

Watch *Telling Tales in English* and ASL on the accompanying videotape.



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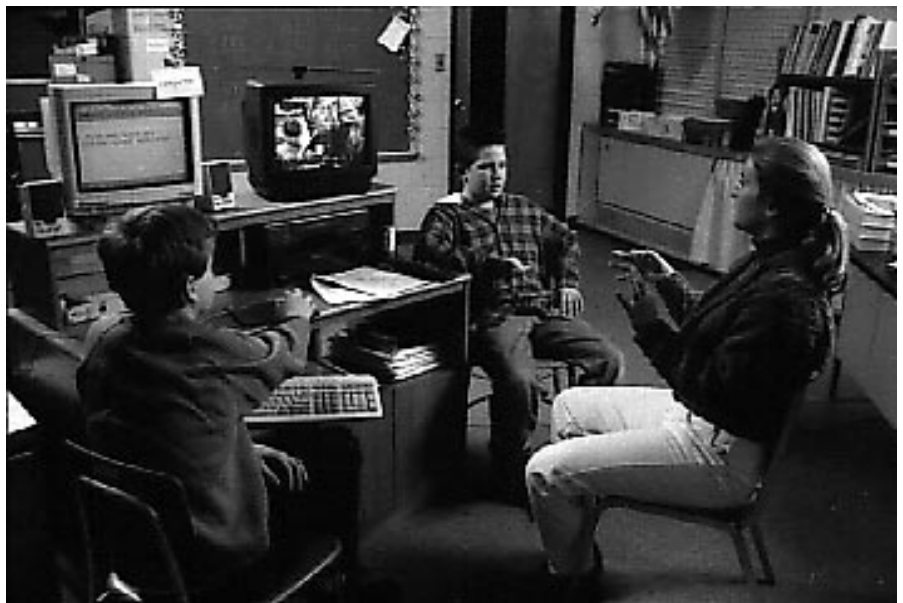
- How video is used to teach literacy skills
- How a writing program for elementary-school students who are deaf combines ASL, videos, and drawings
- How at-risk students participating in a Vanderbilt University Project use video to improve their reading comprehension
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Reading, Writing, and Videotapes

The idea that video can help students improve their reading and writing skills might have been easily dismissed a generation ago. Today, however, video is a central component in a variety of strategies designed to teach literacy skills.

This profile highlights several programs using these strategies. The feature story focuses on an innovative teaching practice for primary-school students that is especially effective for children who are deaf, many of whom begin kindergarten with limited English skills. Based on the idea that students will gain a broader understanding of material if they have the chance to go over or "revisit" it in different formats, the practice revolves around a variety of activities that include the viewing and creating of videotapes, group and one-on-one discussions, drawing, and writing.

Other highlighted teaching practices focus on how students with disabilities use technology to write captions for a video. The ultimate goal of this strategy, as well as the others featured, is to give students the skills they need to become independent readers and writers.



Students and their teacher discuss how to caption a videotape – a unique multi-step process that strengthens literacy skills.

NCIP is the National Center to Improve Practice in special education through technology, media, and materials.

Telling Tales in ASL and English

After watching a story told in American Sign Language (ASL) and then retelling it in sign on videotape, students participating in the following project write their own version of the story.

Viewing a Story

At the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Boston, Massachusetts, a small class of primary-school children have come to the Literacies Lab to work with reading specialist Anne Devaney on their reading and writing skills. They are young children who are deaf and who use ASL.

The students, who have varying fluency in English, begin their work by

watching a story in ASL presented by a teacher or on videotape by a storyteller. The videos – which come from Horace Mann’s extensive videotape library – are classic imagination-capturing tales that hearing children typically read in the early grades. “A primary goal is to make the writing process as visual as possible,” said Doris Corbo, the program’s curriculum specialist.

To reinforce the concepts that underlie the story, Anne leads a discussion focusing on its plot and characters. Students are asked to retell part or all of the narrative in sign language to improve their understanding.



After Horace Mann students have seen a story told in sign language, they are videotaped retelling the story.



Students at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing watch a story told in sign language.

Creating a First Draft on Video

After watching and discussing the video, students go to a writing table to draw the story’s scenes and characters. This “visual road map” will be used later when they retell the story again in writing.

While students draw, Anne takes each one aside and, using a camcorder on a tripod, videotapes him or her retelling the story in sign language. In the process, the student becomes more familiar with the structure and content of the narrative. This videotape version becomes the student’s first draft.

Video: A Tool for Reading Comprehension

As part of the ongoing research initiatives of the Peabody Literacy Program at Vanderbilt University, researchers in the Cognition and Technology Group have developed an innovative teaching strategy that uses video to promote reading comprehension.

Here’s how it works: At-risk students view one- to two-minute video segments about timely issues like AIDS and civil rights. Afterwards they are given three passages to read

that are similar in form and content. Only one of the passages, however, accurately describes the segment. The reader is asked to read each passage carefully and to discern which is the most accurate. At any point in the process, students can review the video.

The authors emphasize that these “discrepancy passages” enable students to increase their comprehension and fluency – well-documented benefits of repeated reading.

In order to more closely approximate standard reading practice, the process is sometimes reversed. Students read passages first and then choose video segments that best represent them. This way students have an understanding of the text before viewing the video. Students can also be given readings that are designed to extend and deepen their understanding of the content, rather than describe the videos.

Working with Teachers and Classmates

While Anne watches the videotape with the student, she transcribes the child's sign language into English on a computer. If the student disagrees with the teacher's translation, the two discuss what the student meant and how to convey this content in written English. After the story is fully transcribed, the student prints it out and reviews it three times – alone, with another classmate, and with Anne or another teacher.

As an alternative to working with the teacher, a pair of students may watch one of their sign language drafts together and discuss its content. According to Doris, some students express themselves more easily with classmates than with teachers.



Once they have been videotaped telling a story in sign, Horace Mann students sit with their teacher and discuss how to transcribe the videotape in written English.



After participating in a variety of activities focused on the retelling of a story, Horace Mann students individually or in pairs write their own version of the story on computer.

Writing the Story

Having reviewed the content and language of the story through a variety of activities, students are now ready to write the tale themselves. Using their drawings, but without the aid of the teacher's English transcript, students go to the computer and individually or in pairs create their own version of the story in English.

While they write, teachers encourage children to take risks with language. The most important thing for these beginner writers is getting their ideas on paper – using proper spelling and grammar will come later.

Teacher Reflections

Teachers continually assess what kinds of support individual children need at each stage and what can be done to improve the process. For example, video-recording the children's version of the story was not originally part of the process. When this step was added, according to Doris, the quality of subsequent drafts dramatically improved.

As students' skills improve, steps in the process are dropped. Needing less support from the technology and their teachers, children move closer to becoming self-confident and self-sufficient writers.

Teachers in the school believe the program has significantly boosted students' enthusiasm about writing. Middle-school teachers also report that students who have participated in the project are entering their classes with better English language skills.

Watch *Telling Tales in ASL and English* on the enclosed NCIP videotape.

Captioning Helps a Student Get the Big Picture

Soon after the Brown Middle School in Newton, Massachusetts, received a captioning workstation through a federal research grant, co-teachers Sue Lesser-Seltzer and Ellen Waite and their students with language learning disabilities brainstormed how each student might use the technology.

Franklin Castillo, a student who according to Ellen "struggles with getting the whole picture," chose to caption one of his favorite sitcoms.

Rather than transcribe every word spoken – the traditional way to caption – Franklin and his teachers decided that Franklin would only describe the important action in each sequence.

After replaying the video several times, Franklin was able to clearly describe the key ideas in different parts of the story. For example, during a scene in which one character was trying to serenade an unimpressed young woman,

Franklin wrote, *Steve is singing a love song to Laura. Steve really gets into the song and doesn't realize Laura has left the room.*

"I believe that this process was a true learning experience as Franklin himself began to understand the whole plot," said Ellen. "Franklin was absolutely delighted with the finished project and got a great deal of positive feedback from his classmates."

Collaborative Captioning

At the Reingold Elementary School in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, two fifth graders who are deaf worked together to caption a videotape of Deaf Awareness Day, a citywide event attended by students who are deaf and hard of hearing from all over metropolitan Boston.

Since the video had no audio and only some sign language, Timmy and Jonathan acted as reporters, using captions to describe and comment on the action in the video. For example, when the camera caught a boy falling down during the potato sack race, the students wrote, *Poor Danny, he fell. Better luck next time.*

The students easily learned how to use the captioning equipment and independently carried out every step in the process. The students' teacher Sheila Donahue, an educator with the CAPS Collaborative in western Massachusetts, helped with revisions, encouraging Timmy and Jonathan to clarify the text and use proper grammar and spelling. Seven weeks after they began the process, the tape was finally captioned and shared with other students, deaf and hearing. The boys also took the tapes home.

Sheila says that Timmy and Jonathan were always excited to work on the project and that it significantly helped their comprehension and writing skills. "Being able to play and replay the video has given the boys time to notice details, and this is reflected in their written language," reports Sheila. "I've seen improvement in their punctuation, use of verb tenses, and the richness of their vocabulary."

Students and Captioning

How Do Students Caption?

Creating a captioned video involves watching a videotape, writing text to match, then combining the text and video. The process sometimes begins with a videotape developed and produced by a group of students and their teacher.

Whatever the videotape being captioned, students use a VCR to play, pause, and search the tape while they compose corresponding text using a word processor. The text may be a direct transcript of the audio, a translation from one language to another like American Sign Language to English, or a general description.

At the beginning of the writing process, students often discuss the content of the video with classmates or a teacher. After they enter text using a word processor, they print out their work and make revisions as many times as necessary.

When students are satisfied with their text, they combine it with the video – a process that can be manual or automated. The text and video are routed through a piece of equipment called a **character generator** and recorded using a second VCR.

What Equipment and Software Are Needed?

A basic captioning workstation consists of a personal computer, two VCRs (one for playback and one for record), and a character generator that allows text to be superimposed onto video. A computer monitor, a video monitor, and a printer are also needed. Some systems require a time-code reader.

When evaluating a potential captioning system, keep in mind whether the word processing software suits the needs of your students and whether the system has the ability to create and read time code (though this function may be unnecessary for your purposes).

Staff at WGBH – the first organization to caption television and a leader in the field – can answer questions about captioning options for schools and provide the names of hardware and software suppliers. This kind of information can also be found on NCIPnet. At WGBH, address your questions to:

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125 Western Avenue
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When students caption videotapes, they use a VCR (right) to stop and start tapes, and a word processor (left) to compose corresponding text.



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