

Signing to Success: Developing Effective ASL Curricula in Secondary Public Education

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What is American Sign Language (ASL)?

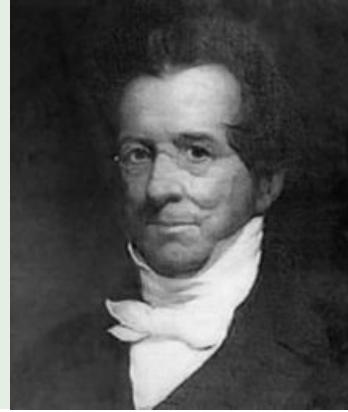
- Non-oral language
- Hand signs/gestures depict ideas
- Facial expressions communicate grammatical meanings
- Most used within the Deaf and hard of hearing community in the United States



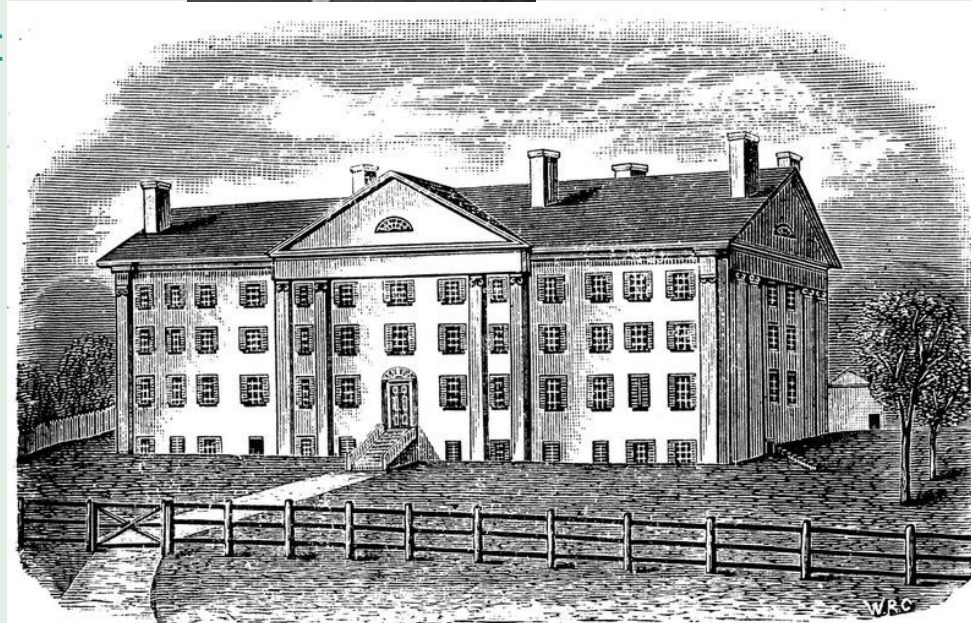
Note. From Drawn image of hands fingerspelling ASL on colorful background [Photograph], by W. Mooney, 2020, (<http://dailyorange.com/2020/03/asl-count-foreign-language/>).

History of ASL

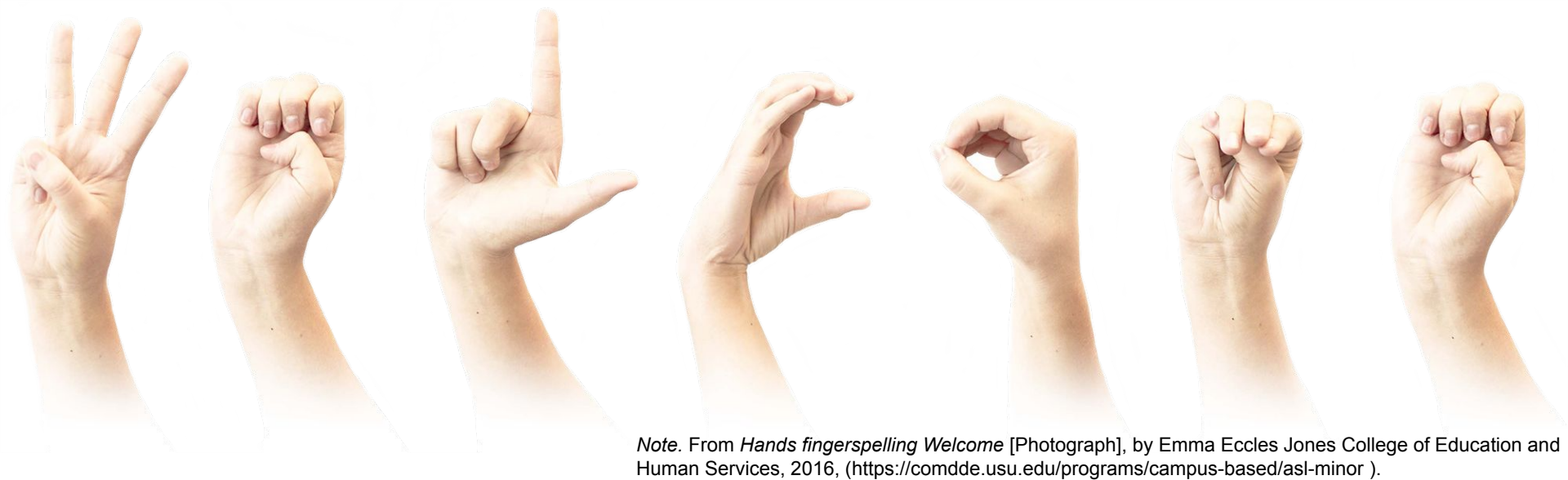
- Uncentralized signed languages
- Alice Cogswell, Dr. Mason Fitch Cogswell, Thomas Gallaudet
- Gallaudet traveled to Europe to visit schools for the Deaf there
 - Met Laurent Clerc and invited him to come back to America
- Founded Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (renamed the American School for the Deaf) in 1817
- School taught ASL and standardized language in US



Note. From Thomas H. Gallaudet [Painting], by G. Wright, 1851, (<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/issue/s/gallaudet-rev-thomas/>).



Note. From American Asylum, 1821 [Photograph], (<https://www.courant.com/opinion/editorials/hc-ed-asd-200-0418-20170417-story.html>).



Note. From *Hands fingerspelling Welcome* [Photograph], by Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, 2016, (<https://comdde.usu.edu/programs/campus-based/asl-minor>).

Recognition of the Language

- William Stokoe- *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles* (1965)
 - Recognized unique grammar, syntax, structure, and morphology
- In 2016, only 46 out of 50 states officially recognized ASL in legislation

Cognitive Benefits

- Learning signed languages promotes nonverbal cognitive development
- Higher scores on reading comprehension in young children
- Bilingualism enhances cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)
 - Score higher on intelligence tests
 - Improved social skills
- Improves cognitive spatial reasoning skills

What does ASL look like in public education for hearing students today?

- Initial: How can ASL in public education increase inclusivity and promote diversity amongst a student population?
- Became: Why should schools implement ASL education for high school aged students?
 - So much more than inclusivity alone



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ASL Today: Elementary

- ❖ Most common age for hearing students
 - Age group can more easily learn and retain languages
- ❖ Primarily from Pre-K through 2nd Grade
- ❖ Often use bilingual model
 - Half of instruction is in English, half entirely in ASL
 - Some districts bring in separate ASL instructor for students
 - Certain subjects are assigned to each language
- ❖ Most studies completed within this age range

ASL Today: Secondary and Higher Education

- ❖ 1980s- Formalizations of ASL education
 - Deaf community influenced
 - Curriculum and instructor certifications
- ❖ Increased demand for ASL courses
 - Growing student interest
 - Increased acceptance as foreign language credit

- ❖ Instructors
 - Deaf teachers
 - Interpreters
 - Certified hearing instructors
- ❖ Bilingual approach not used
 - In higher education, ASL immersion is encouraged
 - No significant data on secondary approach to ASL education

Filling a Need

If we can provide inclusive settings for students who use wheelchairs or accommodations for students who have a learning disability, why can't we also promote normalizing ASL in schools, too?

- Including Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students
 - Promoting Cultural Diversity

Shouldn't schools strive to reach beyond basic requirement of IDEA?

What Now?

- ❖ How can educators help students obtain the most benefits from ASL classes in high schools?
 - Offering ASL classes promotes inclusion and cultural diversity
 - What should be done within existing ASL curricula
 - Pedagogy tips for ASL achievement



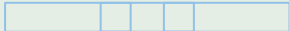
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Recommendations: Beginning Curriculum

Areas of
Student
Interest

Community
Involvement



- ❑ Alphabet
 - ❑ Fingerspelling
- ❑ Numbers 1-100
- ❑ Introductions
 - ❑ “Hi, my name is...”
 - ❑ “Nice to meet you!”
- ❑ Categories
 - ❑ Colors
 - ❑ Foods
 - ❑ Animals
 - ❑ Clothing Items
 - ❑ Family Words
- ❑ Classifiers
- ❑ Talking about preferences
 - ❑ “My favorite colors is...”
 - ❑ “I like... I dislike...”
- ❑ Deaf Culture
 - ❑ ASL Literature
 - ❑ Name Signs
 - ❑ Conversation Etiquette

Recommendations: Pedagogy



Figure 1 [Photograph of calico cat]

- ❑ Only use ASL within the classroom
- ❑ Teach students to think in kinesthetic terms
 - ❑ Instead of assigning an English word to a sign, associate images with hand signs
- ❑ Encourage students to “be present” and not take notes during class
 - ❑ Note: Students with learning disabilities achieve more when taking notes
- ❑ Show students word/image on board, fingerspell word, show sign
- ❑ Peer interaction
- ❑ Circular Seating Arrangement

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**Thank you for supporting education
and language learning!**