language.
  - Signing and speaking at the same time may prevent your child from fully accessing either language.

- Use each language when it is accessible and meaningful.
  - Your child must have access to spoken English before he or she is able to understand or use it. When using spoken English, make sure your child is using his or her hearing aid or cochlear implant and be conscious of background noise.
  - When using ASL or spoken English, make sure that it is meaningful by engaging in language-rich experiences.

Strategies: General Communication

- Present information at a child's eye level (e.g., stoop or sit on the floor with a toddler)
- Make sure the child has a clear view of your face and hands. Be aware that dim lights or glare may make communication difficult.

- Make communication experiences as natural as possible. Attend to what your child is saying first without interrupting the flow of communication for teaching correct production of a sign or correcting production of a speech sound.

Strategies for Facilitating ASL

- Try to sign as much as possible around your child even when you are not talking to him or her directly. Hearing children learn much of their language from "overhearing" communication all around them. Deaf children need to "oversee" language, too.

- Even when you do not know a sign, gestures are a good substitute until you learn the correct sign.

- When your child is looking at books or actively involved in play, introduce the signs for what he or she is doing.

- Do not continuously interrupt a child's natural play or involvement with looking at a book to sign to him or her. Wait until your child shifts his or her visual attention to you to demonstrate the signs.

- Remember that it is necessary to repeat a sign many times and in many situations before a child may begin to understand that a sign represents a specific object or action.

- Do not expect all of your child's signs to look just like the ones you are using. Each child's motor development is different. Just like there is "baby talk," there are also "baby signs."

- Provide opportunities for fingerplay games with your child (e.g., eensy weensy spider, waving your fingers in fun patterns for the child to see). When you feel your child is ready, encourage him or her to imitate your movements.

- Play facial expression and body language games with your child (e.g., imitate *happy*, *sad*, *surprised*) to promote his or her awareness that visual communication is available on the face and body as well as on the hands.

- When you are signing, use a natural rate of presentation—not too fast and not too slow.

Strategies for Facilitating Spoken English

- If a child has a hearing aid or a cochlear implant, try to encourage its use as much as possible.

- Understand a child's current level of auditory functioning as well as how to adjust communication variables in the natural environment to make spoken English accessible. This can occur through modifying the content of a message (e.g., the number of objects to choose from, the number of details in a message) and/or presentation of information (e.g., highlighting a key word, repeating a word or sentence).

- Change voice intonation to represent different characters in a story (e.g., use a low, loud voice for father bear in *The Three Bears*) or add sound effects from stories. Even if a child does not understand the words, he or she may gain information and enjoyment from these features.

- During natural play and reading, provide your child with the spoken word for objects (e.g., ball, book, car) and functional words (e.g., stop, more, bye-bye). Even if the child cannot hear the words, he or she can begin to make associations that language appears on the lips.

- If your child is working on correctly producing specific speech sounds, do not interrupt natural communication to work on training these sounds or correcting the child. Be aware of sounds your child is working on. At a later time, praise the child for correctly using the sound or practice production of that sound (do not overdo it).

- When you are talking to your child, present speech at a natural level—not too loud and not too quiet, not too fast and not too slow. Do not exaggerate mouth movements.

Bridging ASL and Spoken English

Two strategies to bridge ASL and spoken English are *sandwiching* and *chaining*.

- Sandwiching—Saying it-signing it-saying it, or signing it-saying it-signing it.

- Chaining—Signing it, fingerspelling it, using picture support, and saying it.

Resources

American Sign Language

ASL Inside—www.aslinside.com
ASL Rose products—www.aslrose.com
ASL Tales—www.asltales.net
Babies and Sign Language—www.babies-and-sign-language.com
DawnSignPress—www.dawnsign.com
Gallaudet University Press—gupress.gallaudet.edu
Harris Communication products—www.harriscomm.com
Institute for Disabilities, Research and Training, Inc.—www.idrt.com
My Baby Can Talk (DVDs for teaching babies sign)—www.mybabycantalk.com
Sign 2 Me—www.sign2me.com
Sign Babies—www.signbabies.com
Signing Time! (DVDs for teaching babies sign)—www.signingtime.com
Signing with Your Baby—www.signingbaby.com/main

Spoken English

AOLKids (http://kids.aol.com/KOL/2/koljrstories/archive/animal-stories)—On-line stories read aloud

Equal Voice for Deaf Children (www.evdcweb.org)—Resource designed for families who do not have access to a qualified therapist to help their child acquire spoken communication skills

Listening Tree (www.listeningtree.ca/)—A subscription that allows access to hundreds of printable listening and language activities; Listening Tree has a Spanish version with Spanish weekly activities

MED-EL, Soundscapes: Interactive Listening Activities (www.medel.com/us/show4/index/id/255/titel/SoundScape)—Included are interactive video activities and supporting materials to download for children of various age groups

- Starting Out: Listening Fun with Music and Song (ages 0-2)—www.medel.com/us/show/index/id/641/titel/Listening+Fun+with+Music+and+Song)

- Ms. MacDonald's Shed (ages 2+)—www.medel.com/us/show4/index/id/255/titel/SoundScape

- Old MacDonald's Farm (ages 2+)—
  www.medel.com/us/show4/index/id/638/title/SoundScape

- Let's Go Shopping (ages 6+)—
  www.medel.com/us/show4/index/id/638/title/SoundScape

- Telling Tales (ages 10+)—
  www.medel.com/data/downloads/BRIDGE/SoundScape_Handouts/Telling-Tales.pdf

- Continents & Oceans (Teens)—
  www.medel.com/us/show4/index/id/638/title/SoundScape

Starfall.com (www.starfall.com)—A free website to teach children (preschool, kindergarten, and first grade) to read with phonics; phonics games and on-line interactive books

Storyline Online (www.storylineonline.net)—Stories read aloud by members of the Screen Actors Guild (with captioning)

Super Duper® Publications (www.superduperinc.com/apps/Default.aspx)—iPad apps for auditory and speech habilitation

General Bilingual Resources:
- Bilingual/Bicultural Family Network
  - www.biculturalfamily.org/ofthedaysArchive.php?type=activity)—Examples of activities for facilitating languages at home
  - www.biculturalfamily.org/—Activities for families

- Parent Book Summaries (www.parentbooksummaries.com/7-steps-to-raising-a-bilingual-child)

Readings, References, and Resources

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