

**Title:** Enhancing Cultural Literacy through Conversation and Communication: Sign Language in Children's Libraries

**Presenter:** Eileen Baker, M.E.D., C.E.D.

**Sponsor:** Children's Section

**Reporter:** Phyllis DaCorte, Acton Public Library, Children's Librarian

Eileen Baker, Consultant to Industry, Education and Government, Specific to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, presented a dynamic program sharing with children's librarians methods of increasing cultural literacy by integration sign language in story time sessions for young children.

Eileen's program opened with a power-point presentation. To explain how pre-school children can use the sign language they learn in Story Hour, Eileen began with the ground building question, "What is baby sign?" To answer the question, she highlighted four points: "1. Research indicates that infants and toddlers can communicate before they are ready or able to speak; 2. Exposing young children including those with language delays and disabilities to another language, baby sign is an effective and positive bridge to recognizing their often challenging non verbal needs; 3. Learning baby sign encourages toddlers to interact in playful and engaging ways which has been documented through research to increase vocabulary, encourage communication, develop skills of observation, strengthen and introduce hand/eye coordination, motor skills and eye contact; 4. Early positive interaction between parents, caregivers and children facilitates closeness, fosters a sense of intimacy and self-esteem and empowers children to see the impact that shared communication has on their world." Eileen then took the audience a step further by explaining that reaching across grade levels, integrating sign language can "develop an awareness of communication", "introduce global themes of diversity, culture, sensitivity and acceptance", and "stimulate interest in career paths".

The next fascinating subject that Eileen focused upon was the "Sign Language Continuum" chart, which everyone received in their handout folder. The chart listed the six forms of signing, their characteristics, their sign systems, and their relation to English. From that point, Eileen ventured into "Children's Literature/Baby Sign" by having the audience follow her as she signed the alphabet. She then encouraged and demonstrated the use of book and flannel board sets by reading and signing *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, Jr. The audience enjoyed the fun and learning how to sign animals and colors simply by copying the hand signs illustrated by Eileen. As mentioned by Eileen, the children like to play with the flannel objects, and allowing them to do so gives the children the opportunity to interact naturally and encourages communication. Another book and flannel board set that Eileen has used in Story Hours is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. The audience followed Eileen as she signed the finger play *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* and the song *Skiddamirink*.

Each member of the audience received a folder which included charts illustrating the signing of the alphabet and numbers, the "Sign Language Continuum" chart, a copy of the power point presentation, and a bibliography of over 70 books. The "Sign Language Books for Children" bibliography not only listed the title, author, illustrator, publisher, and publishing date, it also included an illustration of the book cover, age

level, synopsis, and a space for reviewing comments. Some of the books listed were on display.

“Enhancing Cultural Literacy through Sign Language in Children’s Libraries” by integrating sign language in Story Hour sessions is an educational and enjoyable experience for all. At Acton Public Library, Eileen Baker presented a three-week Story Hour program in February for pre-school children, and to this day, the children are still signing *Skiddamirink* and *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* and requesting *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.