


Chapter 2

Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Early Childhood Deaf Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a comprehensive exploration of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as it applies to early childhood Deaf education. The authors highlight the urgent need for early and consistent language access to prevent language deprivation and support cognitive, social-emotional, and academic development. Emphasis is placed on the integration of visual and auditory language strategies, family engagement, and the role of Teachers of the Deaf (TODs) in fostering language-rich environments. The chapter outlines evidence-based practices such as serve-and-return interactions, parent coaching, and bilingual-bimodal approaches to support Deaf children's holistic development. Connections are drawn between DAP guidelines, IDEA's special considerations for Deaf learners, and the critical importance of early intervention. This chapter provides practical strategies and

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guiding questions for educators and professionals seeking to implement DAP while honoring diverse family needs, communication modalities, and child development trajectories.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers of the Deaf and hard of hearing students (TODs) serve a population of Deaf and hard of hearing students who have a range of developmental and learning needs, come from unique families, and are educated in an array of settings with varied professional teams and resources to meet their individualized needs. Throughout this chapter, the term Deaf will be used inclusively to refer to all individuals who are Deaf, regardless of their communication mode, language preferences, hearing levels, or cultural affiliation. For Deaf children, access to rich, meaningful language is not just important—it is essential for cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Hall, et al., 2017).

While TODs play a crucial role in guiding Deaf children through an evolving educational landscape, the authors would be remiss to suggest that the proper neurological nutrition of a deaf child falls solely in the hands of early childhood educators of Deaf children; therefore, the importance of the child-parent relationship will also be discussed with practical applications, as well. By prioritizing early language access, secure attachments, and play-based learning, educators and families can create environments where Deaf children thrive. The critical link between child development and language acquisition will be highlighted noting the urgency of preventing language deprivation, and the role of nurturing interactions for lifelong success.

Over the past 30 years, advances in technology, such as newborn screenings and diagnostic tools, listening technologies such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, increasingly widespread resources for families to learn American Sign Language (ASL), and accessible ways to connect with other families of Deaf children, have changed the entire landscape of both the field and of Deaf children's and families' lives. Yet, despite the implementation of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening in all 50 states by 2001, the establishment of Early Hearing Detection and Intervention system goals, and growing bodies of research on visual and auditory language development, many young Deaf children are entering preschool and elementary classroom settings without a solid language foundation. Deaf educators across the country face the challenging task of carefully integrating evidence-based best practices in efficacious ways with this heterogeneous population of children and families to ensure positive outcomes for all. A strong first language (L1) is essential for developing higher-order thinking skills, literacy, accessing the educational cur-

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