

Signing Time: books, videos teach children sign language

By Brent Rowse *Daily Universe Staff Reporter* - 5 Apr 2005

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Sign Language may be an answer for parents looking for ways to diminish behavior problems and help their children develop communication skills.

According to Byran Korth, an early childhood education program coordinator in the McKay School of Education, infants usually begin talking around 12 – 18 months of age. First signs, however, may come earlier.

“In family structures where children learn both Sign Language and English, the signs will come quicker because the gestures have meanings that children can identify with,” Korth said.

Young children have an increased capacity to learn multiple languages. Generally, the children with better communication skills have fewer behavior problems, Korth said.

That is a lesson in communication and relationships that Rachel de Azevedo Coleman has learned well.

When Coleman discovered her daughter, Leah, was deaf, she started learning Sign Language. Now she has turned that experience into a profitable business, and a useful tool for parents and children.

Coleman is making a series of videos called “Signing Time,” to teach children and adults Sign Language. Her father, Lex de Azevedo a local composer, and her sister, Emilie, helped produce the videos. When she started four years ago, she never imagined that “Signing Time” would become so popular.

“We thought we’d make 100 videos and just give them to friends,” Coleman said. “It started spreading by word of mouth, and even though we haven’t done any marketing we now get 60 to 100 orders a day from people we don’t know.”

Now that “Signing Time” has developed an expanding customer base and Coleman’s company, Two Little Hands Productions LLC, is growing, she decided to produce a set of board books to accompany the videos.

“It [producing the books] is something we’ve always wanted to do, but before we didn’t have the resources,” Coleman said. “We felt it was more important to make new videos than to change mediums. Now we’re big enough that we can make the books.”

Coleman said the videos focus on literacy in American Sign Language and reading is an activity that enhances literacy.

“On the video you see the word, you hear it and then you see the sign,” she said. “The books will help reinforce all that, and it’s something you can carry around. Kids aren’t supposed to watch too much TV anyway, so [the books] will be good for quiet time, at church, in the car or where ever.”

Korth said books aid children in the learning process.

“Reading is crucial because literacy addresses language development and cognitive development, so reading something that a child has seen on a video would greatly reinforce that learning,” Korth said.

Jennie Hendricks, an American Sign Language interpreter from Omaha, Neb., said these books in particular will be more helpful for learning sign language than other books.

“Since ‘Signing Time’ books will reinforce what children see on the videos they will be beneficial,” Hendricks said. “Other books that teach signs may be hard to understand what the signs are because they only show a picture and arrows, whereas these books reinforce what children see in the videos where other people model it.”

Coleman said she hopes more people will learn Sign Language until everyone knows a little. She said she wants her daughters to be able to communicate with other people, and have other people communicate with them, without frustration. That is the main reason she started making the videos, and why she wants to make other materials to help people learn Sign Language.

“Eventually I’d like to make story books that give the ASL translations,” Coleman said. “That would give more application than just learning signs. The stories would use and reinforce the signs from the video, and teach how to use them in context.”



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