Experience from India, An alternative education environment addressing challenges everyday.



The question is not “What is wrong with the child?”

It is “Has the child had a fair opportunity to acquire language?”

Dr. Sibaji Panda • Founder, Happy Hands School for the Deaf • Odisha, India

A Deaf-led, sign-bilingual environment tackling language Deprivation

INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

The primary language of instruction

Written English is developed as an additional language—with explicit support for literacy.

Language belongs throughout the day—not only in lessons.

01 **Deaf leadership**

Deaf educators help shape teaching, language policy and learning.

02 **Language-rich daily life**

Classrooms, friendships, play and residential life create communication opportunities.

03 **Identity and role models**

Children see Deaf adults as educators, professionals and leaders.

Deaf children should not simply adapt to hearing-centred systems. Education must be built around their linguistic rights.

What must change?

Four priorities for Deaf children everywhere

01 **EARLY SIGN LANGUAGE ACCESS**

Support families and connect children with fluent sign-language users early.

02 **DEAF-LED DECISION-MAKING**

Put Deaf people at the centre of leadership, curriculum and policy.

03 **SIGN-BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

Teach through sign language and provide explicit, effective literacy instruction.

04 **SUSTAINED LANGUAGE SUPPORT**

Meet children where they are; never confuse limited language experience with limited potential.

“Our responsibility is not to fix Deaf children. Our responsibility is to build environments in which Deaf children can flourish.”