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Available in the Fall! A new Out of the Box Training Kit based on this Beginnings Workshop article: "Using the Storytelling/Story Acting Process for Teacher Development"

Early literacy is a focus of consideration for teaching, curriculum, and children's learning. Buoyed by research that shows early literacy skills correlate with later academic success, program administrators, teachers, and families everywhere are exploring how they will support children's early literacy skill development. This issue of Beginnings Workshop helps address the "how." From storytelling and story acting to making marks to using sign language to involving parents and other family members – ideas, strategies, and techniques aplenty are explored. The road to literacy learning is right here – so turn the page and get started.

The Meaning of Marks: Understanding and Nurturing Young Children's Writing Development

Rachel Robertson has worked with children in a variety



of capacities for over 15 years. Currently she is a Quality Initiatives Manager with Knowledge Learning Corporation, traveling nationally to support and train center staff going through the accreditation process. She is also the author of a number of early childhood articles and a book for children *Deployment Journal for Kids*. She has presented at national and state conferences and is a member of NAEYC, NCCA, NACCP, SCBWI, and ASTD.

by Rachel Robertson

Literacy development has become a primary focus in education. Much attention has been given to statistics illustrating American children's lack of achievement in this important learning domain. In an effort to increase achievement and encourage competence and success, reading initiatives have blossomed throughout the country. While this is commendable and necessary, it is also important to look at the other areas of literacy development — speaking, listening, and writing — to ensure complete development.

All literacy development begins from birth and each area of literacy development contributes to the development of the others, allowing children with well-rounded literacy learning opportunities to achieve higher levels of comprehension and success. Early childhood educators have a particular responsibility to play a significant role in this endeavor, as the early years are ideal for introducing and supporting all of these skills and competencies.

Writing development is a component of literacy development that has received much less attention than reading. A novice might assume that a child learns to write in preschool or kindergarten by picking up a writing instrument and practicing, possibly copying dotted letters in a workbook or using a stencil as a guide. However, the foundation for writing begins much earlier. From the first grasping efforts a young infant makes to the rapt attention a toddler gives to story time, the foundational skills needed to write successfully are practiced. Teachers can and should use this captive and enthusiastic audience to extend and enrich the natural progression of writing development.

Writing development through the ages

Although explicit writing development does not typically begin until preschool years, foundational

skills and other complementary literacy skills are being developed from birth.

- Infants enjoy listening to environmental sounds including different tone and voice inflections, grasping objects, and the progress from uncontrolled to controlled movements.
- Toddlers can use large paper and large drawing and writing instruments (i.e., chalk, crayons), and real-life pictures or objects with print descriptions and rich story time experiences to expand their skills.

As children approach preschool age their literacy-related developmental abilities increase. They are now able to understand the difference between writing and drawing, the symbolism of letters, phonemic awareness, and possess the ability to communicate through print. Preschoolers benefit from:

- storytelling opportunities
- learning centers enriched with writing opportunities, such as materials for writing directions or creating maps in the block area
- a dedicated learning center focused on writing
- large group modeling and practice
- teacher recognition and praise for each milestone.

The nuances found in children's writing development can often be missed, and opportunities to enhance development can be lost. Fortunately, adults who understand, nurture, and scaffold literacy skills in their entirety will contribute to the development of skilled and enthusiastic writers.

The stages

Children develop on a continuum of predictable developmental milestones specifically related to writing. While children of similar age may vary in

writing ability and “stage,” the stages, as is true for other developmental stages, are progressive and will occur as children develop cognitively, physically, and emotionally with the support of adults. According to Judy Schickendanz and her colleagues, “Preschool children like to write, will write a lot, and will learn a lot about writing, but only if there is an environment that supports this type of activity,” (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 55).

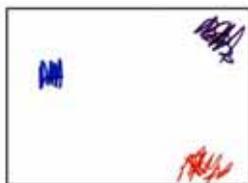
Teachers can support children in this stage by providing many opportunities and varied materials for practice:

- Keeping in mind that children are still developing their motor skills, writing utensils should be large size as should paper.
- All attempts at drawing and writing should be acknowledged and praised.

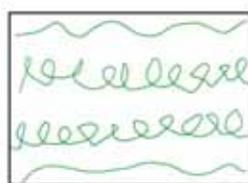
Learning Continuum Stages of Writing Skill Development



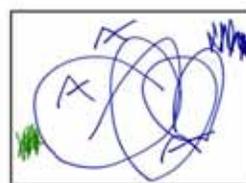
Random Scribbling



Controlled Scribbling



Repetitive Lines or Patterns



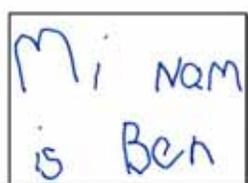
Letter Practice



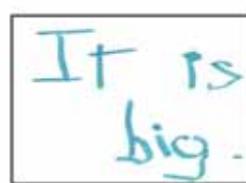
Copy Environmental Print



Name Practice



Invented Spelling



Conventional Spelling

Adapted from the Phelps, Levy, and Stannard presentation (June, 2005):

Play, the universal language of all children: How appropriate play-based curriculum supports the development of every child. Presentation at the National Association for the Education of Young Children Professional Development Institute, Miami, Florida.

While children of similar age may vary in writing ability and “stage,” the stages, as is true for other developmental stages, are progressive and will occur as children develop cognitively, physically, and emotionally with the support of adults.

Stage 1: Random scribbling

Children’s first attempts at writing typically are intermingled with drawing. Lu (2000) explains, “Children usually use their drawing and talk to support their early exploration and use of print,” (p. 1). Young children are beginning to understand that they can put lines, shapes, and color on paper and “make” something. Children are imitating and practicing the behavior of adults around them. At this stage they do not know that there is any structure or definition to writing. Their fine motor control is still in development so their creations are less likely to be intentional.

- Intentional fine motor development opportunities are important as well.
- Songs, rhymes, and alliteration are important to teach sound distinction and word roots.

Stage 2: Controlled scribbling

At this stage children have developed more fine motor skills and are able to be more intentional in their writing. They understand that writing is linear and controlled and they show beginning attempts at mimicking this. They have a rudimentary understanding of the basic purposes of writing and occasionally attempt these behaviors such as writing a note or making a list.

While some preschool children master certain words, conventional spelling should not be the goal in early childhood.

Teachers should recognize this milestone and work to differentiate writing from drawing.

- Ask children what they are writing and write their words on their paper under their writing to help them make the connection between speech and words.
- Involve children in teacher writing opportunities such as attendance taking, classroom signs, or notes to parents, to confirm their budding understanding that words have meaning.
- Read familiar books and help children grasp the connection between words and print.
- Follow the words with a finger while reading, to demonstrate the connection between speech and print.

Stage 3: Repetitive lines or patterns

Children now understand that writing is linear and consists of repetitive patterns. While they may not understand the exact shapes of letters, they have noticed the commonalities of letters, lines, dots, and curves and are beginning to use them (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004).

Encourage children's continued development by:

- Encouraging their experimentation with new shapes and patterns. (Keep in mind that children do not yet know that there are only 26 letters to choose from when writing).
- Ask them to tell you about their writing and dictate their words following their line pattern.
- Value their writing and use it appropriately (for example, if it is a sign, hang it up).
- Give them other line sequencing opportunities like stringing beads or line up dominoes.
- Pretend play opportunities are important, and will continue to be. Pretend play allows children to imagine possibilities and use symbols which are essential skills for writing (Lu, 2000).

Stage 4: Letter practice

Children have had exposure to some letters and are attempting to use them. It is most common to see children experiment with letters in their name because these are the letters they know the most. They also make mock letters using these familiar shapes, assuming their mock letter must be a real letter

because it uses the same shapes. They do not yet understand that specific sounds go with each letter. Now that they have a better grasp of the shapes used to make letters they use these primarily (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004).

Teachers can support children at this stage by recognizing the developmental challenges they face.

- Closed circles and diagonal lines are particularly difficult and children's attempts at these should be nurtured and practiced, keeping in mind that the practice doesn't have to relate to letter writing.
- Worksheets, dittos, or tracing dots are strongly discouraged as they don't develop skills at this stage as much as encourage memorization.
- Additionally, both letter orientation and lower case letters prove challenging to beginning writers (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004). Abundant opportunities for practice paired with quality samples of environmental print will help children sort these concepts out.
- Letter modeling opportunities such as labeling, dictation, calendar, notes home, and charting should be abundant.
- Ideally, writing samples should be traditional (no use of all caps or scrapbook lettering) so children have an accurate model.

Stage 5: Environmental print

A light bulb has gone off and suddenly children understand that writing is a collection of symbols. In the past they have understood that writing is a form of communication, but often they invented the words their writing represented as they went along, not understanding that letters and words hold pre-determined meaning. This new understanding sparks a renewed interest in writing; they are looking for opportunities everywhere. They want to practice and are proud of their accomplishments.

At this stage, teachers can build children's competence in the following ways:

- As children add new letters to their repertoire, their classroom should be rich with samples.
- Continue to model uses of writing and enrich the learning centers with writing opportunities. For example, children in dramatic play can make menus, take orders, make to-do lists, use



typewriters and keyboards, write recipes, write doctor's orders, and read cookbooks and magazines.

- Make sure that classrooms have a dedicated writing center that is rich with materials that are refreshed and enhanced regularly.

Stage 6: Name practice

While similar to the previous stage in many ways, this is often the child's first attempt to write without using a model. Because children are naturally self-centered, their name is typically their favorite thing to write. It is also, typically, the word they have the most exposure to.

Teachers should recognize the pride children feel in writing their name and encourage them to do so often.

- Encourage children to find their names when they check in.

- Have children assist in labeling their personal belongings and storage space and putting their name on their work.

Stage 7: Invented spelling

As children develop they begin to acquire phonemic awareness. Now they not only understand that letters are symbols, they also learn that letters have specific sounds attached to them. They are also developing a much broader understanding of the uses of writing and how it is related to reading. Within this stage children's understanding of spelling starts with the beginning sound, then the beginning and end sound, and finally the whole word (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004).

Repetitive discussions about and recognition of letter sounds is important to help children make the connections between sounds and letters.

- Use phrases like, "This book title starts with the letter R. What sound do you think that letter will make?" to invite children's participation in the construction of their knowledge.
- Give children opportunities to tell stories. This allows them to practice the basics of introduction, plot development, and conclusion.
- Group writing projects — like writing a letter to the cook on chart paper — allow children to learn from each other and build their own knowledge.
- Print should be used as often as possible and should be found in all learning areas.
- Activities that encourage children to recognize letter sounds, such as matching games, should be common.

Stage 8: Conventional spelling

This stage typically emerges in grade school children. While some preschool children master certain words, conventional spelling should not be the goal in early childhood.

Support creativity and approaches to writing. Avoid sending the message that they aren't doing it right.

- The English language is incredibly challenging, and children's attempts at phonological spelling should be revered and encouraged to instill an enjoyment and continued interest in writing.

A well-equipped writing center is essential to children's exploration, discovery, and practice. Be creative in equipping this area.

- When children ask, “How do you spell . . . ?” ask them what they think and give them feedback on their efforts such as, “I see that you are writing the word phone. You started with an *f* because you know that *f* makes the sound at the beginning of phone. Did you know that some other letter combinations can also make that sound?”

Writing center suggestions

A well-equipped writing center is essential to children’s exploration, discovery, and practice. Be creative in equipping this area.

- A variety of paper and writing instruments are essential. Tape, staplers, ordering pads, letter samples, letter stamps, rulers, envelopes, clipboards, magazines, book making supplies, index cards, and scissors are some of the items that will encourage children to write.
- Be mindful to display or use their creations. For example, if children make a book, read it to the class and then place it in the library. This will send strong messages to the children that not only can they successfully communicate through writing but that it is valuable and meaningful.

Long-term benefits

Writing development does not just happen organically. While children are “programmed” to learn, they need

social interactions and adult modeling to ensure the successful acquisition of writing skills. Children often ask adults to spell for them or ask about the meaning of print. Adults who are knowledgeable about the stages of writing development can enrich and enhance these and other opportunities for development. These additional efforts make a difference. According to Judy Schickendanz (1999), “Children who acquire a lot of literacy knowledge and skill before entering first grade are most likely to be those who have had a rich history of skillfully mediated literacy experiences” (p. 3).

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Writing development does not just happen organically.

Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers by Kay Albrecht

Find examples: Put the writing continuum on flip chart paper and post it on the wall at a staff meeting. Send teachers on field trips to each other’s classrooms to find examples of each stage of the writing continuum. Bring examples back and add them to the flip chart in the appropriate place on the continuum. See if everyone agrees on the placement of the examples. Debrief this experience by discussing the importance of plentiful opportunities for writing practice and brainstorm ideas for how to provide them.

A writing center: Robertson advocates having writing materials throughout the classroom and in a writing center. Ask teachers to self-assess the amount of writing materials available in their classrooms, to add where they think more are needed, and to include a writing center in preschool classrooms. Brainstorm additions to the writing area.

Share this with families: Share the writing continuum with families during a family meeting or informally as they pick up or drop off their children. Or, consider writing a newsletter article on the topic.

Sign Language: Meeting Diverse Needs in the Classroom

by Cynthia G. Simpson and Sharon A. Lynch

For a number of years, sign language has been used in special education settings for learners with disabilities. Children with hearing loss, autism, cognitive disabilities, and language disorders have demonstrated improved communication skills with the use of signs. Recently, however, teachers have begun to use sign language with typical learners and young children with developmental delays (Lynch, 2003; Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 2000). Young children often benefit from the combination of speech, movement, and visual enhancement of communication. Preschool educators have recognized this fact for decades, as is evident in the use of finger plays, songs with motions, and the use of pantomime. Since movement is such a natural way for young children to learn, teachers find that sign language often promotes language and communication.

Why use sign language?

When movement and signs are incorporated in communication, some learners are better able to remember what they have heard. This helps children to increase their receptive (words that they understand) and expressive (words that they use) vocabularies. Shy children or reluctant speakers can participate in group activities using signs until they are confident enough to use their words. At first, the teacher can scaffold their responses by both speaking and showing children the signs that they in turn can imitate. Next, the teacher can demonstrate the sign with the child imitating it. Eventually the child is able to use the sign along with his or her own words. This process promotes the skill of learning to imitate, which lays the groundwork for much subsequent learning.

Also, the teacher can use signs with the class when giving directions. Once children have learned some basic signs, the teacher can use signs to cue children about what to do next, desired behavior, or things that they

American Sign Language in ECE

For over 30 years research has continued to prove that American Sign Language (ASL) is a valuable addition to an early education curriculum:

- It supports receptive and expressive language development in typical hearing children as well as children with disabilities.
- ASL incorporates kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learning and makes language more tangible.
- ASL supports developmental milestones and children's developing self-esteem and problem-solving skills.
- ASL is also a wonderful way to support early literacy and language development in all children.

Children learn through what they see, hear, and do. By incorporating ASL into your curriculum you are capturing the whole child — every child. You do not need to learn the structure of the language to incorporate ASL into your curriculum. What is important is to highlight the vocabulary you want children to know. An educator would emphasize the word that they want the child to remember. For instance, if you are asking an infant if they would like milk, you say, "Do you want MILK?" As you say milk you would also sign MILK. Then offer the milk to the child. This allows the child to start making concrete connections and builds their vocabulary.

— *Contributed by Jenning Prevatte, Sprouting New Beginnings*

Dr. Simpson is an Assistant Professor of education in the College of Education at Sam



Houston State University where she teaches courses in Early Childhood and Special Education. She has over 15 years experience as a preschool teacher, special education teacher, elementary education teacher, educational diagnostician, and administrator. She is a featured speaker at the international, national, and state levels. Cynthia lives in Spring, Texas.

Dr. Lynch is a Professor of education in the College of Education at Sam Houston State University. She has been working in the field of special education for over 15 years. She has worked as a speech language pathologist, educational diagnostician, special education teacher, and an educational consultant. Sharon lives in Huntsville, Texas.



Children with hearing loss, autism, cognitive disabilities, and language disorders have demonstrated improved communication skills with the use of signs.

Benefits of American Sign Language to Children

Incorporating ASL into an early education literacy curriculum as a valuable intervention is a meaningful and enlightening choice. The effect it has on children's learning is powerful and long-term. When early education programs utilize ASL:

- Children learn at an early age that speech has visual representations. Understanding that speech has visual symbols makes the development of reading skills come along easier as children enter school. A child learns the word "milk" could look like a glass of milk or like the ASL sign "milk" which is created by opening and shutting your hand like you are milking a cow.
- Motor coordination and language development can happen simultaneously. This is helpful to both families and caregivers. A signing child is able to continue developing their gross motor skills while continuing to communicate his or her needs. This helps decrease frustration and stress for the child and the family or caregiver.
- Children have an easier time expressing their needs and having them met. ASL is a visual language and is easier for preverbal children to utilize to communicate their needs. Using ASL with children incorporates their natural tendency to gesture and gives that gesturing or pointing a purpose — an effective way to communicate.
- Children's pre-reading skills are supported during story time, free play, and music time through the use of ASL: vocabulary development, print awareness, print motivation, letter knowledge, and narrative skills. Children learn first through what they see and do; ASL supports that learning by being a visual language.
- All learning styles are supported. When you use ASL in your curriculum you are reaching the whole child — every child — by having them hear, see, and move to express the concept or vocabulary you are teaching.
- A bridge of communication is built with preverbal children. When young children's needs are met consistently and with ease the bonding process moves along with simplicity, both with families and caregivers.
- ASL is an effective intervention model for developing pre-literacy skills since it is incorporated into all aspects of language development.
- ASL is not just a language boost for our children; it is also a brain boost. A child that has the opportunity to learn ASL benefits from increased brain development. ASL supports early brain development in the areas of: communication, attention, bonding, and visual learning.
- ASL is easy for educators to integrate into their curriculum as an addition to current teaching practices. It is important to understand that educators are not teaching ASL as a language, but utilizing the gift of ASL to support language development and enrich vocabulary development by adding a visual stimulus to an auditorial input.

— Contributed by Jennings Prevatte, *Sprouting New Beginnings*

need to remember. Finally, the ability to use sign language can promote self-esteem in children as they learn new skills that they can share with others. Children with disabilities such as language disorders, autism, pervasive developmental disorders, mental retardation, and hearing impairment also can benefit from the use of sign language. While signs traditionally have been used with students who are hearing impaired, this mode of communication is easier for other learners with disabilities to learn for a number of reasons. Children with learning disabilities have increased oral vocabulary and sight word vocabulary with the use of sign language paired with oral language. Lynch (2003) experienced positive outcomes with sign language to improve vocabulary acquisition with children with disabilities such as Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and autism.

Movement is natural for most young children and learners who are developmentally delayed. On the other hand, vocalization requires the complex coordination of thought, breathing patterns, jaw, lip, and tongue control, and palatal movements. It is virtually impossible to scaffold voice production; however, hand-over-hand strategies can be used to support sign language communication. By utilizing sign language, opportunities for participation are provided for children with disabilities. Increased participation improves the child's self-concept as a **communicator**, and decreases the tendency to develop "learned helplessness" (Lynch, 2003; Seligman, 1975).

What concepts do you teach with sign language?

Sign language can be used when teaching new concepts or when reinforcing previously introduced materials. Many preschool teachers have incorporated sign language into their daily routines by:

- Signing songs that are traditionally sung in the classroom
- Signing words used during snack time such as eat, more, and names of food items
- Signing of the alphabet

- Signing numbers throughout the day such as during calendar time, lunch counts, or circle time
- Signing feelings such as angry, sad, happy, or frustrated
- Signing as a tool to manage behavior by introducing words such as no, stop, line up, sit down, quiet, and lunch (Hubler, 1999)

When selecting signs to be taught in the classrooms, teachers should follow the children's lead. Children's interests and abilities are revealed as they engage in play. Designing developmentally appropriate activities correlating with the children's cognitive and physical abilities will promote the success of sign language instruction.

How do you teach sign language?

Sign language can be taught and introduced in many different ways. However, children retain and learn more information when concepts are introduced to them in a meaningful context. For instance, if children are going to have a snack that consists of cookies and juice, the signs for "cookie" and "juice" can be introduced. If the child requests more juice or more cookies the sign is

Shy children or reluctant speakers can participate in group activities using signs until they are confident enough to use their words.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



What teachers and families say about American Sign Language

"I love the idea of adding ASL into nursery rhymes and other childhood favorite stories to enhance their early literacy, specifically narrative skills. Great hands-on learning!"

"ASL is incredibly helpful for classroom management. Saying and signing "Stop, listen, and look together" is an easy and very visual transition phrase for my preschoolers."

"I use ASL to help my two-year-olds to understand their feelings and how to use their hands to show caring and gentleness. They love to sing and sign, 'When you're happy and you know it.' This helps them label what they are feeling and supports their development."

"It has been much easier to bond with my second child than it was with my first daughter, who we didn't use ASL with. It's a great addition to my 'parenting toolbox.'"

"My one-year-old son signs three signs: MILK, MORE, and EAT. He doesn't need to scream for what he wants, he simply signs his requests and I provide it for him. This was the best thing I could teach him."

"I work with infants and we encompass MILK, MORE, and EAT into our daily routines with children. When we are about to offer a bottle of milk to a child, we ask them, 'Do you want MILK?' as we sign MILK. We have had children as early as 6 months sign milk back to us. It is the most delightful thing to watch them grow and understand language."

"I choose to use ASL with my son because I wanted a way to communicate with him before he could speak. It was such a simple thing to add to our daily routines that made a huge difference in our lives."

"I use ASL with my daughter when we read together and sign the story. ASL is a skill that grows along with your child. Using ASL with her has helped her build early literacy skills."

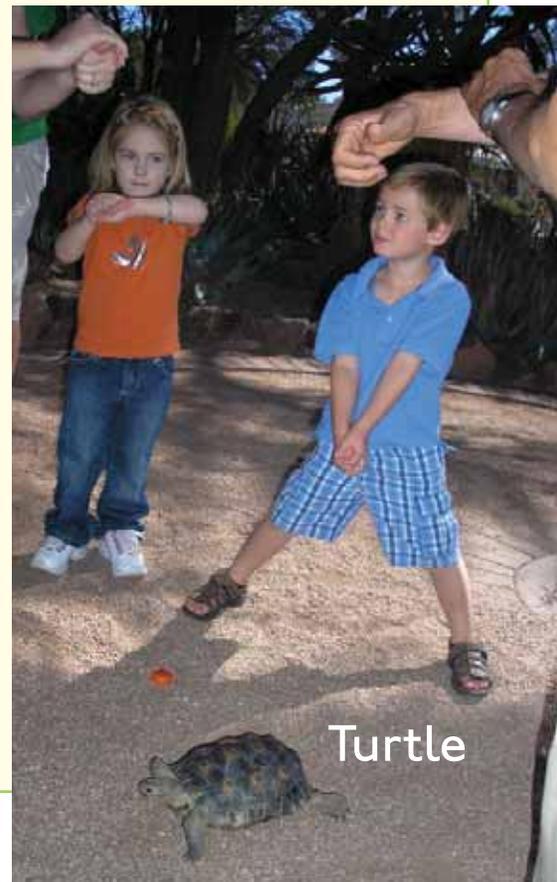
— Contributed by *Jenning Prevatte*,
Sprouting New Beginnings

Jenning A. Prevatte, M.Ed. received her Masters in Special Education with emphasis on infants and young children from Arizona State University. Jennings is a member of the Sign2Me presenter's network. Jennings is currently Level 1 certified under the Sign2Me presenters network and a certified Career Level trainer with S*CCEEDS of Arizona. Jennings is an early childhood educator and mother. She utilizes sign with her Kindergarten students and children with special needs. Brennen, her four-year-old son, has been signing since he was 9 months old. Jennings has also presented at VSAEYC 2006 Fall Conference, Association of Supportive Child Care (ASCC) "Young Child's Conference" Spring 2007, ASCC Self-Study 2007 Spring Conference, and the Arizona Early Learning Institute Summer 2007. Jennings's passion is to bridge the gap in parent-child communication, promote early childhood literacy and help others provide a healthy and developmentally appropriate environment.

The mission of Sprouting New Beginnings is to promote the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development of children while strengthening their bond between families and educators. Our focus is on fun and interactive ways to support the development of healthy minds and healthy children through play, music, and communication to promote school readiness. *We are devoted to planting the Seeds for Early Learning.*



PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



Incorporating ASL into an early education literacy curriculum as a valuable intervention is a meaningful and enlightening choice.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



Blue

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



Red

sign language. Community agencies that serve the deaf community also offer basic sign classes, as do large school districts with programs for children with hearing impairments. The Internet also is a source of information on signing, with some sites demonstrating signs through animation. When teachers of young children use sign language in the classroom, they are able to support the learning and communication of typical as well as special needs learners.

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then reinforced. The sign for "more" is then added. The consistent and repeated use of signs will provide children with the opportunity to naturally embed signing into the structure of the day.

Most teachers who use sign language in preschools are not fluent in American Sign Language. Instead, they use basic vocabulary to enhance the learning of preschool children. Many community colleges offer basic courses in

Designing developmentally appropriate activities correlating with the children's cognitive and physical abilities will promote the success of sign language instruction.

No learners left out: The author points out that teaching sign language to all children ensures that shy and reluctant speakers will be able to find ways to participate in school activities. Ask teachers to consider this important point, identify children who might benefit most, and get started by teaching all children a few signs.

First the teacher...: Teachers will need to learn signs first in order to add them to the curriculum and their teaching. Explore ways for teachers to learn basic signs and then build sign language learning into the professional development calendar. Whatever the topic on the calendar, add a few new signs for teachers to learn at each staff meeting.

How do I teach children signs?: Add one or two of the references listed at the end of this article to your professional development library. Use the books to support interested teachers in learning more signs.

Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers
by Kay Albrecht

Using the Storytelling/Story Acting Process for Teacher Development

by Judi Pack

Judi Pack worked with children from two to eight years old for



25 years as teacher and director. Currently, Judi teaches early childhood and family studies to graduate students at Kean University in New Jersey and is the Early Childhood Specialist at Child Care Resources, the child care resource and referral agency for Monmouth County, New Jersey. Contact Judi at judipack@yahoo.com or jpack@ccrmj.org.

In recent years reflective practice has become an integral part of most professional development activities. But as Vivian Paley has said, “Reflect about *what?*” There must be a focus to this reflection and a reason to do it. In addition, teachers need to have time to practice what they do, to discuss it with others, to read, and to write. Unfortunately, many teachers use scripted lesson plans and rarely have the opportunity to offer or receive feedback or encouragement from their colleagues. Reflecting on practice and participating in action research in the classroom are practices unknown to many teachers.

The storytelling/story acting process

Vivian Gussin Paley, a MacArthur Award-winning author and former kindergarten teacher, has written 12 books that chronicle her work in promoting the fantasy play of young children. A major focus of her books is a process that she developed called “Doing Stories” or “Storytelling/Story Acting” (ST/SA). In storytelling/story acting . . .

- Children tell the teacher a story – their own made-up story – as the teacher writes it down in her notebook.
- The teacher writes as many stories as there are children willing to tell them, or as time allows.
- At some point in the day, the entire class gathers around, the teacher chooses the actors (to be fair, one by one going around the circle), and narrates a child’s story as the children act it out.
- Every child who wishes to participate does.
- The story may consist of one sentence or can be up to one page in length. What matters is that children can see each other in these stories and hear the stories of their classmates.
- The teacher gets to listen to children individually, to write down and chat with the child about her imaginings, thoughts, ideas, fears, wishes, and dreams.

- The children know that what they say is important to the teacher and to their classmates. When children watch as their story is enacted by their classmates, their ideas become visible and clarified.

Using storytelling/story acting as a learning strategy

After introducing the ST/SA process to child care staff and university students, I came to realize the profound impact it had on teachers and considered its potential as a strategy for teacher learning. In particular, I observed adults:

- asking questions
- thinking about (reflecting) on what children know and how they come to know it
- watching the enthusiastic participation of children in the process of telling and acting out stories
- asking themselves and others, “What is happening and why is this so powerful for children?”
- really looking at and listening to the children in their care.

Hearing teachers’ questions and watching their excitement about what they were doing convinced me that this was the sort of “professional development” experience I wanted to extend to more teachers throughout our county and beyond. The teachers were not only providing children with all the benefits of this experience, but were also reflecting on their own practice and were eager to learn more.

The storytelling/story acting network emerges

I began introducing the ST/SA process to child care staff, elementary school teachers, and graduate early



stories. Eventually they exchanged class photographs and videotapes of their story acting, and “met” through videoconference.

The two teachers continue to learn from each other. They meet, e-mail, and telephone to tell their stories, compare notes, and share their wisdom. The teachers have found, in each other, a collaborative partner and friend. Moreover, this mini network has become a rich professional development experience for both of them.

The study group

In seeing the success of the story exchange and the teachers’ eagerness to question and support each other, the next logical step seemed to be to broaden the network by bringing teachers together to talk about their experiences with ST/SA. A study group was born of the desire of early childhood professionals to explore, with others, their children’s experiences with storytelling and story acting. They wanted to learn from each other and share ideas. The ST/SA study group, established in 2003, is set up like this:

- The teachers meet approximately 4-5 times during the year.
- The topics discussed range from simply sharing children’s experiences in working together to finding new ways to involve parents.
- Study group members continue to communicate through outside mailings, e-mail, and visits to each other’s classrooms.

Most teachers want this kind of collaboration and connection with other early childhood professionals.

childhood students in 2002. As a result, the number of teachers providing ST/SA in their classrooms increased and a cadre of oral tradition makers began to emerge. However, they were not in any way linked with one another. In addition to learning more about the children in their own classrooms, I wanted teachers to have the opportunity to share what they were learning with each other. I began the ST/SA network by:

- Inviting two teachers from different public school preschools to meet and establish a story exchange. The teachers did not know each other, but both had spent one year “doing stories” in their classrooms.
- Having the teachers agree to mail introductory letters to each other’s class, exchange their children’s stories, and then have the children act out their friends’

Recent activities and plans include:

- Child care center and primary school teachers in the group are currently planning story exchanges.
- The group planned to attend the New York City AEYC conference in October 2005 where Vivian Paley was to deliver the keynote address.
- A few have taken steps to invite parents into their programs using the many ideas of the study group.

In order to support and encourage the use of ST/SA, the study group has begun documenting what they have observed. They plan to compile their findings into a book, an article, and/or display that may benefit teachers who are just beginning the ST/SA process.

The study group members work in a variety of settings. There are toddler teachers and elementary school teachers from child care centers, public elementary schools, and family child care homes. What do they have in common? We believe it is the discoveries they have made about the children with whom they work. They have discovered that:

- Children have extraordinary ideas and vivid imaginations
- Children have intense feelings as evidenced in their expressive use of language and narrative
- Children care about each other and are fully capable of including everyone in their play.

Most teachers want this kind of collaboration and connection with other early childhood professionals. Despite inclement weather and numerous family obligations, they come to meetings after working long hours. We believe that ST/SA has helped provide the focused reflection on teaching practices that was previously lacking.

Parents in the study group

Because our study group focused on the children's stories and what we were learning from the children — and about the children — we decided to set aside a few meetings to develop strategies for bringing families into the process. After all, how could we truly help children without helping and working with families? We broke into small groups and brainstormed ways to engage families in the process. One center invited parents into the classroom to tell the teacher winter memories from their childhoods. The teacher wrote them down (just as she does with children) and then the children acted out their parents' memories. Just think of the power of this experience has for the teachers, children, and their parents!

At a study group meeting last year, a parent described what she had learned about her child by doing stories at home. The parents are delighted with the development they see taking place in their children as they “do” stories. Parents bring a different perspective to the group and one that teachers need to keep in mind as they work with the children. This collaboration, on a topic of shared interest, creates a rich focal point for parent and teacher discussions.

This collaboration, on a topic of shared interest, creates a rich focal point for parent and teacher discussions.



Creating leaders

Teachers from the study group have emerged as leaders by participating in a variety of activities outside their classrooms and outside the study group. Four study group members presented their work at the NAEYC conference in Washington, DC. Others have reached out to elementary school teachers to join us in this adventure and still others write articles for their local newspapers.

ST/SA as collaborative study

The ST/SA process makes for an excellent action-research project or a great starting point for a school or center that wishes to collaboratively develop their philosophy, vision, or curriculum — the first step in a school's journey in determining who they are and what they believe. A storytelling/story acting focus serves as a way to share in each other's stories and as a basis for discussion; at the heart of it are always the children, at their most authentic.

Conclusion

The ST/SA process is simple to learn and the cost for materials is minimal; a notebook and pencil is all that is needed. The structure can be flexible and can be fit into almost any routine. "Doing stories" requires only that teachers are curious and interested in learning about children and value their play. Creating a storytelling/story acting network is a powerful yet simple tool for reciprocal learning. As the narratives of children, teachers, and parents are played out, an oral tradition emerges. All contributions are welcomed and learning happens.

Vivian Paley's storytelling/story acting process became a focus for teacher reflection, a springboard for professional development, and a catalyst for change. By creating a Storytelling/Story Acting Network, teachers gained a better understanding of children and learning,

partnered with parents, and built a study group of teacher-researchers.

A note from Vivian Paley

Throughout this process, Vivian Paley has generously provided her encouragement and wisdom through correspondence with this author. In her most recent letter she wrote:

I do like so much the total communal approach you and your study group have taken in the storytelling/acting project. You have proven to me that, although it is possible for one teacher — or caregiver — alone to make storytelling a major focus (as Mrs. Tully does), it is far better to organize an early childhood community around these narrative connections. Wherever this is done, there are big advances in understanding and insight. Nowhere do I see a better example than exists in your group.

For more information

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A storytelling/story acting focus serves as a way to share in each other's stories and as a basis for discussion; at the heart of it are always the children, at their most authentic.

Introductions, please: Introduce the idea of storytelling/story acting in a staff meeting. Create pairs to try it out. Use the idea of "winter memories" from the article as your starting point. After stories are told/dictated, send teachers to their classrooms to find props to add to the "story acting" part. Debrief with a discussion that leads teachers to committing to try the ST/SA out in their classrooms with children.

You can do it, too!: The storytelling/story acting process introduced in this article can work with one or with many. Start it with one teacher, collaborate with a small group of teachers, or create a collaborative study group with other interested early childhood teachers. Once the door is open, consider asking families to further the collaboration.

Including families: Inviting families to join you in ST/SA sounds like wonderful fun. Families could read the stories their children wrote and act them out or create stories to act out together. Plan this as a one-time event or consider it as a repeating possibility for parents and other family members.

Using Beginnings Workshop
to Train Teachers
by Kay Albrecht

M. Parker Anderson, a certified coach and life strategist



is the President and Founder of The Anderson Advantage Group (TAAG) based in Washington, DC. Parker specializes in leadership coaching moving individuals, leaders, and organizational teams into creating powerful results for themselves and others. Parker is an elected Board Member for the International Association of Coaching (IAC) and also is a member in good standing with the International Coach Federation (ICF). For more information, go to www.taagroup.org or to contact Parker directly, call (202) 349-1467 or e-mail info@taagroup.org.

David Adelman earned his Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from the University of Maryland and graduated from Loyola College of Maryland with a Master of Education in Administration and Supervision. As an Assistant Principal, David has enjoyed working with students of all ages, and has found that the best way to meet the needs of his students is to keep growing and changing with each new experience. He uses his own experiences, not only as an educator, but also as a colleague to his wife, who is a Gifted and Talented Resource Teacher for Howard County, and as a father to his ten-year-old daughter and six-year-old son.

Coaching and Inspiring an Interactive Family Literacy Project of Excellence in a School-Based Setting

by M. Parker Anderson and David Adelman

Shifting the thinking

“Oh no” is usually the first and only response I, as a coach, get at the mere mention of inviting my educational leadership clients to engage in a Project of Excellence. And then the silence comes, the heavy breathing, the look of doom and gloom, followed by a very expressive and overly detailed explanation of how busy they are in their school setting, the extent of responsibilities that are already imposed upon them, and that the mere thought of adding an additional duty into their schedule would be truly overwhelming.

I, of course, am totally empathetic, and I begin to quietly explain that in my role as an educational coach, my role is to stretch my clients — current and future educational leaders — into possibilities of success and results that go far beyond their present high-level of performance. That over the course of the weeks and months ahead, I will be there to motivate and inspire them to identify and achieve the goal and objectives in the Project of Excellence by highlighting their unique talents, skills, and values and in so doing help them to reconnect to their personal passion and to regain the deep-seated love that they have for their work and their career.

This is when I then invite them to breathe. To breathe in the joys and delights that brought them to this place of school-based leadership and to remember the energy, commitment, and dedication they had when a simple thank you or a gentle smile was all the appreciation they needed at the end of a day's work or the end of another school year. With that, the “no” most often turns into a resounding “yes” and we embark on an effort to co-create a Project of Excellence.

Connecting to the missing link

The Project of Excellence developed by the co-author was designed to engage families in an interactive community-based school literacy program. After some reflection and debate, David recognized that one of his unique interests was in the area of supporting young children who were significantly academically challenged and that another primary interest was in the area of literacy. So these two areas of interest now became the “hook” for David in pursuing his Project of Excellence.

He genuinely seemed excited in sharing and informing his coach and others about the importance of strengthening the reading skills of young children, some of whom were challenged readers, slow readers, or non-readers. The level of success for many of these young students was often insignificant and as a consequence many of the children did not want to participate in classroom activities, acted out, and generally found themselves frustrated by the demands imposed by academic learning opportunities and the environment. Needless to say, the teachers were often frustrated themselves by these children who at times appeared unruly and demanded additional time and requirements that the teacher may not have been able to provide. At the same time, many of the parents felt disappointed in their children, in themselves, with their child's teacher, and with the school.

Although the goal of the Project became how to improve the reading skills of young children, the focus of the Project was directed toward what David calls the “missing link” in school-based literacy programs. Upon reflection and careful analysis, David recognized that teachers were receiving and vigorously pursuing high-quality professional development in the area of teaching young children to read. In addition, students



The families were given reading activities that they practiced and discussed during the monthly sessions and then were sent home to engage in these activities with their children. Some of the activities included reading aloud

Notably, some comments by the young children included that they didn't mind the extra work and they were happy to read at night with their moms or dads and that they were smart because they could read.

were regularly receiving a double-dose of reading and learning opportunities. The "missing link" for David as he assessed his passion was the involvement of the families in the reading program.

Engaging the stakeholders and beneficiaries

Armed with this information, David sought out the encouragement and financial support of the school leadership, invited the involvement of teachers in identifying potential students and assisted with follow-up activities, and he gained the active and ongoing partnership of the reading specialist. David knew that he could not do this program alone. They invited and obtained the participation of 12 very skeptical, yet clearly concerned, parents. Although other families were invited to participate, this became the core group that was willing to be involved.

The parents agreed to participate in the once a month, early evening program; they read a book that supported families and adults in teaching basic reading fundamentals; they engaged in workbook and other interactive learning activities with one another; and they were given assignments to complete independently, at home, and with their children. Child care was provided on the evenings the program took place, so the parents and family members were left to work, learn, and share within the safety of an adult only learning group.

to the children at night, identifying words and symbols to read with their children at the grocery store or while driving down the road; learning to play letter matching games; or inviting the children to read or to be read to and then to talk about or draw a picture about what they had read. Parents learned to celebrate and acknowledge the successes, both large and small, with their children. The children delighted in having the increased time and attention from their parents. The parents were happy that many of the activities were simple and uncomplicated and yet indicated they had not thought of doing many of these engaging activities.

The program was initially designed for a short, six month period of time. Some of the early comments by teachers indicated that the children were "choosing to read," they were "enjoying reading-time more," and the feeling of struggle, disinterest, and disruptions were substantially diminished. Notably, some comments by the young children included that they didn't mind the extra work and they were happy to read at night with their moms or dads and that they were smart because they could read.

The return on the investment

Program evaluations were completed and they support and substantiate the overall value of the initiative. In many ways, the parents spoke and wrote that they appreciated the school and its staff more, parents reported having an increased comfort level

It was recognized further that when parents have positive feelings toward school and the school environment, then children, too, become genuinely excited about school, which has an overwhelmingly positive impact on their behavior and school performance.

within the school environment, and they indicated that they no longer felt alone or helpless in helping their child. Families joyfully shared how they learned to help their child with their homework and that it had also helped them to learn skills that they didn't have either. At the end of the sixth month, most of the families indicated and perhaps even insisted that the project should continue the following year. In addition to wanting the program to continue, the families urged the school staff to expand the program to and for other children and their families within the school.

Perhaps even more surprisingly than all the other reported program benefits, the parents and families indicated that the program impacted them in two major areas. The first area was that the gratitude they had for the immediate advantages the program provided their children and that they, as parents, learned important life-long skills that would help not only their children but also would help their children's younger siblings, or their nieces and nephews. The other area that the families frequently highlighted was the ability to share with one another their frequently overwhelming concerns about their children's academic success or the lack thereof, the ability to convey their vulnerability and limitations, and to address or overcome their fear in not being heard, acknowledged, or recognized within the school setting.

David frequently conveyed that these results should be viewed as huge successes, as many times this group

of parents and families did not interact regularly with the school and its staff as much as they were doing now. It was recognized, further, that when parents have positive feelings toward school and the school environment, then children, too, become genuinely excited about school, which has an overwhelmingly positive impact on their behavior and school performance.

What makes this program a Project of Excellence?

A Project of Excellence is more than just another program or a new, glamorized initiative with a set of goals and objectives that have to be accomplished. A Project of Excellence requires a call to action that goes beyond the everyday rigueur of the commitment, dedication, and high-performance that leaders are required to produce daily. Excellence demands, actually stretches, the seemingly impossible into the possible. Once David accepted the charge of doing a Project of Excellence, he radically moved beyond any



PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNIE NEUGEBAUER

real or imagined fears and concerns and he stimulated, provoked, and engaged the participation and collaboration of so many others who initially may have appeared as unlikely candidates, partners, or guides. Just imagine, the likelihood of a party of one, being able to secure space, get some initial seed money, encourage staff to join as partners, stay late, candidly share from a personal experience, and to invite seemingly disenfranchised families to reconnect to the school experience and environment.

A Project of Excellence starts with the challenge put forward by a coach or a colleague that becomes a call to achievement. The five key elements required within a Project of Excellence include:

- **Leadership** — Going beyond the “no,” to overcome the doubts and fears, and even the resistance to false beliefs of “not being good enough” or the breakdown and/or whining that the project cannot be achieved due to time, money, or lack of support. A Project of Excellence helps one to find the leader within and to recognize that the Project can be even bigger than what one thinks one person can accomplish.
- **Passion** — The driving force for a Project of Excellence must be something that inspires you from within, something that stirs a level of passion within you, to accomplish more. It is the tease, it is the opportunity, it is the challenge, it is the accomplishment that motivates, stimulates, inspires you — the individual, the leader — to say “why not?”, and if so, “why not me?”.
- **Being of service** — The Project of Excellence does not have to be big but the concept must be broad and far-reaching. When you embark into

a Project of Excellence there is no need to get hung up on the numbers or how large the project must become. Many times people think that the Project has to be large in size but it does not. Also, when one is in service to others, then the opportunity for everyone to learn from one another is a valuable and an added benefit, becoming a real cross-pollination of ideas, sharing, and learning.

- **Create a space for allowing** — Leave space for the creative to emerge from within your Project of Excellence; this includes creating space for attracting all of the money needed for the project (understanding that it may not be as much as you once thought was needed). Create an opening and belief that the right people and partners will come forward and step up into helpful and supportive roles. We invite you to leave space for the unknown to emerge — in other words, be prepared to be planfully unplanful. Know from the outset that the Project of Excellence more than likely will become bigger than even what was originally planned. The seed that gets germinated following the vocal “no” will more than likely take on a life of its own.
- **Excellence** — Excellence doesn’t come with a goal. When you begin your Project of Excellence, it may feel like a small grassroots project or an incubator program and yet it will virtually expand to multi-dimensional, even multi-tiered levels. Once again, excellence doesn’t emerge from a single goal or set of objectives; it comes from a deep-seated response to a challenge that emerges from within.

Today becomes a great day for you and your coach or colleague to respond to the question, “What will be your Project of Excellence?” in your life or within your career.

Families joyfully shared how they learned to help their child with their homework and that it had also helped them to learn skills that they didn’t have either.

Shifting the thinking: The “Oh, no” response described in the article may feel familiar to you as a leader. Look for the details in this article that moved the co-author from “Oh, no” to stretch to “Oh, yes!”

Create your own Project of Excellence: Parker gives us a blueprint for creating our own Projects of Excellence. Work through the key elements with your staff to answer the question: “What will be your Project of Excellence?”

Using Beginnings Workshop
to Train Teachers
by Kay Albrecht

American Sign Language: A New Strategy to Integrate into Your Current Teaching Practices

by Jennings Prevatte

*During an outing with my 18-month-old son to a local park, he appeared frustrated when he couldn't climb a certain play structure. I went over to offer assistance. I asked him, "Do you need help?" While I asked him this question I also signed the word **help** in sign language. He immediately responded and signed **help** back. For the rest of the day he used his new sign — **help** — whenever he needed assistance climbing a play structure. It was incredible to see him respond so quickly and to use his new sign to solve his challenges.*

Getting started

An educator's first step to integrating ASL into their teaching practices is to introduce three to five words in ASL into their daily routines and activities. Children as early as four to six months can be introduced to signs. Signs that are easy to execute and are simple and meaningful are good to start with. Some suggestions are:

- milk
- eat
- more
- all done or finished
- stop

Other suggested ways to add ASL into your curriculum include:

- Labeling objects and activities in the classroom.
- Using ASL finger spelling to teach the alphabet and children's names.

Teaching ASL signs to support vocabulary during story time and to incorporate into themes and play time. For instance, if a child is playing in the housekeeping

American Sign Language in ECE

For over 30 years research has continued to prove that American Sign Language (ASL) is a valuable addition to an early education curriculum:

- It supports receptive and expressive language development in typical hearing children as well as children with disabilities.
- ASL incorporates kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learning and makes language more tangible.
- ASL supports developmental milestones and children's developing self-esteem and problem-solving skills.
- ASL is also a wonderful way to support early literacy and language development in all children.

Children learn through what they see, hear, and do. By incorporating ASL into your curriculum you are capturing the whole child — every child. You do not need to learn the structure of the language to incorporate ASL into your curriculum. What is important is to highlight the vocabulary you want children to know. An educator would emphasize the word that they want the child to remember. For instance, if you are asking an infant if they would like milk, you say, "Do you want MILK?" As you say milk you would also sign MILK. Then offer the milk to the child. This allows the child to start making concrete connections and builds their vocabulary.

— Contributed by Jennings Prevatte,
Sprouting New Beginnings

Jennings A. Prevatte, M.Ed. received her Masters in Special Education with emphasis on infants and young children from Arizona State University. Jennings is a member of the Sign2Me presenter's network. Jennings is currently Level 1 certified under the Sign2Me presenters network and a certified Career Level trainer with S*CCEEDS of Arizona. Jennings is an early childhood educator and mother. She utilizes sign with her Kindergarten students and children with special needs. Brennen, her four-year-old son, has been signing since he was 9 months old. Jennings has also presented at VSAEYC 2006 Fall Conference, Association of Supportive Child Care (ASCC) "Young Child's Conference" Spring 2007, ASCC Self-Study 2007 Spring Conference, and the Arizona Early Learning Institute Summer 2007. Jennings's passion is to bridge the gap in parent-child communication, promote early childhood literacy and help others provide a healthy and developmentally appropriate environment.



Children as early as four to six months can be introduced to signs.

Benefits of American Sign Language to Children

Incorporating ASL into an early education literacy curriculum as a valuable intervention is a meaningful and enlightening choice. The effect it has on children's learning is powerful and long-term. When early education programs utilize ASL:

- Children learn at an early age that speech has visual representations. Understanding that speech has visual symbols makes the development of reading skills come along easier as children enter school. A child learns the word "milk" could look like a glass of milk or like the ASL sign "milk" which is created by opening and shutting your hand like you are milking a cow.
- Motor coordination and language development can happen simultaneously. This is helpful to both families and caregivers. A signing child is able to continue developing their gross motor skills while continuing to communicate his or her needs. This helps decrease frustration and stress for the child and the family or caregiver.
- Children have an easier time expressing their needs and having them met. ASL is a visual language and is easier for preverbal children to utilize to communicate their needs. Using ASL with children incorporates their natural tendency to gesture and gives that gesturing or pointing a purpose — an effective way to communicate.
- Children's pre-reading skills are supported during story time, free play, and music time through the use of ASL: vocabulary development, print awareness, print motivation, letter knowledge, and narrative skills. Children learn first through what they see and do; ASL supports that learning by being a visual language.
- All learning styles are supported. When you use ASL in your curriculum you are reaching the whole child — every child — by having them hear, see, and move to express the concept or vocabulary you are teaching.
- A bridge of communication is built with preverbal children. When young children's needs are met consistently and with ease the bonding process moves along with simplicity, both with families and caregivers.
- ASL is an effective intervention model for developing pre-literacy skills since it is incorporated into all aspects of language development.
- ASL is not just a language boost for our children; it is also a brain boost. A child that has the opportunity to learn ASL benefits from increased brain development. ASL supports early brain development in the areas of: communication, attention, bonding, and visual learning.
- ASL is easy for educators to integrate into their curriculum as an addition to current teaching practices. It is important to understand that educators are not teaching ASL as a language, but utilizing the gift of ASL to support language development and enrich vocabulary development by adding a visual stimulus to an auditorial input.

— Contributed by Jenning Prevatte, *Sprouting New Beginnings*

area and is dressing a baby, an educator might say, “Oh, the BABY looks so cute dressed in that pink shirt!” While the educator says, “Baby,” she signs BABY simultaneously.

Educators who utilize ASL as a teaching strategy use it primarily as a tool to support language. Incorporating it into current teaching practices as an additional resource has been successful for many educators. It is important to remember that you are not teaching the language of ASL, but utilizing the vocabulary of ASL to highlight targeted words that you would like to emphasize in your curriculum. For instance, if you were studying a farm unit you would want to emphasize the farm animal words in ASL to support children’s learning.

ASL Resources and Research

Memory

Marilyn Daniels, in her book, *Dancing With Words: Signing for Hearing Children’s Literacy*, explains why sign language is an effective intervention in literacy (Daniels, 2001).

First, researchers understand that memory is related to language storage and retrieval, and languages are stored in the left hemisphere of the brain. Hoemann (1978, as cited in Daniels, 2001) found that ASL had a memory store and English had a memory store. This study and others concluded that “all languages, whether spoken or signed, are categorically coded and housed in distinct memory stores even in the earliest stages of their acquisition” (Daniels, 2001). This is an important fact, because “as a result of the way the human brain stores all languages, the young student learning a new language has two places to look for the information.” This dual memory store is beneficial to young children because it creates a “built-in redundancy that establishes two independent language sources for

children to use for search and recall” (Daniels, 2001).

Brain Development

The visual components of sign language create “an increase of brain activity by engaging the visual cortex and presenting an additional language to the young learner” (Daniels, 2001). With increased language activity the brain is stimulated and the formations of synapses — or connections among the brain cells — are created. “Using sign language and English in tandem provides a much richer language base of brain activity and brain growth and development” (Daniels, 2001).

Additional Support for ASL

There are several reasons why sign language is an effective intervention for young children, such as visual, movement, meaning, play, and hand. The visual aspect of sign language has a close link to brain growth and memory. “Research on ASL shows sign is perceived in a visuospatial manner by the right hemisphere of the brain and subsequently processed by the left hemisphere.” (Daniels, 2001). We understand now that children and people have different

Educators who utilize ASL as a teaching strategy use it primarily as a tool to support language.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



Butterfly

What teachers and families say about American Sign Language

"I love the idea of adding ASL into nursery rhymes and other childhood favorite stories to enhance their early literacy, specifically narrative skills. Great hands-on learning!"

"ASL is incredibly helpful for classroom management. Saying and signing "Stop, listen, and look together" is an easy and very visual transition phrase for my preschoolers."

"I use ASL to help my two-year-olds to understand their feelings and how to use their hands to show caring and gentleness. They love to sing and sign, 'When you're happy and you know it.' This helps them label what they are feeling and supports their development."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE

"It has been much easier to bond with my second child than it was with my first daughter, who we didn't use ASL with. It's a great addition to my 'parenting toolbox.'"

"My one-year-old son signs three signs: MILK, MORE, and EAT. He doesn't need to scream for what he wants, he simply signs his requests and I provide it for him. This was the best thing I could teach him."

"I work with infants and we encompass MILK, MORE, and EAT into our daily routines with children. When we are about to offer a bottle of milk to a child, we ask them, 'Do you want MILK?' as we sign MILK. We have had children as early as 6 months sign milk back to us. It is the most delightful thing to watch them grow and understand language."

"I choose to use ASL with my son because I wanted a way to communicate with him before he could speak. It was such a simple thing to add to our daily routines that made a huge difference in our lives."

"I use ASL with my daughter when we read together and sign the story. ASL is a skill that grows along with your child. Using ASL with her has helped her build early literacy skills."

— Contributed by Jennings Prevatte, *Sprouting New Beginnings*



The visual aspect of sign language has a close link to brain growth and memory.

learning styles. ASL is an effective intervention in an early education literacy curriculum because it meets the needs of all children at their level and supports their individual learning styles.

Summary

ASL is beneficial for all learning styles and stimulates and increases brain growth through a fun and entertaining activity for children. We want children to

become invested communication partners and ASL is a fun, interactive, and easy way to accomplish this goal. It builds community and gives children ways to connect with their caregivers.

References

Daniels, M. (2001). *Dancing with words: Signing for hearing children's literacy*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNING PREVATTE



ASL is beneficial for all learning styles and stimulates and increases brain growth through a fun and entertaining activity for children.

For more information

ASLpro.com [Teacher resource] [Online]

www.aslpro.com

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[Online] www.Sign2Me.com/about.php

The mission of Sprouting New Beginnings is to promote the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development of children while strengthening their bond between families and educators. Our focus is on fun and interactive ways to support the development of healthy minds and healthy children through play, music, and communication to promote school readiness. *We are devoted to planting the Seeds for Early Learning.*

Although all children develop in their own unique fashion, as a direct result of both hereditary and environmental influences, there is a certain pattern of development that applies to nearly all children. It is crucial for today's educators to have a thorough understanding of that development. Schools today play an important role in the socialization of children and therefore it is critical that teachers know how to best socialize their students. An understanding of basic human developmental stages can be used to gear the teacher's lesson plans in order to maximize the success of students in