

ASL LITERACY AND CRITICAL THINKING DEVELOPMENT

ALFABETIZAÇÃO EM ASL E DESENVOLVIMENTO
DO PENSAMENTO CRÍTICO

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ABSTRACT

Most definitions of literacy, both historical and contemporary, define it as the sets of skills needed to learn and work within the basic needs of everyday life (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Lemke, 2004, as cited in Korhonen, 2010). Even the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines information literacy as “a capacity-building context, as the skills and capabilities for critical reception, assessment and use of information in peoples’ personal or professional lives” (Frau-Meigs & Torrent, 2009, as cited in Korhonen, 2010, p. 218). However, these definitions do not fully capture literacy as the skills needed for everyday life in and outside of work or those fostering critical thinking development. More specifically, these definitions do not explicitly apply to American Sign Language (ASL) literacy. To date, ASL bilingual-biliteracy pedagogy has paid little attention to the definition of ASL literacy and to a full understanding of how it is embedded in cultural and social practices. The focus has been more on the ASL curriculum, teaching practices and strategies, ASL assessment, or its connections to ASL as a language of study. This article focuses on the comprehensive definition of ASL literacy and on the different components of how ASL language and culture¹ are connected to critical thinking development and to the use of metalinguistic and metacognitive skills such as comprehension and construction strategies to decode, comprehend, assess, evaluate, and reflect upon ASL literacy works and ASL texts, including ASL media works. In this sense, ASL literacy is seen as greater than the definition of skills needed for work and study, extending to skills needed for life. Furthermore, this article illustrates how ASL literacy learning is connected to the interrelationships between the child, the home, the school, the ASL community, and the global community.

Keywords: ASL literacy. ASL pedagogy. Pedagogical strategies. Critical thinking. Cognitive skills.

¹ The term “Deaf culture” has been used for many years in various publications. However, it can be confusing when discussing the two different groups of Deaf people in Ontario, Canada. One group uses ASL while the other uses langue des signes québécoise (LSQ). Each group has its own language, literature, and culture that are distinct and unique. To avoid confusion, it is more appropriate to refer to ASL culture instead of using the term “Deaf culture” (Gibson, 2006). The same rule also pertains to ASL people, ASL students, and the ASL community, as opposed to Deaf people, Deaf students, and the Deaf community.

RESUMO

A maioria das definições de alfabetização, tanto históricas quanto contemporâneas, define-a como o conjunto de habilidades necessárias para aprender e trabalhar dentro das necessidades básicas da vida cotidiana (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Lemke, 2004, conforme citado em Korhonen, 2010). Até mesmo a Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, Ciência e Cultura (UNESCO) define a alfabetização informacional como “um contexto de capacitação, como as habilidades e capacidades de recepção crítica, avaliação e uso da informação na vida pessoal ou profissional das pessoas” (Frau-Meigs & Torrent, 2009, conforme citado em Korhonen, 2010, p. 218). No entanto, essas definições não capturam totalmente a alfabetização como as habilidades necessárias para a vida cotidiana dentro e fora do trabalho ou aquelas que promovem o desenvolvimento do pensamento crítico. Mais especificamente, essas definições não se aplicam explicitamente à alfabetização na Língua de Sinais Americana (ASL). Até o momento, a pedagogia de alfabetização bilíngue em ASL tem dado pouca atenção à definição de alfabetização em ASL e a uma compreensão completa de como ela está inserida nas práticas culturais e sociais. O foco tem se concentrado mais no currículo de ASL, nas práticas e estratégias de ensino, na avaliação de ASL ou em suas conexões com a ASL como idioma de estudo. Este artigo se concentra na definição abrangente de alfabetização em ASL e nos diferentes componentes de como a língua e a cultura²ASL estão conectadas ao desenvolvimento do pensamento crítico e ao uso de habilidades metalinguísticas e metacognitivas, como estratégias de compreensão e construção para decodificar, compreender, avaliar e refletir sobre trabalhos de alfabetização e textos em ASL, incluindo trabalhos de mídia em ASL. Nesse sentido, a alfabetização em ASL é vista como algo maior do que a definição das habilidades necessárias para o trabalho e o estudo, estendendo-se às habilidades necessárias para a vida. Além disso, este artigo ilustra como o aprendizado da alfabetização em ASL está ligado às inter-relações entre a criança, a casa, a escola, a comunidade ASL e a comunidade global.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização em ASL. Pedagogia de ASL. Estratégias pedagógicas. Pensamento crítico. Habilidades cognitivas.

Introduction

For the last six decades, research has indicated that the acquisition of American Sign Language (ASL) structures takes place in the same language area of the brain where all other languages develop. It is also known that ASL has the same trajectory of development that other languages follow (Corina & Knapp, 2006; Emmorey, 2002; Hickok, Bellugi, & Klima, 2001; MacSweeney, Capek, Campbell, & Woll, 2008). Furthermore, ASL is comparable to other languages in complexity (Klima & Bellugi, 1979; Stokoe, 1960, 1966; Stokoe, Casterline, & Croneberg, 1965; Valli, Lucas, Mulrooney, & Villanueva, 2011). From birth, a child's first language is acquired from the ASL language parents (Baker & Woll, 2008; Lieberman & Mayberry, 2015; Lillo-Martin, 2016; Lillo-Martin & Henner, 2021; Newport & Meier, 1985).

2 O termo “Cultura surda” tem sido usado há muitos anos em várias publicações. No entanto, ele pode ser confuso quando se discute os dois grupos diferentes de pessoas surdas em Ontário, Canadá. Um grupo usa a ASL, enquanto o outro usa a langue des signes québécoise (LSQ). Cada grupo tem seu próprio idioma, literatura e cultura, que são distintos e únicos. Para evitar confusão, é mais apropriado referir-se à cultura ASL em vez de usar o termo “cultura Surda” (Gibson, 2006). A mesma regra também se aplica ao povo ASL, aos alunos ASL e à comunidade ASL, em oposição ao povo Surdo, aos alunos Surdos e à comunidade Surda.

Like all languages, ASL requires pedagogical approaches in the curriculum that allow students to achieve ASL literacy and to use ASL literacy practices. The incorporation of ASL literacy and literacy practices in a curriculum is critical if students are to achieve a level of cognitive complexity that enhances higher-order thinking skills. Such an evidence-based curriculum outlines instructional methods and assessment strategies to maximize ASL literacy. It provides for planned instruction and interaction of students with social, cultural, and language relationships in a variety of daily life and academic contexts.

When students learn to use ASL language in an ASL pedagogical setting, they develop literacy skills both in comprehension and construction. They also develop an understanding of how their language has meaning and the capability to make connections to the world around them, and they learn how to use language for a variety of purposes in a variety of contexts and with different audiences. The study of ASL and its literary works and ASL texts provides students with a connection to cultural values and cultural interpretations of the world they live in. They link them to cognitive, affective, moral, experiential, perceptual, and social domains, which are key to the development of their personal and collective identity and their relationship with the ASL community. In Miller's (2008) article, "Exemplary Teacher: Principal Heather Gibson," Gibson states, "Literary works are intimately tied to the culture from which they spring and have their deepest meaning and strongest impact when the storyteller and audience share a common cultural ground."

Over the past 25 years, various attempts have been made to define ASL literacy, as evidenced by works from authors such as Christie & Wilkins (1997), Gallimore (2000), Gibson (2000), Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan (1996), Moores (2006), Ray (2021), Snoddon (2012), and Zernovoj (2015). Similarly, since 2008, sign language literacy has also been the subject of several attempts at definition by Gagne & Coppola (2020), Kuntze (2008), Mertzani (2022), and Rosen (2020). The respective definitions of ASL literacy and sign language literacy vary, with some authors perceiving them as a non-print form of literacy or as a broader competence beyond just reading and writing, while others view them as multi-literacies such as functional literacy, cultural literacy, and critical literacy. Finally, some authors include the use of literate or higher-order cognition as the prerequisite for effectively understanding and constructing ASL or other sign languages. However, none of these definitions fully captures the essence of literacy as comprehensively as they could. Byrne's definition of ASL literacy, originally developed in 2013 and revised in 2020 (H. Gibson, personal communication, July 7, 2020), has been fine-tuned to better encompass the full scope of literacy.

A comprehensive definition of ASL literacy

ASL literacy means having knowledge and skills in ASL language for a variety of purposes with a variety of audiences and in a variety of contexts. It provides the foundation for the acquisition of even more sophisticated literacy knowledge involving critical literary analysis and higher-level cognitive abilities.

- First, ASL literacy is **the ability** to use the linguistic structure of ASL for deciphering-deconstructing, reflecting, organizing, and conveying information, ideas, and thoughts for a variety of purposes and in a variety of contexts. It involves **the ability** to decode, comprehend, assess, evaluate, and reflect ASL literary works, ASL texts, and ASL media works at the social and academic levels.

- Second, ASL literacy includes **the ability** to imaginatively and eloquently construct and convey ASL literary works, ASL texts, and ASL media works.
- Third, ASL literacy enhances **the ability** to acquire extensive knowledge and experience associated with ASL culture, ASL history, ASL literature and ASL texts, ASL media, education, sign language cultures, and other relevant topics.
- Finally, ASL literacy equips an individual to effectively live, study, work, and actively contribute to the ASL community and communities at large, and to effectively navigate global society. Full ownership of ASL language and ASL cultural identity is crucial for the development and application of ASL literacy skills.

Certain terms explained

Throughout the paper, several terms may be unfamiliar to readers, such as ASL literary work, ASL text, ASL media work, ASL literary device, ASL construction, and deciphering-deconstructing. In order to help readers fully comprehend these terms, it is necessary to define them before proceeding further in the paper.

An **ASL literary work** is an original composition in ASL that is a cohesive artistic expression created in any form with a literary style, point of view, and effect. ASL literary works are artistic explorations of ideas and experiences – for example, to inform, describe, and convey thoughts, feelings, and opinions that connect the audience to an ASL worldview (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

An **ASL text** is a discourse form used for non-literary information sharing and knowledge acquisition. ASL texts convey content or provide information in a continuous, organized, and coherent flow (e.g., ASL video texts, instructions, news, scientific references, historical and contemporary documentaries about ASL people and/or ASL organizations) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

An **ASL media work** is an ASL composition that is conveyed through electronic media. Forms of ASL media have various ASL genres, including news reports, documentaries, sport programs, comedies, cartoons, advertisements, and interviews (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

An **ASL literary device** is a specific pattern of ASL words, classifier structures, phrases, and/or techniques used in ASL literary works, texts, and expositions to create a specific effect. Examples include analogy, comparison, contrast, irony, foreshadowing, simile, metaphor, personification, pun, oxymoron, and symbolism (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

ASL construction is the process of creating an ASL work. Specific knowledge and skills are essential to creating ASL works that incorporate content and forms effectively in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. During this process, a student will apply their knowledge of ASL conventions, ASL grammatical structures, non-manual markers, ASL usage, and registers correctly (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

Figure 1: ASL Construction

Link: <<https://youtube.com/shorts/3VMcOHJrZdk>>.

Deciphering-deconstructing refers to the act and process of understanding a message in ASL. It involves analyzing ASL literary works, such as prose, poetry, and other genres, that are experienced in live or video format without the use of an orthographic system. It also includes analyzing ASL texts (e.g., current news, dictionaries, history, science, and how-to vlogs). The process involves decoding ASL words and classifiers and language structure, thinking about the meaning of the content, and extracting meaning from the work. Examples of deciphering-deconstructing strategies include skimming ASL literary works and ASL texts for information or details; analyzing parameters of ASL words; substituting unfamiliar ASL words and classifiers with familiar ASL words and classifiers; and breaking down the content of ASL literary works into strophes, stanzas, and lines. During the deciphering-deconstructing process, students may use cueing systems – that is, semantic, syntactic, and/or pragmatic clues from the context or their understanding of ASL structures and/or ASL parameter relationships – to help them understand unfamiliar ASL words and classifiers. They may also use a variety of comprehension strategies to help them construct meaning and eventually demonstrate their understanding of an ASL literary work or ASL text (adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

Figure 2: Deciphering-deconstructing

Link: <<https://youtube.com/shorts/3kKz-dMAncU>>.

The term *deciphering-deconstructing* recognizes a more complex process than *viewing* since it involves a variety of comprehension strategies, such as predicting, visualizing, making connections, inferring, and analyzing ideas and information conveyed by ASL works. This term is measurable by assessing students' comprehension skills, whereas viewing is not an appropriate pedagogical term and is not listed in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Miko, 2010). ASL teachers are able to detect areas of strength and areas in need of focus and proceed to the stage of identifying "what next." Deciphering-deconstructing involves students' comprehension of ASL works in a greater depth than viewing suggests.

Figure 3: Literacy



Link: <<https://youtube.com/shorts/1Y08HNxQsg>>.

The most common construction of the ASL word for "literacy" is strongly tied to the concept of traditional literacy, namely reading and writing. This ASL word is demonstrated in Figure 3.

This ASL word reflects the simplified concept that most people have of "literacy." Based on the ability to read and write, it misrepresents the true meaning of ASL literacy. Indeed, it does not appropriately reflect the meaning of the term *literacy* in the English language or any other language since all languages, including sign languages, involve the skills to identify, comprehend, interpret, create, and convey content --- far more than the mere ability to read and write. The proper ASL word demonstrated is shown in Figure 4 below. It appropriately conveys the meaning of non-traditional literacy in the broader sense suggested in this article.

Figure 4: Literacy



Link: <<https://youtube.com/shorts/dyHRxjc4gJE>>.

Theory into practice

According to Hoffmeister (1994), “Learning a language for school is not only a sociocultural process but one requiring metaknowledge, metacognition, and metalinguistic skills” (p. 153). These aspects provide the necessary foundation for the development of ASL literacy skills. Research indicates that higher levels of metacognition and metalinguistic skills yield higher levels of student achievement and well-being in school.

Metalinguistic awareness recognizes the complexities and forms of an ASL language. It includes the ability to think and discuss the linguistic form and structure and how these relate to and construct the underlying meaning of the structure of a language. It also includes the ability to analyze the particular ways in which ASL language is used to convey meaning. With this focus on structure, students are able to detect details in ASL persons’ use of their language for specific purposes (e.g., the use of referential shifting [role shift] connected with specific ASL content, its purpose, and ASL context). It requires an ASL person to have high literacy skills to be able to use and manipulate linguistic features and components of the language. They need to be able to perceive and understand how other ASL persons convey their thoughts, information, and ideas. It is not sufficient to use ASL just to “communicate” or to converse about everyday contexts in a school setting.

It is imperative that ASL is used in the school as *a language of instruction* and also as *a language of study* in itself. In this way, students are exposed to opportunities to learn ASL academically as a language that promotes the development of *higher-level cognitive processes* as they study how ASL is used to convey meaning. This approach is comparable to how, in French-language schools in Canada, French is used as both a language of instruction and a language of study.

For example, the study of social justice in the ASL classroom would invite students to examine how this issue impacts the ASL language, culture, and ASL community. This approach encourages students to use their critical literacy skills to analyze the theme of social justice in ASL literary works and ASL texts, including ASL media works. They are prompted to apply their understanding of ASL contents in a variety of ASL forms in *new and unfamiliar contexts*. As they learn complex issues of social justice in ASL works, they deepen their metalinguistic knowledge and metacognitive skills.

ASL literacy also involves the ability to deconstruct a variety of topics and contents related to the study of language and the cultures connected with it. It includes history, legends, theories, science, arts, sports, etc. When students study ASL contents in a variety of historical, social, traditional, and cultural contexts, they can make connections with other sign languages/languages, cultures, and different time periods (from historical to contemporary). For example, when they examine the relationship between the scientific theories related to language and the history of language and the ASL community, they will think more deeply about ASL literary works, ASL texts, ASL media works, ASL culture, and social justice. When they deconstruct and analyze the impact of legislation on ASL language, culture, community, and its people, they enhance their understanding of the world around them. This, in turn, supports and encourages student development of ASL language and ASL literacy skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

Strong ASL language and literacy skills are the key integrating components for the development of language comprehension and construction skills. For this reason, the ASL curriculum must introduce learning activities and pedagogical strategies with this goal in mind. Students need to be taught comprehension strategies. They need to have many opportunities to respond to ASL literary works or texts. Their construction skills need to be enhanced through dialogues and academic discussions, asking/

answering questions, recounting experiences, discussing opinions, justifying responses, brainstorming, problem-solving, sharing personal reflections, etc. Vygotsky believed that higher-level cognitive processing required meaningful interaction and dialogue with others (Dart, 2008).

A significant part of the ASL curriculum is designed to support the development of ASL literacy. The content requires students to develop and demonstrate their comprehension (making connections and understanding) and construction of content (synthesizing and creating).

Comprehending ASL construction and content

ASL is a complex and evolving language, and full comprehension of both academic conversation and ASL literary works and ASL texts requires the use of higher-order cognitive skills, which includes the deciphering-deconstructing process. The result is a real, in-depth comprehension of ASL literary works and ASL texts. Examples of comprehension strategies involve activating prior knowledge, previewing, skimming, scanning, deconstructing for main points or points of view in ASL works, re-deciphering-re-deconstructing, predicting, making inferences, summarizing, synthesizing, reflecting, and questioning for the purpose of explanation, clarification, expansion of understanding and application to life events.

When deciphering-deconstructing ASL works, students develop a deeper understanding of the dimensions of their people's experience as individuals and as a group. As they decipher-deconstruct critically, they develop a better understanding of the variety of forms found in ASL works and its elements and features (e.g., literary devices and stylistic devices) in ASL literary works and ASL texts. As they study ASL works that are connected with their language, culture, history, and contribution to the ASL community, they create more meaningful connections between themselves and the world around them.

Based on ASL pedagogy and pedagogical strategies, programs (including cognitive activities that rely on ASL as a first language) aim for the development of metalinguistic knowledge and metacognitive skills so students can deepen their understanding of ASL literary works and ASL texts. An example of supporting students' development of cognitive and critical thinking skills is the use of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Pohl, 2000), as described below, which provides one framework for enhancing students' development of cognitive and critical thinking skills.

What is Bloom's Revised Taxonomy?

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, widely used in classrooms, is a system of organizing thinking skills from lower to higher levels, with the higher levels involving increasingly sophisticated cognitive skills. This classification of the thinking process is organized and delineated in different levels of cognitive complexity, providing teachers and students the opportunity to utilize and encourage a range of thinking skills. It also empowers them with various types of questions and guides teachers' levels of questioning within a lesson.

Lower-level questions involve remembering, understanding, and lower-level applications of the taxonomy; these are appropriate for evaluating students' comprehension and application skills. They assist in reviewing and summarizing content, as well as identifying students' strengths and areas of focus. *Higher-level questions*, requiring complex application, analysis, evaluation, or creation skills, encourage students to use critical and creative thinking more deeply, fostering problem-solving abilities. They also stimulate engagement in discussions and independent information-seeking (Miko, 2010).

Applying Bloom's Revised Taxonomy to ASL Literacy Development

Utilizing Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Learning in an ASL program is one strategy to support and develop students' cognitive skills. The goal of employing Bloom's revised taxonomy is to enhance students' ability to engage in complex critical thinking by using increasingly higher-order questions. This method aims to elicit and deepen their understanding of ASL content in various forms, thus enabling them to think creatively and independently as they solve problems related to the complex society in which we live.

ASL teachers are encouraged to use strategies that apply Bloom's revised taxonomy to instruct students on how to think in novel ways. They must employ the higher levels of the taxonomy (analysis, evaluation, creation) related to ASL literary works, ASL texts, and ASL media works to extend students' critical literacy and thinking skills. This assistance enables students to apply what they know to new contexts or situations.

ASL teachers can further employ Bloom's revised taxonomy to guide students in ASL comprehension and construction strategies, encouraging them to use critical thinking skills while deciphering-deconstructing and constructing ASL works. This method enables and encourages students to generate, synthesize, and create new ideas and information using previously learned material. When students are asked to manipulate information and ideas in this way, they become increasingly proficient at independently solving problems, developing a better understanding of the world around them, and finding new meanings in ASL works. Students will also derive new meanings related to social issues and values in their own lives through the analysis of ASL literary works and ASL texts from historical to contemporary periods.

Applying Bloom's revised taxonomy in an ASL classroom enables students to understand, interpret, and make judgments about what they decipher-deconstruct based on evidence. They can draw conclusions about ideas in ASL works and cite stated or implied evidence from the works to support their points of view. The ability to decipher-deconstruct and comprehend ASL literary works and texts is expanded through dialogues. "Learning deepens when students engage in deciphering-deconstructing, analyzing, constructing, reflecting, representing, and responding, and using metacognitive and metalinguistic interconnected skills — and reflect on their own progress in developing language and literacy" (Gibson, 2016, p. 5)³. It is vital that ASL teachers increasingly monitor students' learning. Data related to students' results should be regularly collected and analyzed using ASL assessment, curriculum-based ASL assessment (level of achievement chart for ASL), and students' evidence of learning. Using such data will provide crucial feedback to ASL teachers about the most effective pedagogical approaches and high-yield instructional strategies to support students' development in ASL and ASL literacy skills.

According to Byrne (2013), "full ownership of the ASL language, ASL cultural space, and ASL cultural identity is crucial for the development and application of ASL literacy skills" (p. 27). Therefore, applying Bloom's revised taxonomy affords students the opportunity to engage in higher-order thinking. It is imperative that ASL teachers employ various instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction, graphic organizers, ASL curriculum-based assessment, and instructional activities or learning tasks to enhance students' literacy skills and achievement to a greater extent in various

3 Heather Gibson developed a first language-based ASL curriculum that outlined expectations for students' ASL and literacy competencies. The curriculum is designed to describe the knowledge and skills required at each grade level, providing administrators, teachers, parents, and students with expectations for ASL language and ASL literacy.

contexts when using higher-order questions. This will also improve students' development of ASL language skills. In ASL pedagogy, it is suggested that the use of taxonomy be incorporated into daily lessons using an integrated approach, engaging students in higher-order thinking. Too often, students' critical thinking skills are confined to lower-order thinking levels that are not nourished and expanded.

Below are a couple of examples of ASL curriculum-related templates of questions that reflect students' cognitive development. These are applicable to an ASL class at the elementary school level. There are different components that are involved in each lesson. The examples illustrate in a concrete way how this approach supports students' development of cognitive skills.

Example #1

ASL Poetry: "Cow and Rooster" by Clayton Valli (1995)

Grade Level: Grade 1

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Remembering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an ASL finger-play using the pictured handshapes on a stick and retell Valli's poem. • Describe only the movement of a Y-handshape used in the poem. • Examine and identify ASL cultural behaviours found in the poem. |
| Understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect various props related to farm life and place them in the ASL Community Centre for students to act out Valli's poem. • Give the main idea of the poem. |
| Applying | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine other possible movements for a cow and a rooster. • Use inappropriate ASL cultural etiquette during ASL literacy time (e.g., "how the cow made eye contact with the rooster."). • Have a discussion on the symbolism of the characters' specific movements in "Cow and Rooster". Identify the movements and their meaning, and then make connections among the social justice issues presented in the poem. • Construct and create a similar ASL poem using different animals and make it more comical. |
| Analyzing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze rhymes (movement) and sequences of the poem and other poetic features and make a critique. • Why did the poet select two specific animals, cow and rooster, for his poem? • Why is it important for an ASL poet to use eye-gaze and referential shifts to establish a reference in spatial space to present a cow and a rooster? |
| Evaluating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What part of Valli's poem would you recommend changing? What part of the poem would you not recommend changing? • Which animal would you want to be? Give your reason for your choice. |
| Creating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use repeated parts of Valli's poem to create an ASL chant more comical. • Create and construct an ASL poem after making a plan using an ASL video graphic organizer. |

Example #2

ASL Poetry: “Friends” by Andrew Byrne (2000)

Grade Level: Grade 2/3

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Remembering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recount Byrne’s poem. • Describe what happened after the characters bumped into each other. • What ASL cultural etiquette did the characters use when bumping into each other? • Describe the setting in the poem without the use of props or medium. |
| Understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify unmarked handshapes used in Byrne’s poem without the use of props. • Explain the main idea of the poem. • Paint their hands to represent characters and recite the poem using mnemonic techniques. |
| Applying | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a 3D model using cardboard for a 1-handshape for an ASL word, friend. • What would the movement for using an ASL pronominalized term such as “two of you” be like in an ASL poem, Friends? • Change Byrne’s poem into a short documentary film. |
| Analyzing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infer what will happen to the characters if they did not bump into each other. • Discuss and make a critique of the poem. • Analyze the poem for the stanza. • How can you tell if an ASL person is sharing an ASL poem, “Friends,” in a more formal register? How would you construct your response to them so that it is culturally appropriate? • How did your review of an ASL poem structure prior to examining the ASL video text help you understand the content? |
| Evaluating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What criteria would you use to assess Byrne’s poem? (e.g., originality, creativity, logic of organization, cohesion/coherent, and others). • Discuss the value of a good friend. • How did your peers’ feedback related to the use of role shifting help you understand the content in an ASL poem, Friends? |
| Creating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and construct an ASL poem using unmarked and marked handshapes. • Students design their own scavenger hunt related to Byrne’s poem and place objects in various locations of the classroom and create videotaped instructions using locative classifiers for that scavenger hunt. |

As they decipher-deconstruct, analyze, and reflect upon ASL literary works and ASL texts, students also develop a deeper understanding of the ASL community and culture.

Constructing ASL content and the use of ASL grammatical structures

In the context of ASL pedagogy for constructing skills, teachers need planned language instruction to build students’ development in constructing ASL skills for dialogues, debates, presentations, compositions, and other forms of ASL works. ASL construction is the process of developing, experimenting, and creating ASL works through the use of technology and/or in live presentation. It is not only

that they construct ASL works. They also include cultural information, which is the key part of critical analysis. Kuntze (2008, as cited in Gárate, 2014) argues that ASL “text” should be seen as content that is linguistically documented through the use of video recordings. The content should be seen as a document organized with a purpose and crafted to convey meaning. This requires students to have an arsenal of specific skills and knowledge to create ASL works that incorporate content and forms for their specific purpose and audience. Students need to ensure that there is a connection of ideas that creates cohesion in an ASL work (e.g., use of specific handshapes, locations, and movement paths to create an ASL classifier for snowflakes in an ASL documentary). They also need to ensure that an ASL work is coherent in the use of ASL grammatical structures and non-manual markers. As well, they need to ensure that the ASL sentences are constructed accurately. One of the strategies that students can use to create an ASL work is the use of a video ASL graphic organizer. This process will guide them in the planning, organizing, and editing of their ASL work in the flow of the content and ensure that their work is grammatically coherent.

During the constructing process, students will apply their knowledge of ASL conventions, grammatical structures, non-manual markers, ASL usages, and other ASL linguistic features, components and literary devices that accurately convey meaning in ASL. This process necessarily requires students to demonstrate cognitive skills as they create, construct, analyze, review, evaluate, and reflect on their ASL works.

The ASL Constructing Process

The ASL constructing process (Figure 5) for ASL literary works and ASL texts is a stagewise framework that requires the skills of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, respectively:

Figure 5: The ASL Constructing Process



Link: <<https://youtube.com/shorts/ugk84cJN2-U>>

Planning: This stage involves brainstorming and developing ideas, gathering information, including information about ASL cultures, and determining a form that suits the purpose and audience. It may include considering register, style, and point of view.

Drafting: The drafting stage involves selecting and assuring the appropriate use of ASL discourse structures, markers and registers, as well as ASL language structures, ASL parameters, ASL conventions, ASL vocabulary, classifier construction, spatial construction, and non-manual markers to organize content in a form and style for the purpose and audience.

Revising: This stage involves critically examining the draft version of the ASL literary work or ASL text by using different strategies to refine and improve the content, flow, and structure (to ensure cohesion/coherence, clarity, and accuracy).

Editing: The editing stage involves checking the accuracy of the ASL discourse structures and markers and registers, as well as the language structures, ASL parameters, ASL conventions, ASL vocabulary, classifier construction, spatial construction, and non-manual markers as well as the purpose of the work.

Publishing: This stage involves using elements of effective delivery, such as graphics, layouts, and hyperlinks, to finalize an ASL work that meets the criteria (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021). Note: It is imperative to recognize that students do not always wish their ASL works published.

Constructing ASL literary works and ASL texts from the planning stage to the publishing stage involves higher-level thinking skills, cognitive processes, and technical skills. It entails the use of a framework in which students review, edit, and publish their ASL works. During the ASL constructing process, students are encouraged to use strategies to create, experiment, and synthesize the information they have collected to build content and convey meaning. They are also encouraged to ensure that the connection of ideas and information forms an understandable, cohesive, and impactful whole in their ASL works. There are ASL resources and pedagogical supports (e.g., teacher prompts, instructional tips, glossary for ASL curriculum, and ASL literary genres) that enhance students' development in comprehension, construction, and usage of ASL literary works and ASL texts. ASL digital literacy tools such as video-text applications and photo editing applications are also included in the process.

The constructing process is a *continuous process* that requires students to use their language, critical thinking, and analysis skills when creating their ASL works. It is imperative that ASL teachers are there to support and guide students' learning when creating ASL works during the constructing process. Following are two examples of lesson plans that meet the comprehension and construction expectations of the ASL Curriculum:

Lesson Plan #1: Comprehension

Grade Level: Grade 5

Strand B: Comprehending ASL Construction and Content

Overall Expectation:

B.1: Demonstrating Understanding of ASL Content

- Identify various ASL genres, cultural elements, and ASL words and classifiers to determine meaning in a variety of ASL literary works and ASL texts, using a range of comprehension strategies.

Specific Expectation:

B1.3: Using Comprehension Strategies to Understand ASL Literary Works and ASL Texts

- Use a range of comprehension strategies before, during, and after deciphering-deconstructing ideas and information in ASL literary works and ASL texts to determine meaning.

B1.4: Using Comprehension Strategies to Understand ASL Words and Classifiers

- Use a range of comprehension strategies to determine or confirm the meaning of new, unfamiliar, or recently learned ASL words and classifiers in ASL literary works and ASL texts.

Students' Previous Knowledge:

- Knowledge of different farm animals, including cows and roosters
- Knowledge of ASL parameters and how they are related to ASL words and classifiers and its rhyme (e.g., alliteration)
- Knowledge of ASL poetic linguistic features (focus on handshapes)

Learning Goal:

- We will learn to decipher-deconstruct Clayton Valli's poem, "Cow and Rooster," for meaning. We will respond to questions related to Bloom's revised taxonomy for comprehension.

Success Criteria:

- I can use my prior knowledge to interpret Valli's poem.
- I can analyze different handshapes and their connection to ASL words and classifiers in the poem to determine the meaning.
- I can recite the poem.

Minds-On:

- Review different farm animals.
- Have students discuss and identify/compare how cows and roosters are alike and different.
- Examine and identify each animal's specific character traits. Use the iPads to document their ASL notes.
- Review ASL poetic linguistic features – focus on handshapes and how they are related to alliteration.
- Review/discuss how the ASL poem is related to social issues – based on previous discussions.

Materials:

- iPads to document students' notes and to recite and record their ASL poem, "Cow and Rooster"
- Video of Valli's poem
- Whiteboard and markers
- Photos and videos of farm animals

Teacher Supports:

Examples of comprehension strategies include:

- activating prior knowledge;
- questioning;
- breaking down the content of an ASL poem into lines for meaning;
- repeating the process of deciphering-deconstructing; and
- previewing an ASL poem's characteristics to make predictions.

Group Activity #1: In pairs:

Deciphering-Deconstructing Valli's Poem, "Cow and Rooster":

- Explain to students that they will be asked to analyze lines based on Valli's poem's first and second stanzas. They will be asked to identify the plot for two stanzas. Students will also be asked to predict the next ASL stanza (the third stanza) and its plot. Students will be encouraged to use different comprehension strategies to identify the plot in each stanza. Ask students to examine the first stanza of the ASL poem "Cow and Rooster" and its plots and then ask them to predict what will happen in the following stanza based on their understanding of the poem's structure;
- They will document their ASL notes based on their discussion. Then, each pair will be asked to summarize their ASL document to the class.

Group Activity #2: In pairs:

- Students will work in pairs on Valli's poem to demonstrate their comprehension of the use of referential shifting when using specific ASL handshapes in ASL rhyme. They will use mnemonics as a cue (e.g., repetitive handshapes in an ASL poem {e.g., the Y-handshape and the 3-handshape in Valli's poem}) for them when using referential shifting for two different roles/characters in tableau drama.
- Then, using iPads, each student will be asked to recite the first two stanzas of Valli's poem. They will be asked to recite the stanzas using the ASL constructing process.

Activity #3:

Question/Answers using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy:

Each student will be asked to give their responses using an ASL literary journal. They will be asked to answer the questions listed below.

- Why do you think the poet selected a specific handshape for each character?
- What happens when a specific parameter of an ASL classifier is changed?
- When can unconventional ASL grammatical structures be used for specific purposes, such as a specific handshape to denote "tail" in the ASL poem "Cow and Rooster"?
- How is the character's ASL cultural identity made evident?
- Why did the poet we are studying use a carnivalesque discourse form in his poem?
- What strategies and mnemonic techniques did you use to help you to recite a poem?
- How is an alliteration (the repetition of the Y-handshape and the 3-handshape related to ASL classifiers for the poem for stylistic effect) used in Valli's poem? Students may use the video clips of the poem to decipher-deconstruct for their deeper comprehension related to the use of alliteration in an ASL poem in the first and second stanzas.
- What do the interactions between the two characters in the ASL poem "Cow and Rooster" tell you about the themes of this poem? How is it related to the current social issues?

Consolidation:

Reflection:

- Given the slip using a rubric that is based on the ASL achievement chart, students will be asked to rate their comprehension of the first and second stanzas of "Cow and Rooster" from level one (knowledge and skills with limited effectiveness) to level 4 (knowledge and skills with a high degree of effectiveness).

Review Learning Goals and Success Criteria:

- Identify several things that you have learned in this class.
- Identify the area of the lesson you would like to learn more about or discuss for further understanding of the content in an ASL poem.

ASL Assessment:

- Use identified success criteria to track and monitor progress toward achieving stated learning goals to support students to identify where they are at in their learning, where they need to go/focus on the area(s) they need to develop (next step), and how to get there.
- Observation (Assessment for Learning): Group discussion and students' responses to teacher's questions.
- Product Assessment (Assessment of Learning): Reciting Valli's poem and their ASL literary journal with a list of questions that uses Bloom's revised taxonomy.
- Self-Assessment (Assessment as Learning): Reflection – rubric
- Peer Assessment (Assessment as Learning): Tableau drama activity

Lesson Plan #2: Construction

Grade Level: Grade 5/6

Strand C: Constructing ASL Content and Usage of ASL Grammatical Structures**Overall Expectation:**

C2: Using the ASL Constructing Process

- Use the ASL constructing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish a variety of ASL literary works and ASL texts.

Specific Expectation:

C2.1: Generating, Developing, and Organizing Content

- Generate, develop, and organize ideas and content before constructing ASL literary works and ASL texts.

Activity: Recounting an ASL Poem**Learning Goal:**

- We will recount a videotext of Clayton Valli's ASL poem, "Hands".

Success Criteria:

- I can use the constructing process to recount an ASL poem.
- I can identify constructing strategies that help me to create an ASL poem.

Minds-On:

Review the ASL constructing process:

- Ask students to briefly explain what an ASL constructing process is.
- Show photos and short video clips of the four seasons and how they are connected to Valli's poem.

- Have students discuss what the four seasons are like – what their general character traits might be like.
- Have students deconstruct and discuss the literary devices that Valli uses in his ASL poem (e.g., allusion, alliteration, analogy).
- Decipher-deconstruct four lines from a video clip of Valli’s poem.

Materials:

- i-Pads to recount and record their ASL poem.
- Video clip of four seasons
- whiteboard/chart paper and markers
- Valli’s poem “Hands”

Teacher Supports:

Examples of generating, developing, and organizing include:

- activating prior knowledge through group discussion;
- referring to their ASL video journal to draw upon previous learning and experiences;
- sorting ideas and information using video graphic organizers (a storyboard with the class to generate ideas for creating and constructing an ASL work);
- posing questions to their teachers and peers to develop creative thinking skills.

Group Activity:

1. Group Discussion:

- Have students discuss the characteristics they deconstruct in the video clips of Valli’s poem and how they use handshapes, locations, movement paths, and non-manual markers to create the four seasons cohesively and coherently. Then, have them discuss possible handshapes that they would use for this poem.
- Deconstruct/analyze the four lines of the poem.

2. Group Learning Task:

- Use a chart paper to deconstruct and track the four lines of Valli’s poem and the handshape(s), locations, and movements that correspond with the four seasons.
- Then, have the group recount the first four lines of the poem using video technology to capture their ASL recounting.
- Share the ASL work with the whole group.

Consolidation: Exit Slip and Student-Teacher Conference

Exit Slip: What did you learn about Valli’s poem, “Hands”? What further questions do you have on this topic?

Assessment – Identified Success Criteria:

Use identified success criteria:

- To monitor students’ learning progress toward achieving stated learning goal(s).
- To provide descriptive feedback to help students identify a) where they are in their learning, b) where they need to go, and c) how to get there.

Differentiated Curriculum-based Assessment:

- Anecdotal Notes/Observation (Assessment for Learning): Group discussion responses to teacher questions
- Product Assessment (Assessment of Learning):
 - a) Recounting based on an ASL work students developed
 - b) ASL Journal Response
- Self-assessment (Assessment as Learning): Reflection questions

Including ASL literacy in ASL pedagogy enhances students' success and well-being in developing/learning their own language and socio-cultural competencies, which in turn equip them with valuable skills for their ASL community and for their lives. The academic learning environment is where ASL students achieve complete literacy skills in ASL through the use of critical, metalinguistic, and metacognitive thinking skills and where they learn to apply these skills to a variety of contexts. It is essential that educators maintain collaborative dialogues through the use of the critical pedagogical lens to focus on teaching practices, assessment, and instructional strategies to support students' development of literacy skills in ASL.

Conclusion and Implications

This article argues that ASL literacy is crucial in the design of an ASL curriculum with the aim of enabling students to develop life-lasting critical thinking skills and to apply them in other areas of their lives. The ASL as the first language curriculum has been implemented in Provincial Bilingual-Biliteracy-Bicultural Schools since the early 2000s. Two years ago, the ASL as a second language curriculum was approved by the Ministry of Education and was implemented in the Provincial Schools and school boards. The curriculum is well-respected for its highly designed framework and content, learning expectations, assessment, and pedagogical support. In fact, ASL is one of the four recognized languages in the Ontario Education Act (1990). Therefore, it demands greater accountability on the part of educators to promote the development of ASL literacy skills among students.

The ASL curriculum has been conducive to a learning environment in which students are able to develop a positive self-image and convey and transmit their views of reality, their thoughts, their feelings, and their culture, values, and priorities in their first language. The development of critical thinking skills in ASL enables students to take ownership of the culture of the school community and to ground themselves in the ASL community (Gibson & Blanchard, 2010). A strong ASL curriculum, rooted in ASL literacy, ensures the continuity and evolution of ASL as a living language through transmission to subsequent ASL generations. Today's students of the ASL community will be the keepers of a vibrant ASL linguistic and cultural heritage and future.

The research literature on ASL literacy and how it relates to the best evidence-based teaching practices is sorely limited. More research is needed to investigate and identify the best evidence-based practices in the classroom and how to guide ASL teachers and students in the learning path of acquiring and responding to ASL literacy. As new insights, new instructional practices, methods and strategies, and new resources are shared in the professional educator community, the benefits of having the ASL curriculum can become rich, cumulative, and fully realized.

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