

Baby Sign Language: Hindering or Enhancing Communication
in Infants and Toddlers?

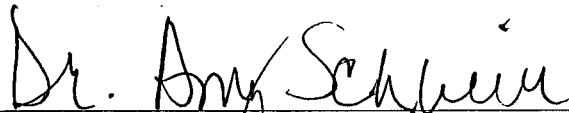
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ABSTRACT

This resource guide examines the research available, including peer-reviewed and opinion papers, on the effects of teaching infants and toddlers sign language and the impact it has on their ability to communicate verbally. The research available strongly encourages parents, grandparents, siblings and childcare providers to start teaching their infant or toddler sign language as early as six months of age. Numerous websites on signing with babies indicate that infants develop the fine muscles in their hands before they develop those required for speech, so they are equipped to communicate with you before they can speak. Research suggests the benefits of signing with your baby include possible higher I.Q., above average ability later in life to learn a new language, may learn to speak earlier, earlier understanding of the English language and they can communicate their wants and needs to their caregiver at an early age. Parents, grandparents and childcare providers need

to be aware of these advantages and make informed decisions on how to best serve their child's communication needs.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Imagine waking from a sound sleep. You walk into your child's room as she stands there in her crib crying. It is one a.m. and it is hard to think straight; is she hungry, is she wet, is she in pain? You quickly evaluate her needs to no avail. She is unable to express her concerns to you. You feel helpless.

Now imagine yourself walking through those same doors, sweeping your crying baby into your arms; she signs "milk". You give her a glass of milk as she smiles at you in appreciation. You kiss her and put her back to bed. What a success! She was able to communicate her needs to you, and you were able to satisfy them. You go back to bed satisfied knowing that your child is safe, happy and once again sleeping.

Statement of the Problem

Being able to communicate with an infant or child should be a major goal as a parent. Finding ways to support infants and toddlers in expressing their wants and needs is something that many parents strive to do. Infants under the age of one lack the cognitive ability and gross motor ability to verbally articulate words. Infants acquire the fine motor skills in their hands before they are able to acquire the skills to speak. Knowing this, research suggests that parents and caregivers should start teaching sign language to their infant as early as six months of age (What Age Should I Start, 2008).

However, there are skeptics out there who make it hard to get support from others when you inform them that you are planning on teaching your infant or toddler sign language. There is a fear that introducing your infant or toddler to sign language will hinder their ability to speak (Leardi, 2008).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this resource guide is to review the current research that is available regarding teaching infants and toddler's baby sign language and the effects it may have on them in regards to their ability to speak. The outcome of this resource guide will provide parents and caregivers a comprehensive understanding of what baby sign language is, how to introduce baby sign language to a child, who can use baby sign language, when is a good time to start, tips for parents, benefits and advantages to signing with your child and also how to answer the questions that others may ask you in regards to baby sign language.

I became interested in this topic mainly for professional reasons, and now that I know more about baby sign language, I am also interested in it personally. I am currently teaching at a senior high school with students with severe disabilities. The majority of my students have little to no communication abilities. It is my goal to find ways to help them communicate effectively throughout their day. I have used a variety of augmentative communication devices such as Step by Steps, Big Macs, Spring Boards and other single step switches. Although these switches have allowed them to become more independent, I still have this feeling inside of me that says there has to be something more. After speaking with one of my professors, she informed me of another classroom such as mine using baby sign language. She informed me of a student who was nonverbal and how he has been watching a *Signing Times* DVD and that he is now able to communicate his wants and needs independently. Having heard this amazing story, it encourages me to find this DVD and to start using it with my students. I am currently waiting for the sold out DVD to be available to hopefully find new horizons for my students.

I am also a new mother to my ten-month-old daughter, Ella. My husband, Ryan, and I started using sign language with Ella about two months ago. Since the first day we started signing with Ella, she seemed so intrigued at what we were showing her. Although, she has not showed us a sign on her own yet, she has become more vocal in the past month. Tonight at suppertime she turned her head as though she was done eating. I used the sign for “all done” and to my amazement she said “all done.” Of course, it was not said clearly, but I could tell that is what she wanted to express. After hearing this, I felt more encouraged than ever to continue signing with her to see what else she could learn in the months to come.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this research paper, the following terms will be used:

American Sign Language- “the dominate sign language of the Deaf community in the United States, in the English-speaking parts of Canada, and in parts of Mexico.” (Wikipedia, 2009).

Augmentative Communication Device- “communication for those with impairments or restrictions on the production or comprehension of spoken or written language.”(Wikipedia, 2009).

Morphology- “the study of the structure and content of word forms.” (Wikipedia, 2009).

Parentese- “high pitched voice you use almost automatically when talking to your baby.” (Will I Grow Out of It? First Three Months of Life, 2008a).

Phonology- “is the systematic use of sound to encode meaning in any spoken human language or the field of linguistics studying this use.” (Wikipedia, 2009).

Pragmatic- “is the philosophy of considering practical consequences or real effects to be vital components of meaning and truth.” (Wikipedia, 2009).

Semantics- “is the study of meaning.” (Wikipedia, 2009).

Methodology

With the research analyzed, I will attempt to create a comprehensive resource guide for parents in regards to signing with their infant and/or toddler. As a parent and a teacher, I feel it is essential for anyone and everyone involved with an infant, toddler or child to be aware of the impact that teaching sign language can have on a child.

Chapter II: Literature Review

American Sign Language

According to Beyer (2008a) “there is a great debate going on in the “signing with babies” community” (p.1). One side of the debate prefers to use only American Sign Language (ASL), and the other side is more relaxed about the actual signs they use with their babies. Originally, Beyer states: “it was recommended making up your own signs instead of using a formal sign language vocabulary. The idea being, unless you plan to teach your child the ASL grammar and sentences structure, there is no reason to use a formal sign language. However, the new recommendation is to use 90 % ASL as well as other parent created signs” (Beyer, 2008a, p.1).

Beyer (2008a) goes on to state: amongst ASL signers there is a certain lack of consistency. ASL is drastically different from other countries using sign language and the differences do not stop there. Signs from the northwest US can be different from the midwest. With that said, signs are generally consistent within a given community, and you can make greater use of your vocabulary if you consult a local interpreter or deaf friend or relative.

According to Suggs (2003), ASL has been said to be the third-most used language in America, after English and Spanish. Brown (2002) feels learning just a few words of sign language can be a most rewarding experience and an encouragement to progress to a higher level. The art of sign language is intended as a basic guide for the complete novice and without any prior knowledge, you can learn up to 850 words. The philosophy behind the development of signed English is simple and based upon the way any child would learn its first language. Apart from the use of a sign to express a word or a series of signs to

express a sentence, the English words are spoken simultaneously, and body language employed to express and emphasize any emotion or feeling. According to American Sign Language (2009) estimates range from 500,000 to two million in the United States alone for the number of individual who use ASL as a primary language.

American Sign Language (2009) states standardized sign languages have been used in Italy since the 17th century and in France since the 18th century for the instruction of the deaf. ASL is a natural language as proved to the satisfaction of the linguistic community by William Stokoe, and contains phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics just like spoken language. It is a manual language or visual language, meaning that the information is expressed not with the combinations of sounds but with combinations of hand shapes, palm orientations, movement of the hands, arms and body, location in relation to the body and facial expressions.

Practicing and developing ASL as a second language; your child can benefit from having this language skill later in life. There are a few reasons to choose ASL over parent-made signs with one of them being that it encourages communication with deaf people an entire segment of society we weren't able to communicate with at all before ("enefits of Baby Sign, 2008).

Most of the materials available for parents and professionals are ASL based. As well as the majority of DVD's available using Baby Sign Language demonstrate ASL. By using available resources, you will be able to teach yourself as well as you child sign language. While you are the one teaching your child sign language, you are able to use the variety of DVDs to reinforce what you have taught your child.

Heller (2004), suggests that either using ASL or ‘made up’ signs are both useful. She feels that anything that encourages the acceptance of sign language for communication is welcome. She wants you to keep in mind that there is no need for parents to rely on a different form of sign language when there is plenty of video and book material available for learning ASL.

Baby Sign Language

Some would say that signing with babies is the new fad. It is something only power moms who want super babies do, and it is a sure fire way for a speech delay. People have been signing with their babies for years. The most common reason for doing so is an intense desire on the part of a parent or caregiver to find out exactly what is going on in a baby’s mind-what does she want? What does she need? What does she observe? What does she think about and remember (What is Baby Sign, 2008)?

Baby sign language is defined as a method in which you and your infant (or toddler) use specific hand shapes and motions to convey words and meanings (quickly and easily) with each other. These exact hand shapes and motions are executed typically using ASL. This special type of communication significantly reduces frustration for your child (What is Baby Sign, 2008).

Also called infant sign language, baby sign and sign language for babies, baby sign language is composed of baby hand and finger signs that indicate words, concepts and ideas babies need and want to communicate. These are words like “hungry,” “milk,” “hurt,” “sleepy,” etc. The proponents of baby sign language say that the gap between desire to communicate and ability often leads to frustration and tantrums (Sign Language in Infants and Toddlers, 2008). Kissane (2001) indicates that for some people, signs are

cognitively easier to learn and retain than spoken language. Signs are more readily accessible than spoken words in the case of non-speaking individuals. It has been said that children generally understand far more than they are able to communicate themselves (Speech Development, 2009).

Myths and Baby Signing

The core myth surrounding signing with your infant or toddler is will my baby talk and will sign hinder speech development (Leardi,2008)? While this is a legitimate concern, and I must admit to thinking the same thing when baby signing emerged, the complete opposite of this myth is true. Leardi, a mother of a hearing infant, tells us that with unquestioned certainty that your signing baby will learn to talk even sooner than they normally would. She began signing with her daughter, Carmen, when she was about six months old. She started with a few basic signs, and since then, her signing vocabulary has increased to about twenty signs. Now at 16 months, she continues to sign as well as to learn to speak words and even small sentences. Jackie is also a special education teacher, and she has seen firsthand how signing can help children associate symbols with sounds and meanings.

Research has clearly demonstrated that using sign language does not mean that a child will not learn to talk. When using baby sign language, you are strongly recommended to say the sign out loud so the child can not only see what the sign is, but also what it sounds like. The speech and language pathologist, Sarah, at my current school has taught her two-year-old baby sign language since birth. When I approached Sarah on baby signing, she explained it to me better than anyone else has thus far. I presented Sarah with the myth listed above, and she stated: “isn’t it easier to verbally say something than to use

your hands to say something every time. It is just natural for a child to start speaking the word to make it easier on them” (Radcliff, personal communication, April 1,2009). After this comment, it all became much clearer to me. Another way to visualize it: signing precedes speaking just like crawling precedes walking.

Why Sign With Your Baby

There are a number of reasons to sign with your baby. There are five main reasons why parents use baby sign language today (The Purpose of Baby Sign, 2008):

- (a) the main purpose of baby sign language is to communicate more effectively with the infant baby. By using sign language, parents are able to communicate better with their kids, thus resulting in better understanding between the two parties,
- (b) it helps personal development of the child,
- (c) it is proven to help improve the IQ levels of kids showing greater proficiency in subjects like Math, Arithmetic, and Statistics as they get older,
- (d) the child will be happy and content, since his/her needs are communicated and satisfied,
- (e) it facilitates greater bondage between parent and child, a higher level of trust from baby because he or she knows that you understand what he or she is trying to tell you and
- (f) SATISFACTION. What a great feeling it is to know that you can effectively communicate with your preverbal infant.

After reviewing the research, the number one reason to teach your infant or toddler sign language is to decrease their frustration levels when they are trying to express their wants and needs. Learning to sign will allow them to feel that they are more in control of a

situation. Of course, we as parents prefer to stay in control in every situation, but signing will allow your child to have a say in what is happening around them. As you are teaching your infant or toddler sign language, they tend to invent their own signs to get their meaning across. For example, when an infant learns to wave bye-bye or when you say “how big is baby?” and you watch them fling their arms up into the air, these are symbolic gestures that are one form of communication used by preverbal infants and toddlers. Signing with babies is not difficult, and as you can see by that the last example, you may already be doing some form of signing with your child, and you did not even realize it.

While children learn new skills at different ages and stages, it is also true that there is much that you can do to help them along the way. Children generally understand far more than they are able to communicate themselves (Speech Development, 2009). Heller (2004) feels that when you teach your infant or toddler sign language, you are helping your child speak earlier than non-signers, experience less frustration, develop larger vocabularies, decrease behavior issues, become better readers and have higher IQ’s that are at least ten to twelve points higher than non-signers.

Along with the advantages listed above, Chun (2004), found four benefits to developing an infant’s ability to sign:

- (a) it makes life easier and decreases tears. Many parents are familiar with this situation: The baby is red-faced and crying and nobody knows what to do. Signing helps frustrated babies tell their parents what they want,
- (b) it allows you to appreciate your baby’s intelligence. “Babies are very smart,” said Connie Markum Wong of Kapolei, who taught her children to sign. “People

just don't understand that babies cannot communicate because they are not able to speak. If they could speak, they would have a very large vocabulary,"

(c) it helps your baby speak sooner,

(d) it is believed to jump-start intellectual growth. In a study by the National Institute of Health, eight children who had signed as infants scored an average of twelve points higher on IQ tests than non-signing children.

How to Get Started

All parents, caregivers, daycare providers, and teachers who will be signing with the child learning sign language need a place to start. Learning baby sign language is quite easy, and most parents are learning the signs right along with their baby. No prior knowledge of sign language is required.

There are a variety of tools to help you teach signs to your child:

(a) there are sign language software packages available that help self-teach baby sign language. These programs run on the computer and usually come with support books and documentation,

(b) purchase a sign language DVD or videos to run on the television or laptop.

These are also self-teaching programs,

(c) there are free eBooks available on the internet that you can download which contain pictures and explanations for baby sign language,

(d) there are a number of baby sign language sites which can be accessed through the free ASL web browsers. ASL browsers offer sites that teach true ASL,

(e) some parents choose to attend parent Baby Sign Language programs offered at a private school, the local YMCA, community centers, and community colleges,

(f) you can learn ASL by attending a program through government funded school programs, community colleges and/or university classes (How Do I as a Parent, Learn Baby Sign Language, 2008).

When you are just beginning to learn baby sign language, it is better to start with simple words and gestures. Use a gesture that you know you will use on a consistent basis such as “more,” “please,” “milk,” “nap,” “thank you” etc. It is important to remember that it will take several weeks of signing before your infant will produce the first gesture, so you have plenty of time to practice. It is important to emphasize that you should try to use the gesture along with the activity; for example, sign the word “milk” every time you give the baby a bottle of milk. At the same time you gesture for the word “milk” also say the word out loud. This connects baby sign language gestures and verbal skills development.

Continue to add simple words and gestures through practice. The more signs your baby knows, the easier it will be for her to pick them up-especially once your baby realizes that she can get her needs taken care of by using signs (How Do I as a Parent, Learn Baby Sign Language, 2008).

You will know if your baby is ready to sign if they are able to wave bye-bye, beginning to clap, holds onto a rattle and/or if your baby drops something and then looks to see where it went (What Age Should I Start, 2008). Although those listed previous are just suggestions on when to start, there are many parents out there who start signing with their babies from birth. The suggested time to start teaching babies sign language can begin as early as six months for almost any infant (What Age Should I Start, 2008). Generally, it is introduce between six to nine months. The above article feels that you can start teaching sign when your child is able to make and keep consistent eye contact with you. Teaching

your infant sign language requires your infant to be able to focus on the hand movement and have the cognitive skills to connect a gesture with a particular item.

Babies who see sign language consistently beginning at six months of age will normally begin signing on their own by about eight months (What Age Should I Start, 2008). Of course, every baby is different and develops at different rates. If you feel that your child is intellectually advanced, you can begin teaching your infant sign language as early as two-three months. On the other hand, it is never too late to start teaching baby signing. An important thing to keep in mind when signing with your baby is patience. It's important to keep reasonable expectations; otherwise, a whole different set of frustrations may unnecessarily develop.

Beyer (2008b) came up with some components to assist you in your adventure of signing with your child. It is important to be consistent. Consistency from the very beginning of your signing experience with your child will be the most helpful to you both and essential for your success. Use the same sign the same way for the same action or object. This will help your baby become familiar with the sign, and she will be able to sign it back to you sooner. Do not frustrate yourself trying to learn an entire signed language in one week; however, concentrate on a few to a handful and build from there. Be happy. Frowning and bored voices will not make a baby eager to learn how to sign. Be open to interpretation. Babies will not always sign correctly the first time they sign it, just like they will not speak a word correctly the first time they speak it. Keep signing the word the correct way, and your baby will soon grow more precise. Be open to suggestion. Sometimes a baby will create a sign for herself. Feel free to continue using it, and applaud her creativity. Be full of praise. Act excited when your baby uses a correct sign, and let you

baby know how wonderful you think she is. Be expressive. Use your face and body in addition to your hands. You should always say the word as you sign it. Make it sound fun and interesting. Be varied, not with the sign, but with the places you sign. Be patient. Babies can take weeks or even months before they make their first sign. Sometimes even when they have done a sign correctly for days or even months, they may stop using it. Be prepared to be amazed! Your child will open your eyes to her world, and it is a great place to be!

Beyer (2008c) has demonstrated a few phenomena to watch out for when signing with your infant or toddler. The first one being, expect your child to recognize a sign that you are making well before he starts using it on her own. Recognizing words and signs is called receptive language and being able to form words and signs are called expressive language. The second phenomena to watch for are signs that have a similar hand shape that often start out the same. Therefore, your baby may be making the same sign for several words. They give the examples of “ball,” “more,” and “hurt” which all have two-handed signs where the hands are brought together. They encourage you to keep in mind that this is all normal and is to be expected. The main challenge to you in this situation is to determine what your baby is trying to tell you. The third phenomena is when your child starts signing, she may use one sign for everything. Just like when she starts talking she may use one word such as “mama” for everything. Keep in mind that this is a good thing! This means that she has realized that the gestures do indeed stand for something and they can be used to get it. Lastly, expect what is called a “sign explosion.” It seems that after mastering a few signs, most babies suddenly realize that signing will get them what they desire, and their ability to soak up signs like a sponge becomes evident.

Speech Development and Milestones

As you begin using signs with your infant or toddler, is it important to keep track of where they should typically be for speech and language development. Christensen (2009a), a Speech Pathologist working with children from birth to 18 months of age, has come up with a comprehensive guide on where your child should typically be:

During the first three months of life your infant becomes startled at loud noises, soothed by calm and gentle voices, likes to cuddle, cries, gurgles, grunts, says “ah,” strong muscles in cheek and tongue. Speaking in a “parentese” voice is recommended. Using parentese communicates with your infant and encourages vocalizations from her. She encourages you to talk to your baby about what you are doing while you are doing it. Use your parentese voice and talk about the parts of the body while you bath her. For example, “this is baby’s hand...baby likes to grab things with her hand (Christensen, 2009a).

During months four to six, infants will watch your face with interest when you talk, tries to “talk” to you, enjoys “talking” with you, smiles at you, coos and squeals for attention and has a special cry when hungry. Making mimic sounds your baby makes is important. This encourages more vocalizations. These are also the sounds that will turn into words. If your baby begins making words, take these words and elongate them. For example, if your baby says “mama,” you might say, “yes, I’m your momma.” This encourages taking turns and is the beginning of a conversation (Christensen, 2009b).

Six months to their first birthday, infants are typically able to understand some common words when used with gestures. For example, “bye, bye,” “up,” “give me,” and their name. They try to say sounds and words such as “ba,ba” and “na,na,” try to sing along with the radio/TV, laugh, and may imitate a cough. Songs, nursery rhymes and anything

with hand movements babies love such as ‘the itsy bitsy spider.’ These gestures will assist your child in learning the song as well as the words (Christensen, 2009c).

At twelve to eighteen months, an infant is able to babble, and it may sound like sentences, understands simple questions/statements, says words (not clearly), nods “yes” and shakes head for “no,” enjoys rhythm and likes to “dance” to music. Some concepts that should be prevalent at this time are looking attentively, following directions, imitating speech, asking for simple needs and using ten words (Christensen, 2009d).

At eighteen to twenty four months, infants and toddlers say some two words sentences such as “more milk,” “all gone,” “me go,” says “watssat,” ask for a cookie or toy, understand “where is mommy/daddy?” understand simple directions “get your coat,” and understand more words than they can speak or say (Christensen, 2009e).

Infants age two to three years of age should be able to combine words in two-three word sentences, follow simple directions, answer simple questions, put a toy “in,” “on,” “under” when asked, and answer simple questions about objects. They should also be exhibiting the use of two word combinations, use pronouns such as “my,” “mine,” “you,” and “me”, negative phrases, stay with an activity for six to seven minutes, build a small tower with blocks, and carry on a conversation with dolls and self (Christensen, 2009f).

Three to four year olds should be able to follow related directions, tell first and last name, understand questions about a picture story, tell a short story, say sentences that are usually three and four words long, give directions such as “fix this for me,” and ask many questions (Christensen, 2009g).

Four to five year olds are able to follow three related directions, speak sounds accurately (except perhaps for l, r, s, k, th, ch, sh which are difficult and can come as late as

eight-years-old), reason more, describe objects and events, show you “top,” “bottom,” and several colors (Christensen, 2009h).

These milestones were added to this resource guide to assist you in your child’s development. Early detection of difficulties at any age can make learning to talk easier. If your child shows any warning signs listed for her age group, please contact your local health care provider or a Speech-Language Pathologist (Christensen, 2009a).

As you teach your infant or toddler sign language, the milestones listed above may vary due to their ability to express their wants and needs to you at an earlier age frame. As mentioned earlier, baby sign language has shown higher intelligence levels and earlier language development. The above milestones are strictly a guide for you to keep in mind.

Skeptics and How to Answer Their Questions

It is quite possible that when you tell someone that you are teaching your infant or toddler sign language that they will have a weird look on their face or have a million questions for you. Acredolo and Goodwyn (2008) came up with a list of ways to assist you when you are confronted with difficult questions.

Acredolo and Goodwyn (2008) feel by far, the most frequently voiced concern about encouraging babies to use baby signs is that doing so will discourage them from learning to talk. In the baby signing world this is known as the “Mother-in-Law” myth because we so often hear it voiced in the following way: “My mother-in-law says, if he gets what he wants without using words, he’ll never learn to walk.” Here are a few suggestions that you can tell that mother-in-law or anyone else for the matter:

- a) baby sign language is well-designed, and government-funded research has shown that the opposite is true. Using a half-million dollar grant from the National

Institutes of Health, a study compared baby signers to baby non-signers from the same communities on standardized tests of verbal language development. The findings are what they will find interesting and perhaps change their view on baby signing. In test after test the baby signers were more advanced than the baby non-signers in language skills (Acredolo and Goodwyn, 2008).

b) once children learn to walk, they no longer crawl because of the greater freedom walking affords them. Communication is the same way. While baby signs are useful before children have words, speech allows them the ability to communicate more quickly and more fully. As a child's mind and body develops, she will naturally transition to speaking in order to convey even more complex ideas and longer sentences. Baby signs provide a bridge that helps the transition from no language to spoken language (Acredolo and Goodwyn, 2008).

c) the experience of baby signing teaches babies useful lessons about how language works: lessons that speed up the process of learning to take once words are finally available. By enabling a baby to practice learning and using symbols, label objects, express needs, and describe feelings, baby signs create the mental framework which makes it easy to incorporate words as soon as a the baby's vocal cords are developed enough to use them (Acredolo and Goodwyn, 2008).

d) the natural reaction to a baby's use of baby sign is to "bathe" the child with words, and the more words a child hears, the faster he or she will learn to talk. It is encouraged every time you use baby sign with your child that you say the word as you are signing. This exposure to words they care about is exactly what children need to learn how to say the words themselves (Acredolo and Goodwyn, 2008).

e) every time a baby successfully uses a baby sign, changes occur in the brain, which bring the child closer to mastering language. As a child experiences more, their brain continues to blossom. Using baby signs enables children to begin this process earlier, the development of this circuitry gets a significant “jump start” that continues to pay off for years down the line (Acredolo and Goodwyn, 2008).

So, the next time you hear someone say: “You are wasting your time,” “You are going to delay her speech,” “You look silly signing to a baby,” “Are you teaching him how to talk too?” “He is not signing, he’s waving his arms,” “That is great that she can sign, but what words can she say?” I hope you can think back to the list I provided and offer them a simple explanation of how you are looking out for your child’s best interest and that baby signing is in their best interest.

Chapter III: Discussion

As a parent and a special education teacher, I have two main goals and objectives associated with my thesis project. As a parent of a ten-month-old infant, I am constantly looking at how I can make her life easier, safer, and enriched. I strongly believe that parents are always looking out for their child's best interest. By presenting this parent resource, I am striving to encourage parents to use baby signing with their infant and/or toddler to give them additional ways to express their wants and needs. I hope that this resource will better educate parents, caregivers, grandparents, siblings, etc. on what amazing things that baby signing can do for a child.

As time goes by and more people are taking the time to listen to why baby signing is so crucial in a child's development, I think the number of parents using signing will increase drastically in the near future. When parents stay educated on these new trends and continue to stay open about the abilities of signing, I feel that they will be encouraged with what their child is capable of doing. All of my relatives and friends have been very intrigued to hear that I was doing my thesis on Baby Signing. The majority of them had the same concerns and heard the same myths that I have listed in this resource. I am going to continue to use signing with my daughter, and I am thrilled to see what she can learn throughout this process.

As a special education teacher, I continue to look for new ways that my students with severe disabilities can communicate with others. By the time that my students come into my classroom, they are around the age of fifteen. Unfortunately, some people along the way have somewhat "given up" on trying to find ways to help them become more independent and successful in life. Lucky for them, I am not giving up hope. As their

teacher, it is my job to find deep inside them what makes them tick. Children learn differently, and it is up to me to find out what makes them become successful. With continued research and guidance through baby signing, I hope that at least one of my nine students will be able to benefit from this program. If just one is able to show me some success, I will consider my signing a success. As you can see, by using baby signing with high school age students, I strongly feel that it is never too late to start teaching an infant, toddler, children or high school age students sign language.

As you have just read, the majority of my thesis has been dedicated to why someone should use signing and how amazing it is; if someone chooses not to use it after they know this fact that is fine. Each parent has his or her own idea of what is best for a child. Presenting you with this resource, I am hoping to give you just one more option to help you along the way of raising your child to the best of your ability.

My recommendations for further research on this topic include obtaining information on individuals who have tried baby signing and have found that these results listed earlier were not the case for their child. Also, speaking with more parents, speech pathologists, and teachers about how they have used baby signing in their lives. I feel that obtaining this information would give the reader more information from both sides of the issue. It is my intention to provide useful information to parents, childcare providers, and grandparents in regards to the decisions they make on behalf of the child that they are raising.

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