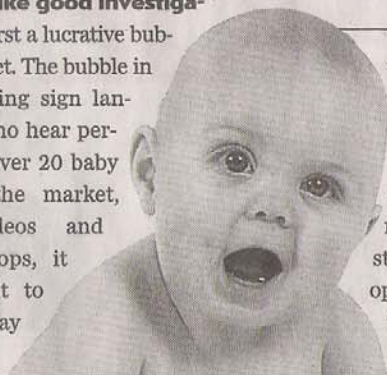


# Bursting the bubble on the new baby sign of the times

**There's nothing like good investigative** research to burst a lucrative bubble in the fad market. The bubble in this case is teaching sign language to babies who hear perfectly well. With over 20 baby sign books on the market, instructional videos and countless workshops, it would be difficult to find a parent today



who isn't at least familiar with the baby sign language movement. It is easy to understand why so many parents would embrace the movement: Baby sign is touted for stimulating language and brain development, reducing intra-psyche frustration, and advancing the emotional

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bond between parent and child. Researchers from the Universities of Ottawa and Waterloo decided to seek some verification of these claims. From their exhaustive review of over 1200 potentially relevant studies on baby sign, only five (yup, five) actually measured objective outcomes from teaching sign language to groups of hearing babies. The studies showed some lim-

ited advantage in early language skills for toddlers who were taught sign compared to children who were not taught sign. However, the children's language benefits were gone by the time they reached two years of age. No advantages were found in the literature with regards to emotional development, cognitive development, or parent child relationships for children who were taught sign language compared with those who weren't. *Carol Milstone, PhD, National Post, hrinkrap-tuedays@excite.com*