



What is the best age to start reading to a deaf or hard of hearing child?

Day one! And continuously afterwards. For many years, we have known that reading aloud to children is THE key to learning to read. Nevertheless, for many children who are deaf or hard of hearing, the experience of being read to by a parent or teacher may be all too rare. Talking to teachers and parents, most of whom are hearing, I find that the most common reason they hesitate to read to deaf children is that they are unsure of the best way to do it.

Lydia Song, for example, had a lot of information and knew that it was important for her to read to her preschool son, but she was really stumped. She would say, “OK, I understand. I know I should do this, but HOW? What am I supposed to do?”

Ann Lynn Smith and her Mom faced another common problem. Ann Lynn’s mom was not a fluent ASL signer.

When her daughter was very young, she had someone come to her home regularly and teach her how to sign books so that they could read with each other. Ann Lynn, who is now majoring in English at Gallaudet, remembers this as being very important for her development.

From a review of the literature plus my own observations, I have identified fifteen principles. Also, available on its own or as a companion to this text is a videotape which demonstrates the principles in action. No matter what educational approach or communication strategy parents subscribe to for their deaf children, the visually-oriented principles demonstrated in the video and described in the manual will be of value to parents and teachers who understand the importance of reading books to deaf children. Our goal is to help you share good books and the satisfactions of reading with the deaf children in your life.



Principles for Reading to Deaf Children

- 1. Deaf readers translate stories using American Sign Language**
- 2. Deaf readers keep both languages (ASL and English) visible**
- 3. Deaf readers elaborate on the text**
- 4. Deaf readers re-read stories on a “storytelling” to “story reading” continuum**
- 5. Deaf readers follow the child’s lead**
- 6. Deaf readers make what is implied explicit**

- 7. Deaf readers adjust sign placement to fit the story**
 - 8. Deaf readers adjust signing style to fit the character**
 - 9. Deaf readers connect concepts in the story to the real world**
 - 10. Deaf readers use attention maintenance strategies**
 - 11. Deaf readers use eye gaze to elicit participation**
 - 12. Deaf readers engage in role play to extend concepts**
 - 13. Deaf readers use ASL variations to sign repetitive English phrases**
 - 14. Deaf readers provide a positive and reinforcing environment**
 - 15. Deaf readers expect the child to become literate**
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1 Deaf readers translate stories using American Sign Language

When parents or teachers read stories to deaf children, one of their most common questions is whether to sign the stories in American Sign Language (ASL) or in a manual code developed in an effort to represent English. Parents and teachers worry that if they don't try to sign every word in English word order, the deaf children will not pick up on the English in the text. However, research on how Deaf mothers and fathers read to their children clearly shows they use ASL to read stories to their children.¹ In fact, one study notes that children find stories told in ASL more interesting and engaging.²



ASL is clearly effective in holding the interest and building the understanding of young learners. Throughout my years teaching classes from preschool to high school, I have watched Deaf readers turn kids on to reading by interpreting books into ASL. The day after seeing a story read in ASL, I know the children will line up to borrow that same book from the school library.

Parents and teachers want to know:

If I use American Sign Language, how will the children learn the English of the text?

Deaf adults who read aloud to deaf children wait for the child's interest to shift from through-the-air language (ASL) to print language (English). Through successive story readings, the child begins to realize that the word order of the two languages is different, but the same ideas can be conveyed in both. By referring back to ASL, the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of English is gradually acquired.

NOTES

¹ *Lartz & Lestina, 1995; Mather, 1989; Shick & Gale, 1995; Whitesell, 1991.*

² *Shick & Gale, 1995.*

2 Deaf readers keep both languages (ASL and English) visible

Although readers use ASL, they also place great importance on the written English text. Deaf parents demonstrate this when they read to their children by keeping the English print visible while they interpret the story in ASL.³ This allows the children to look freely from parent (ASL) to the book (English), making sense of both, while observing that the meaning originates in the printed text.

Researchers have observed Deaf parents frequently calling attention to the text in a story, then signing, then pointing again to the text to help the child connect to both languages. In one videotaped reading session, a Deaf child interrupted his mother to ask, “Where does it say that?” The mother traced her finger along the part of the story she had just signed. The child looked from the page to his mother, back to the page again, then looked again to his mother and with a nod signaled that he was ready for her to proceed with the rest of the story. It was clear that he was generating meaning in both languages.

What is the best way to hold onto the book and sign?

Maintain physical closeness during story reading, especially for young children. Holding the child at an angle on your lap with the book between the two of you, or sitting side-by-side on a sofa with the book spread across your laps or propped on a pillow, leaves hands free for signing. If you sit facing each other, a gentle touch now and then will hold the child's attention. The English text, the illustrations, and the signs should all be visible to the child.

I have a deaf child and a hearing child. Must I set up separate reading times for them?

It is important to separate and validate both languages, so setting up separate times for reading aloud with voice or reading in ASL is a good idea. However, there's no need to separate the children for every reading unless they want it that way. Deaf children may pick up on rhythms or other aspects of English even if they don't hear the words during voice reading, and hearing siblings can learn new signs and respect for ASL during the signed readings.

My son is mainstreamed into a hearing classroom with an interpreter. Should he read from the book himself or watch the interpreter sign what the teacher is saying when the teacher reads aloud?

Both options should be available. The interpreter should always interpret what the teacher is reading out loud, but the book should also be open and visible so the student can see the text. When teachers are trained in the use of interpreters, they should be reminded to pause occasionally so a deaf student can take a break from watching the interpreter for a moment or glance down at the book.

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³ Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993; Lartz & Lestina, 1995; Mather, 1989; Schleper, 1995b; Stewart, Bonkowski, & Bennet, 1990.

3 Deaf readers elaborate on the text

A Deaf teacher was reading the story *Noisy Nora* by Rosemary Wells to a group of preschool children.⁴ The following is an adaptation of what the teacher signed:

“Daddy is busy. So, Nora goes over to see Mommy, taps Mommy, and says “Mommy.” But Mommy has to pick up the baby and burp the baby. Maybe the baby has to burp. So she is patting him on the back. Nora tries to get Mommy’s attention, but Mommy is busy with the baby.”

This is what the text on the page said: *“Jack needed burping.”*

Where did all the extra information come from? The additional commentary comes from the illustrations, from what has happened in the story thus far, from the underlying theme of the book, and from questions and comments of the deaf children who are enjoying the story.

The practice of elaborating on a picture book text seems to be common for most good readers to young children, and has also been observed in Deaf mothers.⁵ This suggests that when reading to deaf children, parents and teachers need not be excessively concerned about knowing a sign for each and every word within the text, but should place a higher pri-



ority on engaging the child and conveying the story. It reminds us that teaching English need not be a deadly serious activity. Entertainment and fun set the stage for more specific language learning at another time.

How can we develop ASL fluency?

Whether or not parents become skilled signers, it's a good idea to look outside the home for language models who use ASL as their primary language, as well as opportunities to enjoy the gifts of fine ASL storytellers. I encourage schools to provide plenty of ASL role models for parents and students to emulate. Parents may also be able to arrange social interactions for their children with peers or adults who use ASL by contacting a local Deaf club or sports league.

In addition, some libraries offer ASL story reading sessions, and many more libraries may be willing to include ASL storytelling and story reading if parents express interest. If the library regularly sponsors read-alouds for hearing children, an interpreter would extend this opportunity to deaf children as well. There are also several good videos of ASL story-reading available that parents can buy or ask their library to purchase. See the resource list on p.49 for suggestions.

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⁴ *Ertling, 1991.*

⁵ *Andrews & Taylor, 1989.*

4 Deaf readers re-read stories on a “storytelling” to “story reading” continuum

Like their hearing counterparts, deaf children who are learning to read enjoy having the same story read over and over to them. Trelease (1995) explains this is a natural and necessary part of language development: “These re-readings coincide with the way children learn. Like their parents, they are most comfortable with the familiar, and when they are relaxed, they are better able to absorb. The repetition improves their vocabulary, sequencing, and memory skills. Research shows that preschoolers often ask as many questions (and sometimes the same questions) after a dozen readings of the same book, because they are learning language in increments—not all at once. Each reading often brings an inch or two of meaning to the story.”

Deaf readers extend the text liberally the first time they read a story, but each successive reading of the book has less and less elaboration. The signing comes closer and closer to the actual text. What occurs is a continuum, moving from the inclusion of background, context, or other details in ASL toward a more direct representation of the English text.⁶ The same approach is used by teachers in a process known as shared reading, where the same story is read and re-read in the classroom with a slightly different focus each time to help beginning readers learn about printed text.⁷

A logical conclusion is that readers use less elaboration in subsequent readings of the same text because they have already engaged the child's interest during the initial readings of the story. As the child becomes comfortable and familiar with the elements of the story, attention is subtly re-directed to the elements of language.

Here is a general progression to keep in mind that skilled readers seem to follow:

- Introduce the cover of the book. Show and sign the title, author, and illustrator. Talk a bit about what the book might be about.
- Show the children the pictures. Take your time reading and showing the pictures. While reading, be sure to hold the book at the children's eye level and make sure they can see all the pictures on each page.
- Follow the child's lead. If the child wants to touch the book, point to a picture, or turn the pages back or ahead, let them explore as they want to. When the child is done, you can resume reading. In fact, children should be encouraged to talk about the book while the reading is going on.
- You will probably read the same book over and over. Children want to repeat the same story many times. Re-reading is an important part of developing a child's competence in story grammar.
- When you're done, invite the child to connect the book to his or her own experiences.
- Many children will want to read or tell all or parts of the book back to you. Encourage them to do so and praise their efforts.

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⁶ *Schleper, 1995a.*

⁷ *Schleper, 1995a.*

5 Deaf readers follow the child's lead

Skilled readers let children take the lead during read-aloud sessions.⁸ This can be as simple as inviting the deaf child to select the book to be read or permitting the child to turn the pages. Deaf readers tend to allow time for the child to examine the pictures and text in a book and wait patiently for the child to look up before continuing to read the story.

Following the child's lead also involves adjusting the reading style to fit the child's developmental level. With young children, or children who have had limited exposure



to books, this may mean initially focusing on what is happening in the pictures. As children grow older and their attention span increases, adults tend to read more complete versions of the texts. This can be illustrated

by the following example, in which a Deaf father was observed reading to his children, a daughter, 3, and a son, 6.⁹

The father initially read *Little Red Riding Hood* by William Wegman to his young daughter. This book has lots of text that accompanies photos of dogs dressed up as characters in the story. As the father read the story, his daughter turned the pages. She was clearly interested in the pictures. Following his daughter's lead, the father allowed her lots of time to examine each picture; when she looked back at him, he signed what was happening. During this reading, the father essentially ignored the printed text and instead retold the familiar tale at a level of detail that he knew would keep her engaged.

In contrast, when he read to his 6-year-old son, the father followed the text, carefully translating into ASL. The son also held the book and turned pages. The father traced his finger along the text before signing each paragraph, and occasionally paused to allow his son to fill in the next part of the text. Because the son was already beginning to read on his own, the father was again following his child's lead.

I'm having difficulties beginning to read chapter books with my daughter, who is six years old—pictures help her and me. How do you suggest beginning to read good literature (chapter books without pictures) and still keep her focused and interested?

It is normal for a six-year-old to want pictures. Most do, whether the child is deaf or hearing. You should follow her lead and let her have books with pictures until she shows that she is ready to move on. Books appropriate for your daughter's age often have a well-developed, complex plot but still contain illustrations that support the story.

It also seems true that while Deaf parents read to their children when they are younger, most of them decrease the time spent reading with their children as they get older. This is probably a factor of the complexities of translating sophisticated texts.

Researchers are investigating further the reading aloud of sophisticated texts by parents and teachers to deaf and hard of hearing students. Reading aloud is a critical piece of educational programming for hearing students of all ages. Deaf and hard of hearing students deserve no less.



NOTES

⁸ *Ewoldt, 1994; Maxwell, 1984; Van der Lem & Timmerman, 1990.*

⁹ *Schleper, 1995a.*

“The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”

— *National Academy of Education
Commission on Reading, 1985*

6 Deaf readers make what is implied explicit

When Deaf readers sign a story, they tend to add information to express ideas that are clearly implied but not directly stated in the text. For example, when a Deaf father read *Little Red Riding Hood* to his daughter, he explained how the wolf donned the clothing of Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother. Then the father added, "He is trying to fool the girl."

This principle can be further illustrated by examining how Deaf readers who are fluent in ASL interpret the story, *The Dancing Fly*, by Joy Cowley. This is a predictable story about a pesky fly that buzzes around a store and annoys a storekeeper, who tries unsuccessfully to swat the fly with a fly swatter. The first couple of lines of the text are, "There was a little fly, and it flew into the store. It danced on the window, and it danced on the door."



I observed 10 different deaf readers sign the story. Inevitably, each reader began the story in a similar manner: First he or she introduced the fly, then added a sign for "arrogant" or "big-headed." The addition of information to clearly state the main idea or moral of the story appears to be

a linguistic feature of ASL discourse. Although the text never mentions the fly's personality, this characteristic is implied throughout the story through the struggle between the storekeeper and the fly.

Like many of the principles observed with Deaf parents and Deaf teachers, this technique appears to be intuitive on the part of these readers. However, one can surmise that such a practice directly affects the deaf children's comprehension and reading achievement. Linguists have shown that narratives in ASL and English present the same information in different ways. Fluent Deaf signers translate the English of the text into structurally correct ASL, helping deaf children to keep the two languages separate and distinct.

7 Deaf readers adjust sign placement to fit the story

Eventually, the father and daughter discussed in Principle 6 above came to the last page in their book about Little Red Riding Hood. In the picture, Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother were eating cake with the woodsman. The father asked, “Are you hungry?” When his daughter nodded, the father mimed taking a piece of cake from the picture and offered it to his daughter. His use of sign placement helped his daughter interact with the story.

Modifying the location of a sign is a common strategy used by adults to invite children to relate to the printed text.¹⁰ Occasionally, the reader will place a sign directly on a child, such as making the sign for “cat” directly on the child’s cheek. Other times, the reader will make the sign on the book or illustration. For example, a parent might use the classifier for a vehicle, place the sign on an illustration of a car, and then move the sign along the picture in a book as if the car is driving along the street. It appears that variation in placement of signs from the usual signing space to the page or to the child encourages deaf children to become comfortable with the printed text.

“When reading tonight, Trey and I read together. He signed “How did frog escape” and “Jump frog jump” every time we got to that part of the story. Trey also corrected me when I incorrectly signed something in the story. It was very enjoyable reading with him.”

—*Mary Balding*
Honolulu, HI



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¹⁰ *Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993; Lartz & Lestina, 1995; Van der Lem & Timmerman, 1990.*

8 Deaf readers adjust signing style to fit the character

Many common characteristics are associated with the expressive aspects of speech such as volume and tone. Even simple variations of pitch and intensity can give life to the characters in a story. Hearing children can easily identify and differentiate the high, squeaky voice of Baby Bear from the Papa Bear's gruff, booming voice in *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. In a similar way, parents and caregivers adjust their signing style to bring characters to life.

Research on Deaf parents demonstrates that they make use of extensive variation in signing style to add dimension to the characters and make the story more interesting for their deaf children.¹¹ For example, a reader might adopt a more rigid, stilted signing style to portray an uptight person, use miniature signs and a very small signing space to depict someone who is timid, or exaggerate signs to show a flamboyant character.

Visual and tactile variations of ASL can also be used to express sound-based concepts and hold attention or add interest to the story. For example, one Deaf reader indicated a door slamming by using facial expression and body language to emphasize a story character's startled reaction to the loud and unexpected noise.

“I signed on the book, also on my child. Katie copies and adds things to the book, like counting the objects on the page. Also we discussed the Kitty and how the Kitty might have taken the shoe (predicted). Katie said the cat stole the shoe. And it turned out that yes the cat had the shoe.”

—*Susie Ahlfield*
Kapaa, HI



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- ¹¹ *Lartz & Lestina, 1995; Mather, 1989; Stewart, Bonkowski, & Bennett, 1990; Whitesell, 1991.*

9 Deaf readers connect concepts in the story to the real world

While a Deaf father was reading *Whales, the Gentle Giants* (Milton, 1989) to his children, he paused periodically to help them connect the story to their own experiences. They had chosen this book because it reminded them of the movie *Free Willy*. Peter, the father, read a section of the text about the blue whale. Then he turned to three-year-old Jessica and asked,

“Are whales big or small?”

“Big,” Jessica replied.

“Really big,” Peter agreed.

Then Jeremy walked over to the far end of the family room to show Jessica how big a blue whale really is. “That big?” he asked.



“No, bigger! Go much farther,” said Peter. Jeremy shook his head. He couldn’t believe it. Peter tried to help the children relate the whale’s size to objects in their own lives. He said, “It’s huge. Think of the football field at the high school. That’s big, right? This whale is bigger!”

Jeremy remained skeptical, so Peter called his son’s attention back to the book and showed him a diagram of an elephant next to a blue whale. “Here’s an elephant,” Peter said, “and here’s the whale. Much bigger.”

Successful readers are known to constantly relate experiences of their own to the characters and events in the stories they are reading. Parents and caregivers help children build this skill by regularly pointing out connections between the story and the lives of the children while they are reading. For example, when the same father read a story about a cat lapping up some milk, he added, “You know, the same as Sparky (their dog) drinks his water.” The child laughed and nodded, clearly making the connection with their shared experience.

To keep reading in the real world

Parents of deaf children will want to take advantage of every opportunity for interaction with printed text, including captioned television. We wish to stress that television with captions is not a substitute for reading books aloud with children. That said, when children do watch television, the more captions the better. Some ideas for using television as a teaching tool are:

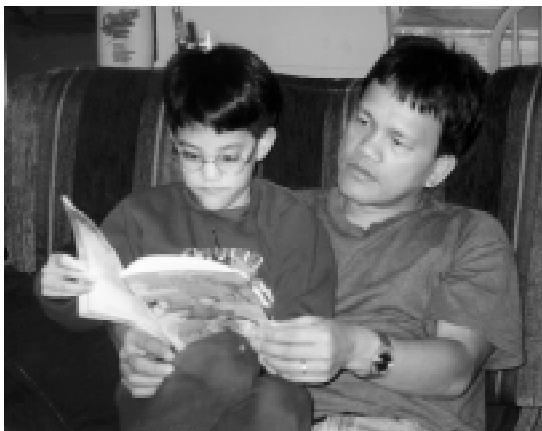
- Encourage a family attitude that viewing television with captions should only be done to watch a specific show, not just to see “what’s on.” Children should not just be plopped down to watch television with captions. That, in itself, will not develop literacy. Television with captions is just a piece of what needs to be done in fostering literacy.
- Make television watching a family event. Use the story lines and characters to compare them to books you have read together. Discuss new information to stimulate family discussion.
- Rent or borrow movies with captions. Pause the VCR about every fifteen minutes or so at convenient places in the movie to “check in,” asking children about the plot or a character, or working together to make predictions about what will happen next.

10 Deaf readers use attention maintenance strategies

It is perfectly natural for Deaf children to occasionally look away or down at the book while an adult is signing a story. Although this can be frustrating, experienced readers usually wait patiently until the child looks up again, then continue to read.*¹²

Parents also use a variety of tactile strategies to focus their child's attention. Most commonly, a parent will lightly tap

the child on the shoulder or leg to get attention. If the parent is sitting alongside the child, the parent will often gently nudge the child or shift the book to



first draw the child's attention back to the text and then to the waiting parent.

Eye contact appears to be critical for maintaining attention, but parents and caregivers also seem to use other subtle facial expressions and nonverbal gestures to monitor the child's understanding and involvement. Ongoing contact of some kind seems to be the key.

Readers also recognize the power of peripheral vision. They note that deaf children pick up a lot even when they are not looking directly at the reader's signs. And, since the reader will often read the same story over and over again, the child will have plenty of opportunities to get information missed during any one reading.

One behavior sometimes noticed with hearing parents and teachers, but absent with Deaf parents, is grabbing the child by the chin and forcibly turning the child's face. While young children sometimes do this with their parents, it is not a desirable behavior to reinforce.

Being read to during the "critical period" for language acquisition (between birth and age 13 or so) is just one strategy for developing literacy. One teacher put it this way, "Reading to students, every day without fail, sets a tone of sharing and a comfortable rhythm for students and teachers alike; it puts imagination in motion and helps nurture a love of literature. That's a good place to start."

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¹² Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993; Andrews & Taylor, 1987; Lartz & Lestina, 1995; Van der Lem & Timmerman, 1990.

11 Deaf readers use eye gaze to elicit participation

Eye gaze—the direction the eyes are looking during various points in a story or conversation—is clearly a significant consideration. One study found that Deaf teachers used two types of eye gaze while reading aloud—individual and group gaze.¹³ The

teacher used group gaze effectively to hold the attention of all of the children, and individual gaze to direct questions or comments to a particular child. Inappropriate eye gaze, however, can lead to a breakdown in communication. One teacher, for example, commented to her class, “Some of you don’t know this story.” Instead of including the whole group, her gaze was focused on just one student. The child, feeling singled out, replied defensively, “I know! I know!” It is clear that eye gaze plays a key role in maintaining attention and eliciting responses during read aloud sessions.



NOTES

¹³ Mather, 1989.

“For many years, educators have known that children who come from homes in which storybook reading takes place have an educational advantage over those who do not. These children are more likely to read before they are given formal instruction, and those who are not early readers are more likely to learn to read with ease when formal instruction does begin.”

— Dorothy Strickland and
Denny Taylor, 1989

12 Deaf readers engage in role play to extend concepts

A mother and her four-year-old son incorporated role play into a session with the book *Roll Over! A Counting Song* by Merle Peek. This story is about a boy who shares his bed with nine animals. Each time they roll over, one animal falls out of bed.

During the book sharing session, the deaf mother and her son were sitting on the bed as the mother read, “Ten in the bed and the little one said, ‘Roll over! Roll over!’ They all rolled over and one fell out.” When she finished the section, her son stood up and fell dramatically off his bed, landing exactly in the same spot as the monkey in the book.



He climbed back onto the bed, and as his mother went on reading, he continued to role play the animals, each time falling happily out of bed.

Several researchers point out that Deaf readers often act out parts of a story to reinforce meaning.¹⁴ A teacher who was reading *The Three Little Kittens* to a group of preschool deaf children noticed that the children were not attending to the story. Quickly, the teacher mimed the kittens tracking mud into the house. Then she brought the children into the role play by “becoming” the mother cat and scolding the kittens. The children’s grins demonstrated their renewed interest and involvement.

NOTES

¹⁴ Ewoldt, 1984; Mather, 1989; Rodgers, 1989.

13 Deaf readers use ASL variations to sign repetitive English phrases

Many predictable books for young children have phrases that are repeated over and over again. For example, “He huffed and he puffed and he blew the house down,” from the *Three Little Pigs*, or “Fee! Fie! Fo! Fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!” from *Jack and the Beanstalk*. When Deaf readers read these repetitive phrases, they don’t always sign them the exact same way. In fact, evidence suggests that readers vary the way they sign repetitive English phrases.

Sometimes the use of sign variations helps to convey increased intensity or “volume,” such as when each successive goat crosses over the bridge in the story, *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. The English words remain the same, but Deaf readers will use different ASL translations each time the English phrase repeats. In these situations, the children see the English text remain constant in the book, while also seeing the phrase translated into ASL in various ways.

These sign variations may be used to maintain interest in the story. For example, in the story *Roll Over! A Counting Song* by Merle Peek, the chant, “Roll over! Roll over!” is repeated 10 times. While reading this book to her son, a Deaf mother pointed to the English text (which was the same each time), but then signed the text in various ways. Sometimes she used a classifier to show the animals rolling together. Other times, she used a different sign for “roll.” The variety of ways she

used to express the concept seemed to enhance her son's interest in the story.

Readers demonstrate that there are multiple ways to convey the English meaning in ASL. In the process, the readers are also developing the children's vocabulary, and, one can assume, promoting the children's ability to make meaning from the English text. These skills become increasingly important as the children move on to more complicated and demanding texts.

Fingerspelling

Many parents and teachers have questions about fingerspelling English words to pre-school and elementary children. Fingerspelling is a naturally occurring feature of ASL.¹⁵ I encourage parents and teachers to use fingerspelling with infants, toddlers, and young children. Deaf people generally process the whole shape of a fingerspelled word, rather than the individual letters. In normal signed conversation, it is the meaning, not the English word, that is being represented by fingerspelling.

For example, suppose we have a child who is two years old who has enjoyed a visit by a friend, Beth. The next day the child will ask his mother, "Where's . . .?" Although the child's expressive fingerspelling may not be very clear or correct, his mother understands through context and repeats, "B-E-T-H is at home," fingerspelling the whole name. Later, the child may ask about "B" or "B-E" but his mother still spells out "B-E-T-H." Deaf children pick up parts of fingerspelled signs and expand them into fingerspelling the whole and correct sign with repetition, just as hearing children learn to pronounce English words correctly over time.

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¹⁵ *Blumenthal-Kelly, 1994; Maxwell, 1988.*

14 Deaf readers provide a positive and reinforcing environment

Reading is supposed to be fun. It is also supposed to involve the construction of meaning through a lively interaction between reader and text. Research with Deaf parents shows they tend to set up a positive, interactive environment.¹⁶ In one reading session, a Deaf father was reading *Little Red Riding Hood* to his daughter.¹⁷ His daughter tapped his knee, then turned back to the previous page and pointed, “Look at the teeth!” she said.

“Yeah, the teeth are sharp! Like fangs,” the father replied, reinforcing the child’s observation.

“They have blood on them,” the daughter pointed out.

The father questioned this, pointing to the illustration. “Where?” he asked. They examined the picture together. “Maybe you’re right. They do have



blood!” the father said. Instead of ignoring his daughter, or telling her she was wrong, the father let her make her point. His positive, reinforcing response helped make their interaction with the text enjoyable. And when the read-aloud sessions are enjoyable, it is more likely that the child will retain fond, positive associations with books and reading.

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¹⁶ Akamatsu & Andrews, 1993; Andrews & Taylor, 1987; Ewoldt, 1984; Rodgers, 1989.

¹⁷ Schleper, 1995a.

15 Deaf readers expect the child to become literate

A final principle that seems to underlie the read-aloud sessions between Deaf adults and children is a positive belief in the children's abilities. One researcher observed a Deaf teacher with a reputation for producing good, enthusiastic readers, hoping to determine which of her teaching strategies and practices seemed most critical.¹⁸ After observing for an extended period of time, the researcher believed she had discovered the key:

The teacher expected them to become literate.

Most parents and caregivers do not read to their children in order to teach them English or to instruct them in the reading process. They want to share close, focused time with their children, to expand their knowledge of the world, to support the growth of their imagination, and, in many cases, to pass along their own love of books. While they may expect some academic benefit for the children, that is clearly secondary. When Schleper



(1995a) asked Deaf parents if they thought their children would become literate in English, they all replied, “Of course!” There was never any doubt.

Learning from Deaf readers

English literacy is still the burning question in the education of deaf children. It may be that in our zeal to share what we know with deaf children, we have overlooked a most important resource. Hearing parents and teachers and deaf adults who have not grown up with ASL can look to culturally Deaf adults to find excellent models of effective strategies for reading to deaf children. The book-sharing practices of Deaf readers who have mastered English and passed that legacy on to their children make the answers to most of our questions readily apparent. Learning from Deaf adults can help all of us—adults and children alike—enjoy exploring good books together.

NOTES

¹⁸ Whitesell, 1991.

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A Look at the Research

Akamatsu, C.T., & Andrews, J.F. (1993). It takes two to be literate: Literacy interactions between parent and child. *Sign Language Studies*, 81, 333-360.

As part of a larger study on dialogues between parent and child, Akamatsu and Andrews taped interactions between culturally Deaf parents and their Deaf son at six month intervals over four years. The boy was read to almost from birth, and he was raised in a literate environment, with parents who read regularly, used a TTY, decoder, and captioned videotapes, and wrote often in front of their child. One aspect of the study examined booksharing between the parents and child. The parents translated the stories into ASL, used eye gaze and pointing to keep the boy's attention, connected the pictures and events in the stories to the child's experiences, signed directly on the book, and used fingerspelling to draw attention to the printed text.

Andrews, J.F., & Taylor, N.E. (1987). From sign to print: A case study of picture book 'reading' between mother and child. *Sign Language Studies*, 56, 261-274.

Andrews and Taylor examined the strategies used by a Deaf mother when reading a book to her three and one half year old son. The mother was observed giving her son necessary support to respond correctly to questions and discussions about ideas in the book. She rarely responded to her son in a critical or negative manner, using touching and eye contact to maintain attention. The mother involved the child in the reading by relating the book to his experiences, elaborating on the text, requesting some re-

sponses, and checking comprehension.

Bishop, J. , and Gregory, S. (1985). Mothers and teachers looking at books with deaf children. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 1, 149-161.

As part of a larger study which examined the difference in linguistic demands from home to school, Bishop and Gregory looked at interactions between deaf children and adults during booksharing.

Twenty-four children were videotaped in one-to-one situations while looking at books with mothers and teachers. The researchers found that teachers' dialogues with the children were longer than with the mothers. However, the children took less initiative and frequently responded more passively with the teachers than with their mothers. The results suggest that the children experience longer and more elaborate dialogues in book-reading with teachers, but with their mothers are able to exert more control in initiating and sustaining conversations.

Ewoldt, Caroline (1994). Booksharing: Teachers and parents reading to deaf children. In ***Under the Whole Language Umbrella: Many Cultures, Many Voices***, Alan D. Flurkey and Richard J. Meyer, eds., Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 331-342.

As part of a longitudinal study of young Deaf children engaging in literacy, parents and teachers were videotaped annually as they shared books with 30 Deaf children. The children were approximately 3 years old at the beginning of the study and 7 years old at the end. During the reading sessions, the researchers observed messages that were inadvertently being conveyed by teachers and parents. These included the idea that adults are authorities about reading, and that reading should be verbatim and error-free. In spite of this, the children created their own views of literacy. The children showed that they

could interact directly with a text (e.g., signing directly to characters in the story), and they challenged the authority of the text, conveying the message that the text is not infallible.

Lartz, Maribeth N., Lestina, L. Jill (1995). Strategies deaf mothers use when reading to their young deaf or hard of hearing children. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 140(4), 358-362.

This study identified strategies three Deaf mothers use while reading to their children aged 3 to 5 years old. The reading sessions were videotaped and transcribed by a native Deaf signer. The six categories/strategies that all mothers used include 1) sign placement (signing phrases on the book or with a book); 2) text paired with sign demonstration (pointing to text, elaborating with ASL explanations, then to text); 3) real world connection between text and child's experience; 4) attention maintenance (tapping shoulder or lap, elbow nudging, and moving book); 5) facial tone and body posture demonstrate character changes; 6) non-manual signals as questions (nose-twitch, lowered and raised eyebrows, and mouth movement). The authors contend that these strategies may promote higher reading abilities in Deaf children.

Lartz, Maribeth Nelson, and McCollum, Jeanette (1990). Maternal questions while reading to deaf and hearing twins: A case study. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 135, 235-240.

This study examined the frequency and types of questions that a hearing mother used during storybook reading sessions with her 3-year-old twin daughters. One was hearing and one was deaf. Results indicated that the mother asked almost twice as many questions of the hearing twin as she did of the deaf twin. The types of questions also varied. With the deaf twin, the mother asked simple ques-

tions such as “What’s that?” and “What color?” In contrast, the questions asked of the hearing twin were more complex, such as requesting opinions (“Is that kitty very happy?”), picture matching (“Where’s the picture of the kitty playing with he mouse?”), and inferences (“Which one is the mama cat?”).

Mather, Susan A. (1989). “Visually oriented teaching strategies with deaf preschool children.” In Lucas, Ceil (ed.) *The Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community*. NY: Academic Press, 165-187.

Mather analyzed a native and non-native signer as they read a story to preschool children. The native signer used eight distinct patterns to communicate with the students. She 1) asked wh-questions instead of yes/no questions; 2) elicited answers, then probed for more response; 3) encouraged the students to take risks; 4) used classifiers to fit actions in the story; 5) used role playing to expose students to the visual concepts in the pictures; 6) allowed students to see text and signs at the same time; 7) adapted signs to fit pictures in the story; and 8) changed English words that show sound-related concepts to signs that show visual concepts.

Maxwell, Madeline (1984). “A deaf child’s natural development of literacy.” *Sign Language Studies*, 44, 191-224.

Maxwell’s case study examined the interactions of a Deaf child and her Deaf parents as the child became literate. The child was observed over a five-year period during 22 videotaped sessions of 2 hours or more. Beginning just before age 2, the child progressed through six levels of story knowledge, from labeling/naming pictures, stating propositions, reading pictures, going beyond pictures, projecting into stories, to reading independently for meaning. The development was similar to that observed in hearing

children.

Mogford, K., Gregory, S., Keay, S. (1979). "Picture book reading with mother: A comparison between hearing-impaired and hearing children at 18 and 20 months. *The Journal of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf*, 3(2), 43-45.

The researchers conducted a study of the interaction that occurs between hearing mothers and their deaf children during picturebook reading sessions. A five-minute period of picturebook reading was videotaped twice in every three-month period for six children at 18 and 24 months, and compared with groups of hearing children at the same age. The results indicate differences between hearing and deaf groups in the way dialogues are structured, particularly by 24 months of age. The hearing mothers with hearing children tended to move into more complex language and give more feedback, while the hearing mothers of deaf children were more likely just to label the pictures. Both sets of mothers expanded comments with reference to the book, but mothers of deaf children tended to expand within the book context rather than diverting the child's attention away from the book. Mothers of deaf children also reported that they participate less often in picturebook reading and for shorter periods, primarily because they struggled with maintaining attention. These mothers also tried to control and channel their children's attention, rather than following and elaborating upon the children's interests.

Rogers, Deborah (1989). "Show me bedtime reading." *Perspectives for Teachers of the Hearing Impaired*, 8(1), September/October.

Rogers' study examined primary-aged children who were read bedtime stories four times a week for one school year. Pre and post tests indicated gains in students' abilities to follow complex sequences of

events, recall details, and comprehend story structure. Students' videotaped expressive language samples showed much more sophisticated through-the-air language. Observations suggested that the students enjoyed having stories re-read to them and engaged in a process of shared reading where students predicted upcoming events in the stories.

Schick, Brenda, and Gale, Elaine (1995). "Preschool deaf and hard of hearing students' interactions during ASL and English storytelling. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 140(4), 363-370.

This study compared the quality and quantity of interaction by deaf and hard of hearing children during stories told in different language conditions. Twelve stories were told to preschool children in three conditions: using pure ASL, using pure SEE II, and using SEE II with ASL features and ASL structures. All interactions of four profoundly deaf and hard of hearing children, ages 4 and 5, were coded. All children had been in a preschool program that used SEE II but had regular storytelling in ASL. The results indicate that children participated more and initiated more interactions during story conditions that were either pure ASL or contained ASL signing. In addition, children referred to the book more often during the ASL condition. In general, the data indicated that children might find stories told using ASL more interesting or engaging.

Schleper, David R. (1995). "Reading to deaf children: Learning from deaf adults." *Perspectives in Education and Deafness*, 13(4), 4-8.

Schleper examined the research on deaf parents and deaf teachers when reading to deaf children, coupled with his own observations, and identified 12 strategies commonly used by deaf adults when reading to deaf children. The strategies Schleper identified include: use American Sign Language; keep both En-

glish and ASL visible; elaborate on the text; re-read stories on a “storytelling” to “story reading” continuum; follow the child’s lead; adjust sign placement and style to fit story; connect concepts to the real world; use attention maintenance strategies; role play to extend concepts; use eye gaze to elicit participation; provide a positive and reinforcing environment; and expect the child to become literate.

Schleper, David R. (1995). “Read it again and again...and again.” *Perspectives in Education and Deafness*, 14 (2), 16-19, 24.

Schleper described the process he used to read and re-read a story to his early elementary class. The shared reading process he used involved reading a book over and over again on successive days, inviting students to join in and read along, having the students role play sections of the story, creating new written versions of the story, and reading the story independently. Observational evidence of students’ written retellings suggested that the students learned the English from the text while signing in ASL.

Stewart, D., Bonkowski, N, and Bennett D. (1990). Considerations & implications when reading stories to young deaf children. *Occasional Paper No. 13*. East Lansing, MI: Institute for Research in Teaching, MSU.

Stewart and his colleagues examined variables that may influence teachers’ ability to read books to deaf children. They attempted to improve teachers’ ability to read stories to deaf children during a four-year period with teachers in several public school programs in the state of Michigan. The researchers taught the teachers several strategies, including: making liberal use of animated signing; overviewing selected vocabulary prior to reading; reading the same book over and over again; associating signs

with print; reading at a comfortable pace; helping children draw upon their own experiences to understand stories better; allowing students opportunities to select the book they want read to them; reading what is written; and translating stories into ASL. The strategy instruction improved the teachers' ability to read to deaf children.

Uzuner, Yildiz (1993). *An investigation of a hearing mother's reading aloud efforts to her preschool-age hearing and hearing-impaired children before bedtime*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

This study examined a hearing mother's reading aloud behaviors to her preschool-aged hearing and deaf children before bedtime in their home. The primary focus of the study was on a 4-year-old deaf son, and his 3-year-old hearing sister. Videotapes and interviews were gathered and analyzed over a five month period. Analysis showed that the mother adjusted her style to fit the type of story to be read. During the read aloud sessions, the mother pointed to pictures in the stories and asked the children to label the objects shown. The mother also asked many questions, and made extensive use of role play to help her children comprehend and relate to the story being read. With stories that had more text, the mother tended to mediate the text during departures from the story, adding, substituting, rearranging, and deleting from the printed story.

Van der Lem, Truus, and Timmerman, Debora (1990). "Joint picture book reading in signs: An interaction process between parent and child." In Prillwitz, Siegmund, and Vollhaber, Tomas (eds.), *Sign Language Research and Application: Proceedings on the International Congress*, Hamburg, March 23-25, 1990. Amsterdam: Signum Press.

Van der Lem and Timmerman describe an intervention program of the Dutch Foundation of the Deaf and Hearing for hearing parents of deaf children. The program involved a picture book reading course for parents of children between the ages of 1 and 6. The course is designed to give parents insight on the importance of reading to deaf children, teach parents various strategies for successful picture book reading, and teach parents how to tell stories in native sign language. Three typical parents with 3-year-old children were examined through analysis of pre- and post-videotaping of reading sessions. The analysis showed improvement in the use of attention maintenance strategies by the parents, increased proficiency of the parents in telling stories in signs (such as use of signing space and shifting body position for various characters), and improved interactions between the parent and child (the parents became less controlling and learned to follow their children's lead).

Vignolo, Kathleen Anne (1995). *An analysis of the interactions of hearing parent and deaf toddler dyads during story-reading*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1995, Boston, MA.

The purpose of this study was to observe interactions between hearing parents and deaf children as they occurred within story-reading sessions. Eight dyads, each consisting of a hearing parent and a twenty-four to thirty-six month old deaf child, were videotaped during one story-reading session. Two books were read by the parent, one familiar and one novel. Results of this study indicated that the hearing parents engaged their child's interest in the story-reading event, using physical, verbal, sign and visual/gestural cues. They adapted their language level through their use of short phrases and through labeling and pointing. Some parents adapted the text and/or used repetitive phrases. Among the

strategies found to be effective in promoting and maintaining the flow of interactions between parent and child were imitating, repeating, and expanding on the child's language, and using nonverbal language.

Whitesell, K. M. (1991). *Reading between the lines: How one deaf teacher demonstrates the reading process*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

Whitesell studied the instructional practices of a Deaf teacher as she read stories with a group of kindergarten children. This teacher had a reputation of producing good readers, children who enjoyed reading and knew reading was a sense-making process. She expected the children to become literate. An examination of this teacher's efforts showed that she was modeling at least 4 types of literate behavior: 1) how to connect events within stories to events in one's own life and to one's knowledge of the world; 2) how to react to and talk about what is read; 3) how to use all information available in the text to construct meaning; and 4) how to translate print into its signed equivalent.

Resources

Books:

- Barton, Bob and Booth, David. (1990). *Stories in the Classroom: Storytelling, Reading Aloud, and Roleplaying with Children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books [ISBN 0-435-08527-1].
- Leonhardt, Mary (1995). *Parents Who Love Reading, Kids Who Don't*. NY: Crown Publishers [ISBN 0-517-88222-1].
- Oppenheim, Joanna, Brenner, Barbara, and Boegehold, Betty, D. (1986). *Choosing Books for Kids: Choosing the Right Book for the Right Child at the Right Time*. NY: Ballantine Books [ISBN 0-345-32683-0].
- Slaughter, Judith Pollard (1993). *Beyond Storybooks: Young Children and the Shared Book Experience*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association [ISBN 0-87207-377-7].
- Taylor, Denny, and Strickland, Dorothy, S. (1986). *Family Storybook Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books [ISBN 0-435-08249-3].
- Trelease, Jim (1995). *The Read Aloud Handbook*. NY: Penguin Book [ISBN 0-14-046881-1].

Videotapes:

- Visual Storyreading in American Sign Language* developed by the Kansas School for the Deaf. For information about how to order them, please call Dr. Pam Carson Shaw at 913-791-0573 V/TTY or Dr. P. Lynn Hayes at 913-588-5750 V/TTD.
- Read with Me* developed by Boys Town Press. These are popular stories in American Sign Language on video. They are available from Boys Town Press, 13603 Flanagan Boulevard, Boys Town, NE 68010. Call 1-800-282-6657. Fax 1-402-498-1125.
- The Shared Reading Project* by Pre-College National Mission Programs. Contact David R. Schleper, KDES PAS#11, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-3695. Call 1-202-651-5346.

Read and Sign is a collaborative project between the Department of Education and the Department of Television, Photography, and Educational Technology at Gallaudet University. For more information, please contact: Cynthia Neese Bailes, READ AND SIGN Project, Department of Education, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002.

Organizations:

Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action, FOLDA-USA, 814 Thayer Ave., Rm. 202, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4500, 301-572-4134.

About the Author

David R. Schleper received his B.A. degree in Deaf Education and English at the University of Northern Colorado, and his M.A. degree in Deaf Education with a Secondary English Emphasis at Gallaudet University. He has also completed post-graduate studies in writing at the University of New Hampshire.

Dave has travelled throughout the United States to lead workshops at residential schools and mainstream programs in such places as California, Arizona, Hawaii, Tennessee, and his home state of Minnesota. He has also presented at national conferences, including the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of the Social Studies, the Whole Language Umbrella Conference, and the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf as well as workshops in Australia, Canada, Guam, and Puerto Rico.



Dave is an avid reader and writer, and the author of several articles on using whole language with deaf students.

Dave formerly taught English at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf. After two years as a teacher at the Hawaii Center for the Deaf, he returned to Gallaudet's Pre-College National Mission Programs where he is the Literacy Coordinator. He originated and developed the Shared Reading Project, a program to teach hearing families how to read with their deaf children.