

LEAD-K Testimony for Oregon State Legislature

Thank you for inviting me to discuss about language deprivation among deaf babies.

The first 12 months of the baby's life is dedicated to language learning between the mother and baby. The baby learns how to babble, (either in speech or sign, regardless of the baby's hearing status - Petitto & Marentette), learns grammatical information, such as syntax (word order) patterns.

Deaf children born to a hearing parent that does not sign will not have access to learn how language works until later, when the language acquisition window closes, and it is harder to acquire language.

when we acquire language, we naturally put smaller bits of language and piece them together to build words, phrases and discourse to engage with each other. A building must have a strong foundation. Like a building, language learning requires a strong foundation. Language deprivation looks like a building with a concrete foundation that hasn't been properly mixed well. Over time, more language loading will stress the concrete foundation, and the building will buckle and collapse. Then, we try to build on that rubble, and it's hard to build on the rubble. We end up with a shack that is not able to weather the elements of different language interactions a person will encounter their lifetime.

This impacts the child's ability to access collaborative learning. The ability to grow social skills, employment opportunities and develop vibrant, healthy families are all impacted, and the well-being of the individual is diminished.

How can we, as a society, help?

We need to invest in the architecture that supports our parents and families to make sure the deaf baby is in a language nutritious environment. This represents a long term cost savings as productive members of society are less reliant on public funds to meet their basic needs throughout their lifetimes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Guthrie Nutt', written over a large, hand-drawn oval shape.

4/17/17

GUTHRIE NUTT, MASLED