



# Cochlear Implant Education Center

**Cochlear Implants and Sign Language:  
Building Foundations for Effective Educational  
Practices**

**Designing Programs and Services for Children  
with Cochlear Implants: The Learning Center  
Experience**



LAURENT CLERC  
NATIONAL DEAF EDUCATION CENTER



# Designing Programs and Services for Children with Cochlear Implants: The Learning Center Experience

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## Designing Programs and Services for Children with Cochlear Implants: The Learning Center Experience

Stephanie Sweeton, Speech-Language Pathologist, The Learning Center for the Deaf  
Carol Nelson, Coordinator, The Learning Center for the Deaf


Stephanie Sweeton and Carol Nelson shared the experience of [The Learning Center](#) in developing and implementing programs and services to support students with “auditory access” (both through hearing aids and cochlear implants). The mission of the school is to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing students achieve their full potential in an educational environment where language and communication are the keys to building competence, character, and community.

They discussed:

- The evolution of their program at the Framingham campus, a bilingual program. Early on, this included children with single channel implants who were not oral communicators and children getting implanted beyond the early language learning years. By 2002, their population had shifted to families using sign with their babies and also choosing a cochlear implant at a young age.
- How their initial response to including spoken language in their ASL program was a band-aid response including augmentation of their program through speech specialists for short periods of the day and occasional use of simultaneous communication to get in some measure of spoken English.
- Their school’s process of change, which included the involvement of deaf colleagues, staff training, visiting oral and signed English programs, and participation in regional discussion groups.
- What they learned regarding the need to be explicit in staff training related to demonstrating how to incorporate both receptive and expressive spoken language strategies in the classroom.
- The program’s initial trial use of many strategies including “sandwiching” (sign it-say it-sign it), music classes, talking lunchtimes, increased speech pathology services, one-on-one time for students with their teachers to review familiar concepts in English or sign-supported English, establishment of a position to offer one-on-one services to students to address phonics, phonology, and oral reading. These strategies each achieved varying degrees of success.
- The school’s move to more purposeful planning to include both spoken English and ASL in their school.
- Their experience establishing an “auditory access” classroom within their preschool to give

identified children/families more opportunities for exposure to and use of spoken English than had traditionally been offered in their program. Discussed were the struggles in setting up such a classroom, including: Finding qualified staff to teach it, getting existing staff on board and trained, developing individualized language and communication plans for each child, planning for children with other learning challenges, addressing cultural sensitivity within the school, and establishing communication policies on campus.

- Their current model, which includes individual communication plans for children. Note: Students in spoken language access classrooms in the preschool and kindergarten join other students in the program that are at the same age level for activities facilitated through ASL such as Deaf studies, project time, free choice, and ASL stories.
- The challenge of programming for children beyond the early childhood years, including the necessity for their school and other schools to address how to program for children with varying spoken language outcomes in what have traditionally been ASL classrooms.



The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center is comprised of two federally mandated demonstration schools for students from birth through age 21 who are deaf. Located on the campus of Gallaudet University, these schools work in collaboration with a national network of exemplary programs and professionals to identify, research, develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative curricula, materials, educational strategies, and technologies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Clerc Center also provides training and technical assistance to families and programs throughout the United States, and serves as a model individualized educational program, working in close partnership with its students and their families.

Working for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Throughout the United States



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