

PRODUCT FEATURE

ASL Animations supporting literacy development for learners who are deaf

By Shelley Popson Ardis

Children diagnosed with hearing loss

Most learners who are deaf/hard of hearing arrive at school far behind their hearing peers in early literacy development. Typical hearing children are exposed to millions of words by the time they enter school. A child with hearing loss lags far behind as the majority of young children who are deaf/hard of hearing do not access fluent language during the early years – those critical years when concepts are being organized in the brain. By the time young children with hearing loss enter school they must be directly and purposefully presented with words, concepts, and ideas about the world.

Most children with hearing loss do not have the luxury of being exposed to incidental information and vicarious knowledge every day in their early lives. Most children progress during the critical years of language acquisition asking “WHY” questions. While these questions may tire adults, it helps to develop the schema chil-

dren will apply to learning in all areas.

On the contrary, children who are deaf/hard of hearing have tremendous gaps in their world knowledge and a significant and disabling language delay. The majority of children with hearing loss are born to parents with normal hearing. In the past, children with hearing loss were rarely identified as being deaf/hard of hearing until they were toddlers or young children. During this period of time, the child should be building knowledge about what things are, how things work, and what words mean. Luckily today, many states evaluate babies at birth so families can learn about hearing loss and interventions. People in the field of deaf education and families hope that this early diagnosis will offer children better preparation for the life ahead of them.

It is safe to assume that most parents of a child with a hearing loss have never met another person who is deaf/hard of hearing. As children learn sign language, their parents must now begin to learn a new language to

communicate with their child. They begin to learn sign language so their child can visually access information about the world. Because these parents are not already fluent in sign language, the child does not have the same amount of exposure to language as a hearing child has during these critical years.

Research has demonstrated that babies who are deaf and born to deaf parents are much more likely to become good readers and enter school understanding much more about the world. These babies have fluent language role models from birth. Sometimes they also have a delay in understanding English, but they have “words” for concepts and can connect those understandings to print. Children who have not been provided with language to describe and understand the things around them are much further behind in learning English and reading print because they are delayed in having “words” for the things they see around them.

This delay in vocabulary and concept knowledge affects stu-

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This article originally appeared in the December 2005 / January 2006 issue of *Closing The Gap*, Vol. 24 No. 5.

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dents far into their school years. First, students struggle to learn the tremendous amount of words they need to know to learn to read. Then, if the language delay isn't addressed early, the vocabulary delay prevents them from succeeding when they must read to learn. By third grade, students begin learning science and social studies and are required to meet high standards in reading and math.

Teachers of students who are deaf and hard of hearing must work hard to bridge the gap in concept knowledge.

Only a handful of commercially available materials have been created specifically for learners who are deaf/hard of hearing. These students require resources that will assist them in developing knowledge by using sign language, often the

students' first language, as a support. There is a critical need for resources that teachers can easily integrate into their curriculum to help students reduce their language delay. In addition, many software publishers are very interested in having sign language resources that work with their products. In doing so, students who are deaf/hard of hearing can benefit from their learning tools as well.

Vcom3D develops sign language software

Vcom3D has been researching and developing sign language software tools for use in education since 1998. Teachers have requested ready-made materials and resources that they can integrate into their curriculum – particularly sign

language resources that are easy to learn and easy to integrate into the software programs they already use. In response to these requests, Vcom3D has developed animated GIFs and movies of signs that can be integrated into multimedia programs, including Web browsers, presentation software, and literacy programs.

This collection of sign resources is a product called ASL Animations. Volume 1 was introduced in the fall of 2004. The second volume was released at the Closing The Gap 2005 Conference. Together, the two volumes contain more than 500 signs.

The focus is on vocabulary and concepts covered in curriculum of early education classes – Pre-Kindergarten through third grade. Each volume breaks

Clicker activity designed to support student's writing incorporates ASL Animations.

up the words into learning categories. To date, these categories include:

- About Me
- Time
- Feelings
- Holidays
- Family
- Colors (including the colors of the rainbow)
- Animals
- Shapes
- Science and Weather
- Numbers (1-31 for calendar activities)
- Feedback (words and phrases like “thank you”, “sorry”, and “good”)
- Other basic vocabulary found on “most frequently used words” lists

The ASL Animations provide an immediate connection between concepts shown in sign and text. Activities can be made to assist students in learning vocabulary and in demonstrating their understanding. Research has demonstrated a significant increase in comprehension when signed pictures were connected to English text (Wilson & Hyde, 1997). The ASL Animations provide even more support since the resources are moving animations and movies of signs rather than still images.

Use ASL Animations with popular educational software

ASL Animations resources can be integrated into many different publishers’ products. Teachers are not required to learn a new program to utilize the ASL Animations because it works in programs they already have and are most comfortable using.

Clicker and ClozePro by Crick Software

Clicker Grids can be made for use during student writing with the ASL Animations GIFs providing students with additional support during the writing process. The animations can be used to prompt students and guide them in making connections between text and signed concepts.

ClozePro allows teachers to develop CLOZE Procedure activities for vocabulary and comprehension lessons. The GIF files can be used in both the grid por-

tion and the text document portion of the activity. Feedback can be provided to learners, prompts can be used, and the program can record student activity and demonstrate performance as a report.

IntelliPics Studio by IntelliTools

IntelliPics Studio, part of IntelliTools Classroom Suite, can be used to present information to students as well as for the development of interactive student lessons. Students can view an activity and be provided with interactive elements to move or select. This program allows feedback to be given upon mouse clicks, movements, and so on. Students can create their own presentations as well. The ASL Animations movie files can be incorporated into IntelliPics Studio documents.

My Own Bookshelf, Task Builder and Test Me, Score Me by SoftTouch

My Own Bookshelf is a program that allows teachers to develop multimedia books for students. The books can then be sorted onto bookshelves so students access the books assigned to them or related to a specific topic. The program allows for images and movies, text-to-speech with a computerized voice or voice recording, and text boxes. Text boxes can be set up

to speak the content and highlight words as they are read. There are many access options for students who have physical and cognitive disabilities and data tracking to document what students have read, how much time they were on each page and so on. This is a great program for making interactive books to expose students to vocabulary and concepts during independent reading. This program can utilize the ASL Animations movie files.

Test Me, Score Me and Task Builder are also compatible with the ASL Animations movie files.

Kurzweil 3000 for Windows by Kurzweil Educational Systems

Kurzweil 3000 for Windows allows for a picture dictionary to be associated with the program. If a student needs some additional support, such as the sign or an image to understand the concept, the Picture Dictionary provides that support. The ASL Animation GIF files can be used with Kurzweil 3000’s picture dictionary. Kurzweil 3000 is a program used for interacting with digital content. It can read content aloud and study tools are provided, allowing users to highlight content, leave notes, prompts, and much more.



ASL Animations used within IntelliPics Studio to support student vocabulary development.

Teachers can also integrate the animations into PowerPoint by Microsoft, Web page development software, Kidspiration and Inspiration, and BuildAbility, as well as other multimedia presentation tools.

Suggested activities to use with ASL Animations, Volume 1 and 2

- Develop an activity in which students must put the signed words in the correct order (e.g. calendar items – months, weekdays, seasons, etc.)
- Match the signed animation to the appropriate English word
- Associate a concept to related images or words
- Fill in the correct words in context of an English sentence
- Introduce words within specific categories (feelings)
- Identify English synonyms for the displayed signed animation
- Identify English antonyms for the displayed signed animation
- Practice recognition of multiple meaning English words. Display the English word and the variations of sign animations (can, can1). Ask students to write or demonstrate sentences using signs in context – can be done in sign or orally
- Provide sentences that contain multiple meaning words. Ask students to identify the correct signed animation to match the context of the sentence



ASL Animations can be integrated into multimedia programs, including Web browsers, presentation software, and literacy programs.

- Adapted Digital Books, support vocabulary items within a digital book (PowerPoint or IntelliPics Studio) with signed animations

It is important that organizations and professionals providing support to learners with hearing loss become aware of ASL Animations as visual supports within the curriculum. There is potential for learners with hearing loss to have greater access to concepts, much younger, and reduce the number of students remaining language delayed throughout their lives. There is potential for learners who are deaf and hard of hearing to have repeated exposure to concepts across a range of activities, allowing them to become readers earlier in their school years. ASL Animations is an exciting product with potential to make a big difference for learners who have had few resources and few advantages throughout their education until now.

ASL Animations pricing

Purchase each Volume separately for \$79.95 each. Purchase both Volumes 1 and 2 together for \$150.

ASL Animations can be purchased from Vcom3D (see contact information at the end of this article); Clicker and ClozePro <www.cricksoft.com>; IntelliTools Classroom Suite <www.intellitools.com>; SoftTouch <www.softtouch.com>; and Academic Distributing <www.academic-wholesale.com>.

How to purchase software resources for use with ASL Animations

Clicker and ClozePro, <www.cricksoft.com>.

IntelliTools Classroom Suite, <www.intellitools.com>.

My Own Bookshelf and other Soft-Touch products, <www.softtouch.com>.

Kurzweil 3000 for Windows, <www.kurzweiled.com>.

For more information, contact the author:

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ASL Animations Testimonials:

"ASL Animations has such huge potential! It is so nice to finally have a sign language resource that I do not have to make myself!"

Teresa Smith, Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Florida School for the Deaf and Blind

"ASL Animations not only makes learning fun, it helps my students develop language and skills across the curriculum while producing exciting technology projects. Because ASL Animations is so easy to use, students of all ages can easily access its learning and technology power. I envy the power of the technology tools to which my students have access to today!"

Janet Calvert, Coordinator, Bruce Street School for the Deaf