

Living in the Grey

Bimodal Development in
Young Deaf/HoH Children:
Barriers & Bridges



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Lighting fast objectives...



- ❖ Bimodal myths – the what and the why?
- ❖ Loving our beautiful language brains ❤️
- ❖ Provider and caregiver challenges
- ❖ Barriers and privilege checking
- ❖ Language planning that meets families where they are



Bilingual

**Knowing two (or more)
languages that share a modality**

ASL & printed English (visual)

English & Spanish (spoken)

LSQ & printed French (visual)

Arabic & Hebrew (spoken)

Bimodal

**Knowing two languages,
using two modalities
(one visual, one aural-oral)**

ASL & spoken English

ASL & spoken Spanish

JSL & spoken Japanese



Myths*

*still going strong

- “Signing delays talking.”
- “Deaf kids should only learn one language at a time.”(either-or thinking)
- “Learning more than one language causes language confusion.”
- “You don’t need to sign because your kid’s technology is so advanced.”
- “If you don’t sign fluently in the early years, your kid can’t learn sign language.”
- “If you sign and talk, your child won’t develop a full language.”

What research says...



- Signing DOES NOT delay talking (Tang 2014, Higgins et. al, 2023)
 - *The flip side is true too: Talking does NOT delay signing**
- Deaf kids DON'T have to learn one language at a time. “Either - or” thinking is unnecessary. (Humphries et. al, 2012; Yim, 2012)
- Learning more than one language DOES NOT cause “language confusion.” (Williams & Heinlein, 2013)
- You SHOULD/CAN sign EVEN THOUGH your kid’s technology is so advanced. CI outcomes are highly varied. (Petersen et. al 2010)
- EVEN if you don’t sign fluently in the early years, your kid CAN learn sign language. (Lieberman et. al, 2022)
- WITH intention, intervention, and ample access, your child CAN develop two full languages. Yim 2012, Bunta et al., 2016

Early Intervention Protocols: Proposing a Default Bimodal Bilingual Approach for Deaf Children. M. Diane Clark, et.al. (2020)



“..Effective implementation of a bimodal bilingual philosophy begins at identification. An environment that allows for deaf children to become bimodal bilinguals is effective in avoiding language delays (Hamilton & Clark [2020](#); Hassanzadeh [2012](#)) and language deprivation (Hall et al. [2017](#))

”

International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Included in Social Science
Citation Index® and
Humanities Citation



error , problems and confusion, has been replaced...for coherence with the new plurilingual perspective and the recognition of the positive role of language interaction .
(Menendez, 2010)



“Translanguaging”

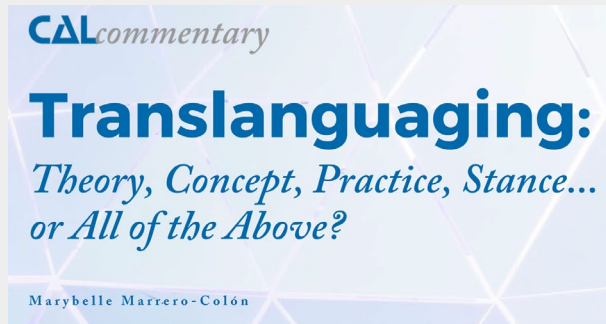
- “A theoretical lens that offers a different view of bilingualism and multilingualism.
- Rather than possessing two or more autonomous language systems (as traditionally thought), bilinguals, multilinguals, and all users of language, select and deploy particular features from a unitary linguistic repertoire to make meaning and to negotiate particular communicative contexts.
- ...represents an approach to language pedagogy that affirms and leverages students’ diverse and dynamic language practices in teaching and learning.”
- Vogel & Garcia, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education, 2017

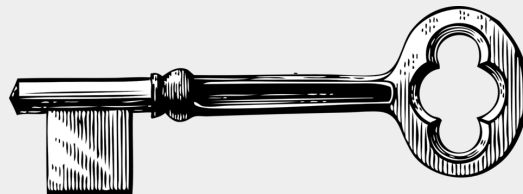
“Translanguaging”

The squish:

Multilingualism is not a fight between languages or a ranking of one over another. Translanguaging allows us to pull from our full language repertoire.

Our brains “pool” languages into a single “language mother ship” and draw upon that combined language knowledge depending on situation.*





...emerging evidence suggests acquisition of two or more languages is possible for this population (Crowe, 2018) but quality and quantity of access to both languages is critical

(Waltzman 2003, Yim 2012)





Provider bias is real and confusing

**Deaf children with
spoken language
bilingualism:
Professional guidance
to parents**

Wright, Stojanovik & Serratrice
Deafness & Education

International

Volume 25, 2023- Issue 1, p21-39

*Audiologists ~ “11 times more likely than SLTs [SLPs] to report linguistic confusion” in children

*ToDs ~ “11 times more likely than SLTs to report reduced proficiency in English and the home language because of bilingualism”

*MEAN WHAT? “There is a need for specific training and interprofessional learning to ensure parents receive consistent evidence -based advice”



Fostering Home Languages

“The benefits of bimodal bilingualism go beyond having access to both English and ASL –

–it also serves as a vehicle to scaffold and incorporate the home languages of families who do not speak English.”
(Delgado, 2020)





Families (and kids) in the middle...



Families report:

- *Getting little information from their “home base” EI about SSPs (specialty service programs) re: multiple language use
- *Being actively discouraged from using bimodal approaches (by their EIs)
- *Fair-weathered “tolerance” between language “camps” (not feeling truly welcome in either language space)
- *Fear of Deaf community rejection (for them and their child)
- *Feeling their home -base EI is incompetent and/or biased with regards to deafness



Families (and kids) in the middle...

Families report:

- *Fear their children won't fit in the hearing world or the Deaf community
- *Getting mixed messages from family, friends, colleagues, social media, entertainment media, etc.
- *Mountains of conflicting information from professionals, even those in the same field (hospital SLP vs. EI SLP vs. SSP SLP)
- *Feelings of not knowing who to trust
- *Constant fear of “messing up” and lots of feelings of inadequacy



How can we build trust and confidence in families?



Research must drive conversations, referrals, etc., especially when it comes to something as variable as bimodal development

NOT:

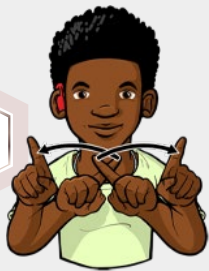
- conjecture
- myths
- bad science
- buzz words
- “inspiration porn”
- our own language/cultural bias

The Bilingual Brain



Like with hearing children learning two spoken languages, the Deaf brain can learn two languages in two modalities from a young age, simultaneously, and with some notable trends along the way:

- ***Uneven development** - dominance of one vs. the other
- ***Slower development** of one or both languages
- ***Code mixing** (code blending) within/between utterances



BUT, some exceptions

Children with **additional challenges** (neurological differences, medical complications, etc.) **may not follow typical bilingual - bimodal development patterns** .

Depending on the child, it may be more beneficial to learn one language, or not introduce a second language until they have an established primary language.

Strategies for their bilingual language development may be different.

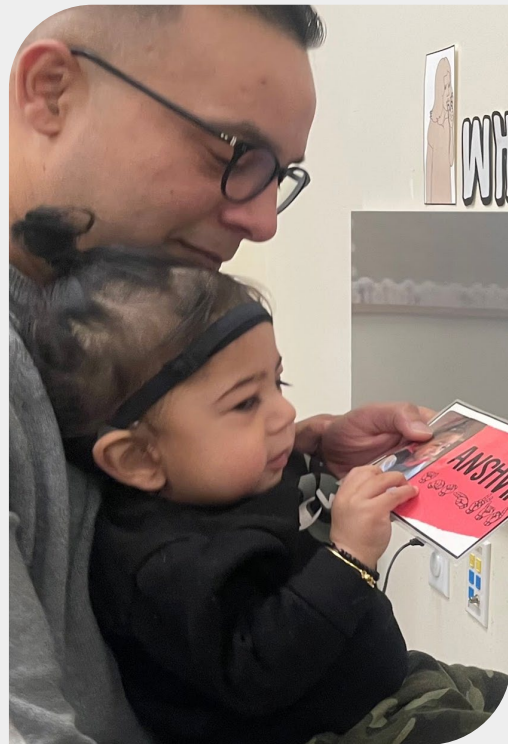
Code mixing/code blending ("language mixing")

*It is **NOT SIMCOM** (simultaneous communication)

*It is **NOT CODE SWITCHING**

*It is **TYPICAL**. Even bilingual-bimodal, fluent, adults do it.

*Is a feature of **TRANSLANGUAGING**



“Rather than being a sign of confusion, code mixing can be seen as a path of least resistance: a sign of bilingual children’s ingenuity”

Byers-Heinlein & Casey Lew-Williams 2013



“These findings encourage a move away from a fractional view of bilingualism which focuses on separate proficiencies in separate languages and from pedagogies which aim to separate the use of sign and spoken language.

That is not to suggest that proficiency in both languages does not remain a goal, but rather that we investigate the creative use of children’s full language repertoires to achieve such a goal.”

Tang, Lam & Yiu K., 2014

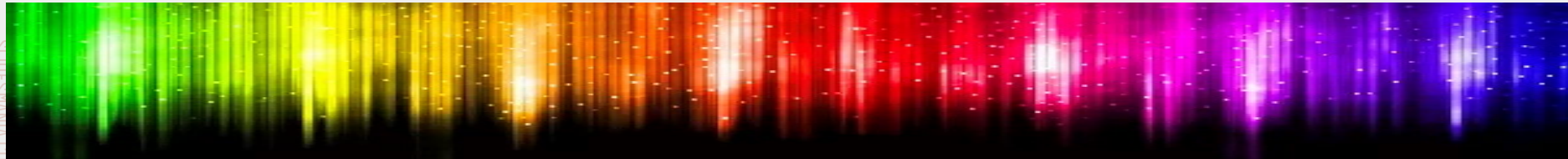


Fluency is a spectrum

-bimodal fluency is no different.



Ex: A child may use spoken language in some specific ways, but primarily be an ASL user. Or vice versa.



Language Planning for Bimodalism

We ask a lot of families in our language plans...

In creating these plans, do you consider families' barriers?

"You need
xx hours
of speech
therapy a
week"

"Pick times of
day to
only sign
and only talk"

"You have
to always
separate
languages"

"You need
to become
fluent as
quickly as
possible"

Do they have the privilege needed to carry out the language plan?



Language Planning for Bimodalism

When designing a language plan, remember:

- Fluency is a spectrum – many parents are starting at zero
- It is not always realistic to separate languages in real life, especially with mixed company and when a family is in early stages of language learning.
- Complete and constant separation of languages is not what we advise hearing bilinguals. It ignores translanguaging's advantages...and can scare people away.





The ideal



The real

Language Planning for Bimodalism

- New language learning is full of privilege:



- Not all adults are capable of reaching the fluency needed to separate languages consistently. A more flexible model may be necessary.
- Learning to fill gaps in sign knowledge takes support and practice, but professionals rarely talk about this. Then parents feel inadequate.

This is where we (the professionals) come in!



- ★ Providing information & options is only part of our job
- ★ Recognizing and navigating families' barriers is just as important



- *Help families with follow through
- *Connect families to SSPs immediately
- *Transportation assistance?
- *Funding assistance for ASL classes/programs?
- *Designing language plans that meet families where they are

Language Planning for Bimodalism

How can we help families enrich and increase “voice-off” times when they are still learning and don’t yet have the skills to create rich ASL experiences?



Language Planning for Bimodalism

- Emphasize that body language, eye contact/gaze, facial expressions **ARE “LANGUAGEING”!**
- Don't forget visual attn./joint attn. strategies!
- Avoid emphasis on “sets” – colors, numbers, letters
- Remember it is not damaging to code blend
 - *Add visuals to make connections (body language, facial expression, real objects, sensory experiences, pointing)*
- Trying to use language *naturally* is a viable goal



Promote real-life Deaf interactions: Deaf mentorship, Deaf -led SSPs, Deaf family partners, online ASL groups, ASL meet-ups, etc.

Language Planning for Bimodalism

Deaf professionals on the team

...Just as important for bimodal kids!

“Presenting a unified front as a diversified bimodal bilingual EHDI team will both validate and support parents in providing crucial language opportunities to their deaf infants.” (Clark 2020)



Language Planning for Bimodalism

THE
ASL
SHOP

Self-Paced Course

Zoom Sessions

In-Person Classes

Assessment



SigningROCKs

LittleSignersROCK

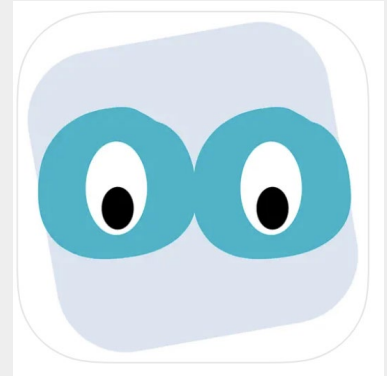
ParentsROCK

Groups

Bilingual Stories Bookshelf

Discover the Bilingual Stories Bookshelf app, designed to support early language acquisition for young deaf and hard of hearing children through a diverse collection of bilingual storybooks in American Sign Language (ASL) and English.

Immerse yourself in signed stories with interactive vocabulary lessons that foster an inclusive learning environment for families and celebrate the richness of various cultural perspectives!



We anticipate adding at least 75 more stories to the app over the next three years, with a total of 85 published bilingual stories and 35 original stories.



AMERICAN SOCIETY for DEAF CHILDREN



AMERICAN SOCIETY for DEAF CHILDREN

Intermediate ASL 201

Learn ASL with ASDC

Intermediate LEVEL ONE

- 4-Week classes every third Wednesday at 8:00 pm EST | Elevate your ASL Skills and Fluency
- Held online via Zoom | Interpreter Provided
- \$75 for ASDC Members | \$125 for Nonmembers

For Class Schedules and to Register, visit us at www.DeafChildren.org



REGISTER NOW!



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Give your little ones the gift of language with ASL for Young Children! This short class is perfect for children ages 3-5 and makes learning American Sign Language engaging, interactive, and fun.

- ✓ Interactive!
- ✓ Online | First Saturdays
- ✓ 12:00 - 12:30 pm EST

Enroll Now

\$15
ASDC Members save \$5



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Parent Strategies

Join our Parent Support Group Today.

Designed especially for parents, grandparents, and guardians of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children, this FREE 6-month support group offers connection, shared experiences, and mutual support. Learn more by visiting our website.

Reserve Your Spot
Limited spots available.
ASL Interpreters upon request.

www.DeafChildren.org



Parent Skills with ASDC

Building Connections: Social-Emotional Growth for DHH Children


March 24, 2025

Parenting Skills Workshop

Online via Zoom | 8:00 - 9:30 PM EST

Free for ASDC Members | \$25 for Nonmembers

www.DeafChildren.org



Parenting Skills Workshop

Medical Signs in ASL: A Guide for Parents and Teachers

April 7, 2025

Parenting ASL Skills Development Workshop

Online via Zoom | 8:00 - 9:30 PM EST

Free for ASDC Members | \$25 for Nonmembers

www.DeafChildren.org



AMERICAN SOCIETY for DEAF CHILDREN

Conversational Skills in ASL

Learn ASL with ASDC

Conversational Skills

- 4-Week classes every Thursday in April | 90 minutes once a week
- 8:00 pm EST (unless otherwise noted)
- Elevate your ASL Skills and Fluency - Understanding Classifiers
- Held online via Zoom | Interpreter Provided
- \$75 for ASDC Members | \$125 for Nonmembers

For Class Schedules and to Register, visit us at www.DeafChildren.org

REGISTER NOW!



AMERICAN SOCIETY for DEAF CHILDREN

ASL Classifiers

Learn ASL with ASDC

Classifiers: A Deep Dive

- 4-Week classes every Thursday in March | 90 minutes once a week
- 8:00 pm EST (unless otherwise noted)
- Elevate your ASL Skills and Fluency - Understanding Classifiers
- Held online via Zoom | Interpreter Provided
- \$75 for ASDC Members | \$125 for Nonmembers

For Class Schedules and to Register, visit us at www.DeafChildren.org

REGISTER NOW!



Bimodal reflections:

- Born profoundly Deaf
- ASL from birth
- School for the Deaf
- HAS then CIs (age 4, 6)
- Mainstreamed 9th gr.
- Current college senior

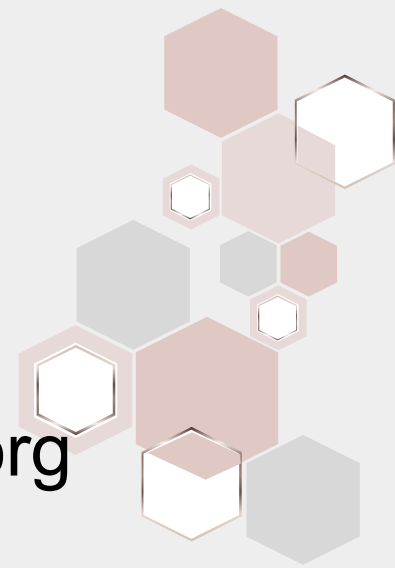
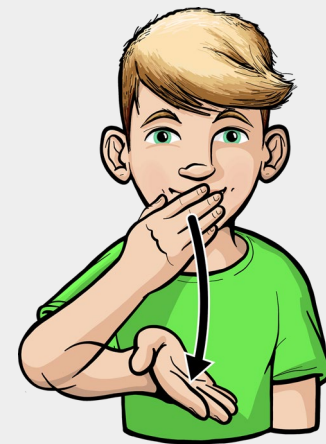
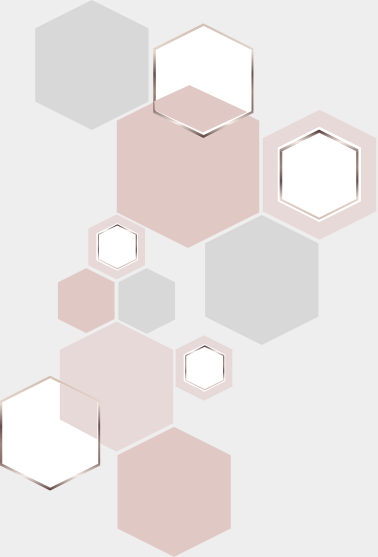




Takeaways



- ★ Quantity AND quality of each language are key when bimodalism is the goal
- ★ Bimodal development follows patterns similar to spoken bilingualism
 - “Language confusion” is antiquated. **Languages can, and do, positively interact.** **TRANSLANGUAGING IS OUR FRIEND.**
- ★ Families get a lot of mixed messages – Let research be your guide, not conjecture, fear, status quo, what’s easiest for you, etc.
- ★ Provide tools to help elevate families above barriers without judgement. Meet them where they are.
- ★ Check your own bimodal biases



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