



# Cochlear Implant Education Center

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

**Experiences in the Field: Auditory Consultant  
Resource Network (ACRN)**



LAURENT CLERC  
NATIONAL DEAF EDUCATION CENTER



# Experiences in the Field: Auditory Consultant Resource Network (ACRN)

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## Experiences in the Field: Auditory Consultant Resource Network (ACRN)

Mary Koch, Auditory Education Consultant, Boys Town National Research Hospital

Mary Koch, national auditory educational consultant, shared her insights from working in numerous capacities with children who have cochlear implants since 1983. She discussed her experiences regarding planning for diverse children with cochlear implants, including her current work with Boys Town National Research Hospital in their Auditory Consultant Resource Network (ACRN). ACRN provides professionals and families with in-service training, individual coaching, and educational resources through [on-site consultation and distance support](#).


She discussed the following topics:

- The importance of addressing the language and educational needs of children who have diverse characteristics and spoken language outcomes.
- Her personal experiences in prompting the necessity of looking at “one child at a time” in regard to planning for facilitation of strong language foundations regardless of modality, and the importance of honoring the individual needs of children rather than methodologies.
- Her concept of “The Priority Pyramid,” an educational training and counseling graphic which depicts the importance of establishing the foundations of communication, cognition, connections, and language before getting mired in decision making regarding specific modality use and precision in articulation (either spoken or signed).
- The importance of reframing how professionals guide families in making decisions about language and communication. She discussed the use of a graphic tool that looks at how a child may best access information receptively for learning along a continuum<sup>2</sup>-- from visual (V) to auditory (A) and how they may best express themselves along a continuum from sign (S) to oral (O). For children with cochlear implants, this may mean not “parking” the child into one methodology and staying there, but rather “skating” between strategies to best facilitate language development in both visual and auditory modalities.
- The importance of assessment driven individualized instruction to guide the strategic use of auditory and visual communication for each child.
- The importance of “fishing” to assess how a child comprehends either visual or spoken information for any given communication interaction. How and when to use either spoken language or sign language will be tied to whether it is a new experience, review experience, highly contextual experience, etc.

- The importance of monitoring the “communication dashboard,” a visual depiction of the many areas (gauges on the dashboard) a professional must monitor at all times when planning and implementing an effective, individualized educational program for children with cochlear implants. Examples of “gauges” include: Equipment functioning, language use, classroom acoustics, and classroom groupings.

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<sup>2</sup> The receptive continuum was adapted from McConkey-Robbins (2001). The expressive continuum was conceptualized by Bettie Waddy-Smith, Speech Pathologist at the Clerc Center. Both continuums have been included in Clerc Center national professional training workshops provided by the CIEC, “Spoken Language and Sign: Optimizing Learning for Children with Cochlear Implants,” as well as other professional training activities. These continuums are also incorporated into the individualized planning process for students enrolled at the Kendall Demonstration Elementary School.



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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