

Getting Back to Clerc's Roots in Bilingualism: A Deaf-Centric Approach

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Even before the International Congress for Educators of the Deaf's 1880 ban of sign language in deaf education, deaf education has been largely hearing-centric. The concept of "signing" and immersion in Deaf culture has been significantly overlooked. Deaf Frenchman Laurent Clerc's teaching strategies were among the earliest formal bilingual approaches.

What would Clerc's Deaf-centric bilingualism look like today?

- Value ASL* for Deaf children.
- Value ASL assessment in determining educational plans for young Deaf children.
- Ensure ASL accessibility in curricula.
- Use ASL materials created by Deaf people.
- Focus on ASL as a first language to support English as a second language.
- Offer ASL as language arts in K-12 curricula for deaf children.
- Allow young Deaf children to have freedom to use ASL.
- Refine Deaf children's ASL skills.
- Include ASL literature and Deaf history in curricula at all grade levels.
- Introduce Deaf children to ASL parameters as a vocabulary builder for all grades.

* Or signed languages in other countries with the second language being the country's national language(s).

Bilingualism is unquestionably workable and natural. Deaf children become better communicators, are more educated, and are more knowledgeable/academic. They are more likely to seamlessly participate in both the Deaf community and the hearing community. Ultimately, they become contributing members of society.

There is no mystery in planning for Deaf children's educational success: a Deaf-centric approach that incorporates bilingualism must be included in today's education.