

RESOURCES

Visual Language and
Visual Learning

[http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/
research/research-briefs/](http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/research/research-briefs/)

(briefs 2, 7, and 8)

"The human brain does not discriminate between the hands and the tongue. People discriminate, but not our biological human brain."

*Dr. Laura-Ann Petitto
(VL2 Project)*

*For more information,
contact the KSD
Outreach team at:*

913-210-8149
KSDOutreach@kssdb.org

**450 E. Park Street
Olathe, KS 66061**

Deaf Education at a glance...



KANSAS SCHOOL
FOR THE DEAF
OUTREACH

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING SOCIAL LANGUAGE

It is not a new line of thinking that in order for students to be able to participate in academic discussions or to understand academic information presented to them, and that they must first be able to understand and use social language. This Theory of Language (BICS/CALP) was first proposed by researcher, Jim Cummins, in 1984. Children typically develop social language by the age of five by conversing with family members, playing with peers in the neighborhood, watching television, or listening to the radio. Children may start to develop some academic proficiency before they enter school, but it is at school that children typically master academic language by the age of 13. From there, children focus more on learning *content* than learning *language*.

For Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) children, these milestones may be very different. Not having 100% access to incidental learning opportunities, such as family and friends' conversations, information on the television, radio, smart phones, tablets, audio toys, et cetera contributes to less opportunity to acquire social language in both ASL and English. When social language lags, it will have an impact on the rate at which they start to learn and use academic language. Often D/HH kids are still trying to acquire social language when they first enter school, but they are still expected to learn academic *language* as well as academic *content*, hence their challenges in achieving grade-level academic learning in literacy and content. For this reason, it is crucial that their social language be assessed. Schools are charged with assessing students' academic knowledge and academic language use, but what is done to determine their social language level?

At the Kansas School for the Deaf, all students' social and/or academic language competencies are assessed yearly or every three years, depending on each child's needs, using the Kendall Conversational Proficiency Test (P-Levels). This is a language-blind test which can be used with spoken English, ASL, or any other language if the assessors are trained and fluent in the given language. At KSD this assessment is primarily used to assess ASL because it is the primary language of communication and instruction as well as it is the most accessible language to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Knowing where a student is functioning in ASL allows educators to then meet the needs of each student in ASL, so that she/he can then focus on acquiring and learning English.

This also addresses another of Jim Cummins' theories, the Language Interdependence Theory (1981). The level of proficiency a student can achieve in one language (both social and academic), can also be achieved in a second language. P-Level information helps teachers modify their language, determine grade level placement, provide tutoring services, and provide language therapy.

KSD Outreach Mission: To provide the highest quality of services, resources, and support to children ages birth-21 who are deaf/hard of hearing by collaborating with their families, their communities, and the professionals that serve them.