

## Supporting Preschool Learning with American Sign Language

Marie Baeta: Hello, and welcome to Front Porch. We're so happy to have you here with us today. We're going to be talking about supporting preschool learning with American Sign Language. If you – if this is your first time joining Front Porch, Front Porch is a series for teachers, family care providers, and home visitors that work with preschoolers and Head Start, Migrant, and Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian and Alaska Native programs. These webinars are here to introduce you to research about preschoolers.

You'll also notice that there is a sign language interpreter today with us that will be interpreting today's webinar. Feel free to resize your windows so you can see the video and the slides. So welcome. My name is Marie Baeta, and I'll be your host today. I'm from I-LABS, the Institute for Learning and Brain Science, here at the University of Washington. I-LABS is a NCECDL partner organization, which is an interdisciplinary research center dedicated to understanding human learning with an emphasis on early learning and the brain. Today, we'll also be joined by our guest speaker, Sam Sanders, from the Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center.

Let's start off today by reviewing our learning objectives. By the end of today, you should be able to share some information about American Sign Language, deaf culture, and preschool language development with others. We'll also be learning and using basic ASL signs and learn how to implement strategies for integrating those signs into your preschool learning environments. Before we jump into today's content, we wanted to define a few words that's really going to lead the discussion today.

In Head Start, a child who is a dual language learner is defined as a child who is learning two or more languages at the same time or a child who is learning a second language while still developing their first. Typically, these children will be mastering their home language, as well as an additional language, commonly English, but could include other languages, as well. Children who are learning American Sign Language are also in this category. They are also dual language learners. Typically, they'll be learning American Sign Language along with English, but this may include other home-spoken languages and other home-signed languages.

When we're thinking about dual language learners, we also want to think about equity. Equity, according to Head Start, means the fair and just treatment to all children, family, and those – families and those who support them. Equity enables everybody to achieve their full potential. Leading with equity when we're talking about dual language learners means supporting the full and effective participation of children who are dual language learners in nurturing environments, where children and families feel seen, and heard, and connected, acknowledged, and really feel connected to their community. This means that we support their home language, whatever that may look like, and that includes children who are learning American Sign Language.

To get us started today, I'm very excited we have the pleasure to speak with Sam Sanders, who is the lead teacher for ages 0 to 3 at the Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center, who's going to help us learn about the beautiful world of American Sign Language. Welcome, Sam, and please give us a little introduction.

Sam Sanders: Hello, everyone. Thank you, Marie, and my name is Sam. I'm from the Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center, or HSDC, and I work in the preschool as a lead teacher. I teach children through play, and really, I'm a lifelong reader. I've been immersed in art and many different mediums, including sign language. It's an honor to be invited here to this webinar today, and I'm really looking forward to showing you the amazing possibilities for everyone with American Sign Language.

Marie: We're so happy to have you here today, Sam. To get us started today, let's jump right in. What is American Sign Language?

Sam: Certainly. Best way to start. American Sign Language, ASL, it's a visual language, and it's used by many different people to express themselves with communication to describe the visual world using space. It's a full and legitimized language with a rich history behind it.

Many years ago in Europe, a person named Laurent Clerc, a European person, came over to the U.S. to start a deaf school in the United States and that spread across the country. Instituting a Center for Deaf Culture and, as well, was taught and passed down through the deaf community and deaf people, expressive and storytelling, and ASL is a vital part of deaf people's experience. That's a bit of the history.

Marie: Thank you for sharing. I think the more you dig into the history of ASL, it's just really fascinating to see it develop over the years, and I'm excited to learn more. You touched on this a little bit, but I'm curious. What do you think ASL – what makes ASL unique?

Sam: Sure, wow. I mean, it's very rich in history and description. We have a lot of different ways of expressing language. One hand shape, you can show not just a vehicle but the car moving. The motor, for the sound, you can move your cheeks and mouth to indicate different aspects and parts of the car. Say there's a bump, you can show the car speeding over a bump by incorporating facial expressions, and that's a critical part of American Sign Language, which some people may not realize.

And facial expression, as well as the signs in sign language, that's what makes this so expressive. For example, you can, if you watch my hands, I'm describing a seed growing. I put it in the soil. It starts to prop up, and sprout its leaves, and you can see my facial expression is indicating the sunshine feeding it and blooming. Just as a quick example. American Sign Language, we use space and movement to create our world and in front of your eyes.

Marie: That's so beautiful. I just love how expressive it is and how it just builds a whole world right in front of your eyes. There's nothing like it. I think it's really interesting because in some cultures, facial expressions and very overt body language cannot be appropriate in their culture. But in deaf culture and ASL, it's like critical to these – to the language and the meanings, too.

Sam: Absolutely.

Marie: We're going to pause here and ask you all a little poll. Do you think American Sign Language is universal? Sam, do you think American Sign Language is universal?

Sam: Many people think so, but actually, it's not. It's much like any other spoken language, for example, where cultures, and communities, and different geographies have their own language

based on context and history. In America, in the United States, we use American Sign Language. In France, they use a different form of French-based sign language based on their language and culture. And so you can – and in France, they use French spoken language and similar is true for American Sign Language and other sign languages around the world. It is not universal.

Marie: I think that makes a lot of sense. Just how spoken languages around the world are different, develop in their own context, that the same is for American Sign Language. Just because it's a visual language, it's still a language. I always love including this answer. Actually, we have the poll results, 127 people said yes, it's universal, and 92 people said no. It's great that we have these questions to kind of debunk these myths that language is language no matter if it's spoken or visual.

This brings us to our next question. Are there variations in ASL?

Sam: Yes, there are definitely. In the United States and Canada, they both use American Sign Language. However, in Canada, in the Quebec region, they actually use a French-based version of their own sign language unique to that region. But in the United States, there are many varieties of sign language. For example, we have Black American Sign Language, and so the African American community here in the United States, they use a lot of what we call BASL.

As well, we have the Deaf-Blind community in the United States, we – they use American Sign Language, as well. But what I want to emphasize is that we have another dialect called ProTactile, which is a separate form, and it's a unique language that is for Deaf-Blind people and their community. As well as American Sign Language. And really the best part is the regional dialects within sign language, so it can be quite examples. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we have a sign for salmon.

This is common for our area, and you can see the pointer finger at the chin where the salmon has that sort of chin shape. We show that through sign language as an example of one of our regional dialect. And another example is we have Indigenous sign languages based on different tribes throughout the United States. There are a lot of varieties, and these sign languages have been passed down from community over the generations.

Marie: And it's cool to note that ASL actually borrowed some signs from Indigenous sign language, as well, so really interesting history here and a lot of variety, too. And I also wanted to mention that in addition to having cultural variations in ASL, that there's just a lot of different people that use ASL, as well. You know, deaf people, hard of hearing people, hearing people, like myself, who learn for fun, people with disabilities, people with language difficulties, children of deaf adults.

Just there's a ton of different – of diversity within the community of who uses ASL. There's just so much to learn, a lot of history, and it's really fun. OK, I'm curious what it means to be culturally deaf. This might be people's first time hearing that there is a deaf culture. At Head Start, we talk a lot about language and culture being tied together. How would you describe deaf culture?

Sam: Yes. Deaf culture, we have several – a concept, for example, a capital D on the word Deaf or a lower-case d describing the word deaf. What we are trying to signify there is a spectrum of

identities. Like capital D Deaf typically means that ASL has been passed down, and it's your most comfortable maybe native language. You maybe go to Deaf schools or to a college with a Deaf population in a Deaf community.

Then on the opposite end of that spectrum, maybe that person speaks for themselves, has an assistive technology like a cochlear implant or hearing aid. But they're comfortable navigating between both spoken language and American Sign Language. But really the valued part of this deaf community is there's something for everyone and there's a variety and a spectrum of people within it. We have kind of that social model of disability where there's no – it's not a lack of hearing. It's the cultural identity is what we focus on.

This community, and the shared experience between people in this community, telling stories, just having different deaf experiences here in the hearing world. As a deaf person, if you see another deaf person, there is an instant connection, and that shared language and experience with ASL. In our experience, it can be quite complex. There are a lot of different cultures within the world. Deaf culture is one that we share across all of those varying identities.

Marie: I think that's really interesting and makes a lot of sense that, you would have an instant connection if you meet a deaf person from France. You may not hear the same language, but you might have similar experiences. I think it's important to kind of take into context the multiple identities that we can hold at one time.

That it doesn't necessarily define you, but it is also is part – a real part of your experience. Do you want to share what's happening in this photo? I realize we haven't been describing what people have been signing in the video.

Sam: Sure. In this photograph, you see a children's book, and a picture of the dog in the book, and a funny facial expression with the teacher has her hand up and tongue out to show the student. They're using play and American Sign Language with facial expression. What they're showing is a dog panting, or perhaps licking, or with that sort of floppy ear. It's quite a fun way to engage with reading and show through American Sign Language.

Marie: It's very engaging just looking at a photo.

Sam: Definitely.

Marie: The question is what percentage of children who are deaf and hard of hearing are born to hearing parents. We have A, 20%; B, 40%; C, 60%; or D, 90%. Let's see what people are thinking. Oh, it's kind of even across the board. That's pretty interesting. OK. So in the lead, we have around 40%, which, I mean, there's lots of choices here. All right, keep this in mind and let's talk about it. The answer is actually 90% of deaf and hard of hearing children are born to hearing parents. That's a pretty big number.

Sam: Absolutely. It's quite shocking to learn this statistic. You know, families, oftentimes it's the first time they've met a deaf person, and they are unfamiliar with deaf identity and culture. It's critical important for families of deaf children to be involved in early intervention services. That way, you're able to connect with the deaf community, and deaf culture, and have multiple different outlets and routes to communication available to that deaf child.

Absolutely. This being a dual language learner for a child who's using American Sign Language, they may use English but then know American Sign Language. For example, the family may not know sign language but know English. When they're not familiar with each other's languages, it's great to bridge those gaps so that people can connect and have those language acquisition skills. In order to get support in that early intervention, the 0 to 3 years, is very important for a deaf child for language acquisition.

Marie: I wanted to share with some educators that are joining us today. They might serve children who might use hearing-assistive devices like hearing aids that we see on the left here, where an educator is assisting a child putting their hearing aids on. And on the right, a child who's using a cochlear implant. Or maybe you've never seen these before and maybe a child will join your classroom, or your services, or your home visits that uses one of these devices.

You might be familiar – getting familiar with these. Although these are tools that children can use, ASL exposure is important for these kids, as well. Because ASL is 100% accessible to them all of the time because it's visual and it doesn't depend on hearing or listening. But it is very important to talk with families and understand and support their communication choices with their child, as well.

Sam: Yes. One of the most important parts of this role is really to collaborate and engage with the families of the deaf child and get to know their values and what their goals are for that child. And then to be able to support their growth together. So whether the child has an assistive device, that's great. Just recognizing sound but also having sign language will be beneficial and having ASL can help actually develop their English acquisition, as well as their ASL.

They are mutually reinforcing and other languages, as well. It could help support development in Spanish, French, Italian. There are a variety of benefits that can come from having that language exposure. It's important to recognize that learning sign language does not mean that their spoken language or any English acquisition will decline. It actually promotes mutual growth. It's not going to take away from one or the other. It's really improving access and language acquisition on all linguistic ends.

Marie: Yes, absolutely. It's additive, that they can have both learning American Sign Language, supporting that first language development. In addition to learning spoken languages, you know, whether that's English, and they support each other, which is really wonderful to know. Even if you're a home visitor and you might work ...

Sam: Yes, in partnership.

Marie: Yes, absolutely. If you're a home visitor, even you might serve some families who are deaf or use ASL. Even you as a home visitor, learning some signs to communicate with that family can really help build trust, and communication, and kind of a foundation of respect, too. So the benefits are widespread.

On to our next question. Why is it important to provide ASL environments for deaf and hard of hearing kids?

Sam: It's really important to have this discussion with the family to, as we mentioned, understand their values of the – for their child and create an accessible environment. And have the family be a part of that learning experience and provide ongoing support. And that it's consistent with the family values. We know that all children, they – that 0- to 3-year period is critical for language development and cognitive development.

ASL is only one of the – is the only language that's 100% accessible for a deaf or hard of hearing child. Wanting to, you can establish pictures, for example, of a family, maybe go on a walk together, or imagine a family on a walk together or sitting around in a circle, and communication is happening. Maybe they're talking about the weather, or the news, or world events. And the – perhaps another hearing child, a sibling, is able to take in all of that environment but then the deaf child that has a different experience.

They may not in – without ASL in that environment, they might not be able to pick up what's happening in the noise environmentally. Because sign language is the only way for that child to feel fully included and be fully included. Say I'm walking around, I'm using sign language, then a child can look and it's in the visual space. Because it's a visual-spatial language, that child is able to participate and understand the conversation.

All children benefit, whether they're deaf or hearing, and, again, it does not impact any other language acquisition in a negative way. It reinforces.

Marie: I think that's really important to remember just the language that surrounds children, generally. That's how a lot of our learning happens is just not intentionally but just hearing people talk around you. Having access to that makes a lot of sense to me. I also agree that it benefits children no matter what their hearing loss status is, too, which we're going to talk about the benefits of soon.

I would say for myself, I'm a hearing person, and learning ASL really opened up a whole new world to me, a whole new language. Sometimes I feel like ASL fits me better than English, and I think it's just really magical and a special thing to do. Do you want to say what the educator is signing in this photo that we see here?

Sam: In the picture, you see the teacher and the child facing each other, and they're using the sign for butterfly. She's describing a butterfly flapping its wings and perhaps taking off for the day. This is the sign for butterfly.

Marie: Perfect. Thank you. Thinking about early usage or ASL usage in early childhood classrooms or settings, I wanted to share a research study that was done in an early learning environment. This was in a public kindergarten, and there was two classes. One class where both the teachers are hearing. One teacher is fluent in American Sign Language and one teacher is not.

In the American Sign Language class, for nine months, the teacher would integrate ASL into her classroom. How she did this would be, introducing new signs during circle time, new vocabulary during story time. She used signs for classroom management, too, often without her voice, which encouraged kids to look at her and be aware of what's happening in the environment. She also used the manual alphabet, which is the ABCs in American Sign Language, too,

especially for learning the phonic sounds of letters, and alphabet, and spelling tests – or spelling tasks, not tests.

And often included, added the ASL sign. If they saw an English word in print, they would learn the ASL sign for that word. The teacher also sent home ASL newsletters for the families, as well, so they could learn at home and see what they're learning in the class. What did they find after only nine months of ASL exposure? The researchers found that compared to the non-signing class, the signing class showed a robust vocabulary gain, attaining a full two years of vocabulary growth during this nine-month program.

They also found that naturally, they had increased their ASL ability to sign ASL vocabulary, as well as an increase of letter recognition ability compared to the other class, which we know is a critical skill for literacy. They also learned, like I said, a lot of ASL signs, but some of them didn't learn a lot of non-manual signs, which as we talked about the facial expressions in ASL. That might have just been because she wasn't a native signer, which we know, you know, learning from native signer is best. But a very interesting study.

Studies like this are really encouraging to see that it really benefits all students to learn ASL and can really show that it's going to have academic and social impacts on their development.

Sam: That study helps really show that teaching ASL benefits all students, all language learners. And you can scaffold that, whether it's pairing an English word with an ASL vocabulary sign or switching ASL to English. And so just increasing that literacy or language acquisition. Having access to language and learning to communicate, this is going to benefit all children in their development.

Marie: Absolutely. I think the more ways to communicate, the better. I also want to say in this photo, this was taken from a video, and the child is signing, "Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning." The educator says, "Wow." She's signing, "Wow, so many." That is what's happening in the video. Talking a little bit about the benefits of ASL, let's get more into it.

Sam: Great. Sign language, it engages our physical and our visual spaces at the same time. It uses fine motor skills and multiple modes, so you have different connections in your neural networks to help with recall. It actually maps on to the brain in various regions. For example, the research we just discussed where ASL was able to support the vocabulary development in English, as well.

You're able to increase those skills and awareness of letter recognition, whether it's the alphabet. Another example is sign language. It helps with capturing attention and socialization because it requires eye contact. You have to be engaged in that visual space and have someone's gaze to communicate. Sign language is able to become a bridge for two languages and for that learner.

Say, for example, some English skills they're learning at the same time, but they might feel more comfortable communicating visually through sign language. And other children may prefer an audio-based interaction or visual interaction.

Marie: Just like you said, it could be a great bridge for dual language learners who might be learning English or other languages, as well. I've actually heard from several Head Start programs that have integrated ASL and really want to say and show that it is what they're experiencing is that it reduces frustration for children who maybe struggle with communication or might be language delayed or speech delayed, that it really supports them with their peers and with the adults.

And really reduces that frustration in communication because they have another way to communicate that isn't verbal. When children are able to communicate with their peers and their educators that increases feelings of belonging, too. If a child might have deaf parents and they use ASL at home, use ASL in the classroom, that's a way of them to really reflect that home culture, that home language, that we're really interested in. It's interesting about the multisensory part where it lives in different parts of our brains.

Because oftentimes, I will forget an English word, a spoken word, and then I will remember the sign, and once I sign it, it'll pop into my head – the English word. It's just an interesting way of like experiencing how it lives in your brain in different ways. This list is very important for educators. We can share these benefits with families, with group socializations, really share why we want to integrate ASL and why it's so beneficial. In this photo, we see a teacher and – or an educator and a child both signing "sit."

As you probably know, our viewers, is that preschool time is just an amazing time of development across domains – the physical skills, emotional skills, verbal skills, those cognitive skills. It's just really all over the place. So preschool time is a wonderful time to add in American Sign Language for learning. In this photo, we see an educator and a child signing "museum." I think they were talking about a field trip, so they were signing "museum." There you get an extra sign.

Sam: "Museum."

Marie: We're going to watch a clip. Are we doing this aside thing? Oh, no. OK, we're going to watch a clip of a preschooler learning a new sign, and we just want to see what you all notice.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Do you want to give that over there to the other teacher? What's this one? Let's put it done. Oh. Is it wet? Oh, water. Is it wet? It's wet. Oh, yes, it is wet, you're right. It is wet. What should we do with it? If it's wet, what should we do with it? Should we put it back in? Where should we put it?

Child: OK.

Teacher: Yes. I know, but where do you want to put it?

[Video ends]

Marie: Yes, how – right in the chat, everyone who watched that video, what did you notice about their interaction in learning that new word? Any observations? OK, that's fine. We'll talk about it. Did we find something? OK, I saw eye contact. They were engaged in play. They were



repeating the sign together. And you could really see how animated the child is when they're learning that new sign "water" and "wet."

Sam, do you have other observations about your experiences in the classroom with children learning signs and what's important for introducing new signs?

Sam: Yes, absolutely. It's really like any other language. You show the word in context and then you repeat it several times so that that person is able to pick up or the child's able to pick up the concept and the sign. And you just mentioned, you know – and children are like sponges in their cognitive development.

As you mentioned, it's the best time during that early learning period where their brain is soaking up information. It's really important to expose children to fluent, qualified language models during that time, so that 0 to 3 period.

Marie: Yes, absolutely. OK, this is our video section, if you couldn't tell. We're going to watch another interaction with ASL and a child. Let's see what we see.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Do you want help? Oh, do you need more glue? Is that what you need help with, taking the top off? I can do that. Oh, no. Oh, no. See, this one's going, too. I say let's check this one out. Oh, this one's still got glue. There you go.

[Video ends]

Marie: In this video, we saw a child asking for help.

Sam: In terms of how do we ask for help, it can look a little bit different in American Sign Language. The child threw the glue. Maybe they were in a social situation where that could have been appropriate.

But deaf people, how they're, in terms of how to get a deaf person's attention in a ASL context, sometimes with a dual language learner, if it's in a loud environment or perhaps they're not sure. Maybe they're not sure of the term to use. Maybe that child can switch to sign language to reduce the stress in that communication environment. That's an opportunity.

Marie: I think ASL can be a bridge for so many, and it can look different, just like you said. If we look through that throwing the glue stick through a cultural lens, it's very appropriate in deaf culture. And we'll talk about appropriate ways of getting attention, too, very soon here. Oh, actually, right now. Here's another poll.

What method of attention getting is not appropriate in deaf culture? A, waving your hand in their visual space; B, tapping their shoulder; C, throwing a light object near them; or D, flashing the lights. This might be a tricky one because we just kind of talked about one aspect. We can see 53% said throwing a light object near them. And then next we have waving your hand in their visual space. Sam, what do you think?

Sam: I would say A, B, C, and D, all of the above. It's context dependent and their relationship with that person, if you're going to throw something, for example, absolutely. Waving your hand, that's certainly permissible. Tapping your shoulder or flashing the lights on and off. All of

those are acceptable ways to call someone and get their attention. If you wave or tap someone on the shoulder, that's typically if you're trying to get one individual's attention.

The lights flashing can typically get a large group's attention to get all eyes on you. And then with young children, it just takes practice and just absorbing that deaf culture and different cues, whether it's waving and tapping of the shoulder. It's training one's eye to make eye contact and know that that's time for conversation. In a learning environment, we may try and discourage throwing light things just in terms of the context. It really just it depends on who you're having a conversation with in the space.

With children, it's really great to develop skills for getting attention, and how to have a conversation, and communicate. Finding a way that best meets their needs.

Marie: I think that all makes a lot of sense, and educators can maybe try maybe this week, we're going to focus on like light shoulder tapping. Or the next week, we're going to like wave to get each other's, you know, visual attention. Home visitors could also talk with families and see if they want to try some of these strategies, as well. And we know that this is culturally dependent, as well.

It's the time you've all been waiting for. It's time to learn ASL. Yay! All right. Sam is going to teach us some signs, and we are going to copy them with him. OK, play. Play.

Sam: Play. You take with your thumb and pinky out and shake your hands at the wrists. You can add facial expressions to indicate the type of play.

Marie: An important one for preschoolers. Outside. All kids love to play outside.

Sam: Outside. You take an open palm and pull your fingers as you push – as you – your hand leaves farther away from you, your fingers come in closer.

Marie: Happy. Your face has to match. Happy.

Sam: All right, and happy, yes.

Marie: Those emotional words are important.

Sam: You use one or two hands for happy.

Marie: Sad.

Sam: Then you want to indicate a sad face, so your facial expression matches the sign. Your eyebrows are furrowed. Your bottom lip may be out, and you're giving a sad facial expression while your hands pull down.

Marie: Angry.

Sam: You take your hand and scrunch it towards your face and scrunch your face in where your palm scrunches.

Marie: Silly. You know preschoolers are silly.

Sam: So silly, you take the same hand shape as play with your thumb and finger out and wave it towards your nose.

Marie: Clean up. A good one for everyone to know.

Sam: Clean up.

Marie: Hurt. It happens.

Sam: Hurt. You take your two pointer fingers and say you bumped your head toward your forehead, you would sign that sign towards the injury. You can use it towards your elbow. If you bump your nose, so you put the sign where the injury happened because sign language is visual, so it shows you where the injury has occurred.

Marie: Wait. Lots of waiting for preschoolers.

Sam: It can be a fun sign. It's not always going to be a boring sign. It can be boring if you're waiting, and waiting, and waiting, but you can also make it fun, and rhythmic, and maybe suspenseful, or exciting. You can play with the production of that sign.

Marie: I love that way. Bathroom, also very important.

Sam: Yes, bathroom. Your thumb goes in between your index and middle finger and you shake your wrist. Bathroom.

Marie: Sit down.

Sam: Sit down. You take your pointer and middle finger and on top of each other in a perpendicular way. You can show different expressions with it. And you can also show several people sitting.

Marie: Friend. Preschoolers love friends.

Sam: Yes. I love this sign. This is the sign where your two index fingers lock. It's like two people, and they meet, and they, "Hi. How are ya?" And they become friends. They become interconnected.

Marie: That's awesome. Love that one. Please.

Sam: Please. Take your closed hand, palm towards your chest, and move in a circle.

Marie: Another good one to learn. Thank you.

Sam: You can sign thank you, thank you, thank you. You can sign fast to give that extra emphasis.

Marie: Awesome, well, thank you for teaching us these signs. As a reminder to our viewers, this will be recorded and available on Push Play, so you can rewind back and practice these signs you learned, share it with your colleagues. Or even watch it with your kiddos. Now that we know a few ASL signs, let's talk about how to incorporate ASL into your learning environment.

Before, we didn't show much of the ASL alphabet, but you can find it everywhere on the Internet or a book, a library. Integrating the ASL alphabet, you can spell their names in circle time. You can talk about letters and the sounds they make. We talked about introducing new vocabulary during story time, choosing two, three, four new words to include during story time. Also practicing those facial expressions and the body language that is so important to ASL.

I played this game with my niece and nephew, where we hide an object. I hid an object in the room, kind of like the game hot-cold, but only used my facial expressions to tell them. If they were close, I'd be like [Facial expression], and if they were far, I'd be like [Facial expression]. They really loved it, and it was a great way to kind of hone in on that practice. Home visitors can also chat with families, thinking about what vocabulary comes up with them most often during mealtimes or bath times and learning those signs together to support the contextual way of learning those signs.

Sam: Absolutely. I love that game, the hot-cold game that you played with your niece and nephew. It sounds very fun. ASL storytelling. You can make them rhythmic or rhyming, and that's a very important part for ASL and deaf culture, just as in spoken language. For example, "London Bridge is Falling Down."

We have a similar parallel experience in American Sign Language with visual rhyming. And so that rhythmic using sign language, just as we do in spoken languages, we have equivalents to that that benefit all children. For example, I can show you the – I just mentioned the sign for waiting and you can kind of wait back and forth on either side, from left to right, and it can follow a clapping rhythm. As Marie mentioned, you just – it's available resources for you.

We've got a lot of opportunity for you to continue your learning following this webinar. You can set a dedicated time in the class schedule for silent time. Meaning all students have their voices off and they have to use their eyes on, turn their eye headlights on and be able to use sign language together.

Marie: All of this sounds like a lot of fun to share and to try with families. We mentioned before sharing a newsletter or the sign of the week that you want to share with families. A lot of these strategies could be used in group socializations, as well. Great modeling for parents to use those activities at home. And if you want to learn more about ASL rhyme and rhythm, you should join us next month for BabyTalks, April 18, where we're going to talk more about rhyme and rhythm.

If you take a look at your Viewer's Guide right now, we also, what Sam was saying, we included resources for looking at ASL rhyme and rhythm in your Resource Guide. But there's also a few boxes down there, too, I think at the bottom of Page 2 that you can take a look there and think about what signs would you want to learn first where you are being an educator.

Whether that's home visitors, family childcare, center-based. Just go ahead now and take a minute and write down which signs, the first five signs that you want to learn. Oh, yes, mealtime.

Sam: Certainly. Mealtime is a great opportunity to incorporate some ASL because the kids are in a circle, and they're busy, and their eyes are able to be engaged, and they can use sign language. It's a great opportunity to tell a story during mealtime. You can always watch a video and have some sign language modeled during mealtime.

Marie: All right, let's watch a video of this in action.

[Video begins]

Teacher: This is salad. What color is it?

Children: Green.

Teacher: Green. Who remembers the sign for green? That's red. He's remembering green. That's green.

Child: Me, too. Me, too.

Teacher: You're remembering green.

Child: Me, too. Me, too. Me, too.

Teacher: All right, here you go. Riley, you may start with that. Kayla, did you want to start with the bananas?

Kayla: Yes.

Teacher: What color are these, friends?

Children: Yellow.

Teacher: Yellow. Who remembers yellow? Oh, Tony knows yellow really well. He's really remembering yellow.

Boy: Just like his shirt.

Teacher: His shirt, same thing.

[Video ends]

Marie: Here we saw an educator kind of reviewing the color signs like during mealtime, engaging the kids in questions. Maybe this is a good time to practice those signs together, seeing what they remember. It helps with them waiting to be served, practicing a new language, modeling language for each other.

Also building those relationships with each other, too. We saw the two girls on the right kind of sharing with each other their excitement about learning the sign for green.

Sam: Absolutely. Yes, mealtime is just – it's a wonderful time to allow for practice using sign language. You've got all of that wonderful attention and eyes on each other. They're not going in 10 different directions. You're all in one space in that way, so it's a great opportunity. And in deaf culture, it's not rude to be eating and chewing while you're chatting at the same time, so ...

Marie: Absolutely. Definitely a benefit, or if you're in really loud places, ASL is also very useful, too. You don't have to scream.

Now, we're going to move into how to incorporate ASL into your environment. ASL doesn't have a printed form, but there are ways to integrate ASL. Like in this photo, you see kind of alphabet there and there's circle time space. But let's see what else we can do, Sam.

Sam: There are a lot of opportunities to integrate ASL into your environment in the classroom. During circle time, that's a wonderful opportunity to, like you see in the photo, hang photos of the signs, whether it's the alphabet. Here's another example, you are also able to add the

English word to an ASL sign or even other languages, Spanish or some other language, whatever culture or language you may have in the classroom.

It's very important to have photos, depictions of the word, so you're able to see that in English and then the sign above it, so children can make that cognitive connection. As well, in the classroom, it's very important to incorporate a variety of books and resources regarding deaf culture, for example, and the different possibilities for sign language.

We're also able to teach a range of things, whether it's storytelling, the rhythm in different sign language poetry through books. You know, "A Colorful Ocean," is a wonderful resource, and that's rhythmic, as well. It's very cool.

Marie: It seems like there's ...

Sam: Lots of opportunities.

Marie: It seems like there's a lot of opportunities to include ASL in our environment outside of ourselves. Local libraries are great resources for books for educators to make copies and share with families, or even just talking with families and seeing, "Maybe we could put up a poster here. We can talk about this letter this week." I think there's a lot of opportunities there.

Sam: Here are just some recommendations going forward for learning and supporting ASL and language acquisition in your programs. We always try and emphasize that a qualified – for language acquisition, you want to have a qualified signer, a native signer. We have provided a list of where you might learn from a deaf instructor and so you're able to get that resource there.

Maybe a deaf volunteer or family member who's deaf and uses sign language who may come in and teach ASL in the classroom. It's fun and an inclusive way of partnering with the home and the school, so creating that connection. And also, you may find a local deaf center. That's such a valuable resource if you have one in your community.

Marie: Yes, absolutely. I really recommend people looking up their deaf resource center. Oftentimes, they'll have storytelling times, and classes for you to learn, and books, and other resources. It's a really valuable thing to get in contact with. And we talked a little bit about the deaf-friendly practices like the tapping, and the waving, and the flashing the lights. You could try one and see how it goes.

You can encourage families to try it out, too. And we also want to encourage talking about these differences in language and culture in your learning environment. It really supports this beginning identity development for children, as well. So maybe you have children who speak different languages. Highlighting those languages, and their cultures, and the differences really sets the stage for positive identity development, building values around empathy, and equity, and diversity.

Well, thank you so much, Sam, for joining us today. It was such a pleasure to have you and to hear your expertise. We'll actually see you next month at BabyTalks, so thank you so much for joining us.

Sam: Thank you for inviting me, and happy learning, everyone. Well done. Thank you. Bye.

Marie: As we wrap up here, I wanted to also highlight an amazing resource for all you viewers. If you don't know about it already, the Ready DLL app has seven languages already available for you to learn and we will be adding ASL to this app, which we're really excited. And guess who it is? It's Sam. You will see Sam on this app.

Hopefully, in the next five months or six months, you'll be seeing it there, so keep an eye out to learn more ASL with us. And if you join us next month for BabyTalks, we'll be learning a whole new set of signs. In addition to the signs you learned today, there's going to be a new set of signs you can learn next month. That'll give you a really great place to start and just start incorporating ASL into your learning environment. And just like I said before ... Thank you so much for joining us today. Our next Front Porch will be June 20, and we'll be back here with more research and practice to share. We'll be focusing on tools and strategies to implement equitable practices that support all preschoolers and their families. We hope to see you then.