VCSL Webinar Q&A (Revised 3-6-2018)
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Questions About Qualifications (i.e., Who is Qualified to Administer the VCSL)

Is this one-hour training enough for teachers or other school professionals to be considered qualified/adequately trained to use the VCSL with their students?

The webinar provided an introduction to the VCSL: Online, but it is not sufficient for participants to be considered qualified. We recommend that teachers participate in a training that includes a discussion of visual language development in young children, how to hand score the VCSL, and how to use the VCSL: Online.

Who should be evaluators?

The VCSL is a tool for tracking the language acquisition and development of children who use a signed language. Formal evaluation of the child's language level should be done periodically by professionals who work closely with the child to ensure that the child's language is on track (family support specialists, early childhood teachers, Deaf mentors, ASL specialists, etc.) Outside professionals unfamiliar with the child's daily language use would not be appropriate as evaluators. The VCSL documents language growth over time; it is not an assessment that can capture a one-time snapshot of a child's language abilities.

Someone giving the assessment may not have adequate signing skills to evaluate the child, which could result in inaccurate information regarding the child's language acquisition and development. Is there a minimum level of ASL skills required for an evaluator administering the VCSL?

Ideally, evaluation team members would hold an ASLPI 4+ or advanced signing level. In less than ideal situations, at least one team member should have an ASL PI 4+ or advanced signing skills while the other team members should have a minimum of ASLPI 2+ or intermediate signing skills. In rural areas where professionals with the minimum acceptable signing skills are not available, programs should make every effort to provide a Deaf mentor to support families as well as early childhood programs.

Evaluators often have their own descriptions of how they rate the children. How can you be sure that the scoring system they use is effective and accurate?

We recommend a team approach where professionals working with the family and/or child meet often to share their observations of a child's language use in different environments (home, school, playground, dorm, play groups, etc.) and come to a consensus on scoring the VCSL.

Many assessments require individuals to practice a few times before their first assessment is considered valid. Do you have a sample/practice evaluation so new evaluators can become acquainted with the VCSL before they are considered qualified to administer this assessment?

Yes, if you participate in a training/workshop, you will be given electronic tickets to use to practice scoring the VCSL and preparing reports.

Translational Questions (i.e., About What the VCSL Tests)

How do you assess/evaluate Deaf students at different levels of language acquisition?

The VCSL uses Not-Yet-Emerging, Emerging, Inconsistent Use, and Mastered to document a child's language acquisition. It does not use the term novice. As a child is evaluated, a teacher will document the child's language growth until it is mastered. After that, the teacher will monitor language development in the next items that are rated as emerging or being shown with inconsistent use.

What methods and equipment do you use to evaluate children's language acquisition?

We recommend that children be formally evaluated twice a year at a specific time as determined by school administrators. For example, a child could be evaluated in the fall and again in the spring. Infants/toddlers 24 months or younger should be evaluated more often to ensure that critical visual skills are developed early.

A team approach should be used to observe/document the child's use of language in different environments (at school, at home, on the playground, etc.).

Ideally, only professionals who work with the child on a regular basis should serve on the VCSL evaluation team. The team members should track a child's language development through ongoing observation. Formal assessment using the VCSL is completed on a predetermined schedule. After the evaluation is conducted, the child's basal age and ceiling age can be compared to those listed in the norms. The VCSL: Online automatically scores the basal and ceiling levels and generates normative comparisons.

No special equipment is required for the VCSL; however, a digital video camera may be useful for filming a child's sign production (e.g., telling a story). If using the VCSL: Online, electronic tickets are required for each assessment. They can be purchased at the VL2 online store at http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/products.

Do you work with speech therapists?

Yes, speech-language pathologists who are fluent signers are often members of the evaluation team and work along with early childhood teachers, ASL specialists, and other professionals using a team approach to evaluate children's progress.

Why is the checklist broken down into years? That seems like a pretty big developmental range. Can it be broken down further?

The VCSL norms have more fine-grained age ranges found to be associated with more detailed language acquisition. The use of years on the VCSL is used to guide users on where to start the evaluation.

The manual indicates that this assessment can be used for children from birth to age five. In a hypothetical situation, when assessing a five year-old child who has acquired all of the skills on checklist, his ceiling age comes out to be 4:9. This reflects a delay despite him acquiring all of the items. How would you report this score to parents?

A child who is five years old is already at the maximum testing age. Therefore, it is recommended that if the child has age-appropriate language, additional evaluations/assessments should only be completed if there is a concern regarding the child's ASL acquisition. Additional ASL assessments can be found at vl2.gallaudet.edu under the 'Tools' tab. Additionally, Tobias Haug (tobias.hague@iscla.org) manages a website discussing additional assessments. Also, see the

American Sign Language-Phonological Awareness Test (ASL-PAT) by McQuarrie (under development).

Can this checklist be used with older students that are delayed in language development? If so, what is the "cut-off" age?

Yes, children who are older than five may be evaluated with the VCSL to identify gaps in language development. We do not recommend the VCSL for children older than eight years of age. Remember, it would not be appropriate to use the norms with children older than five years of age.

You mentioned that the VCSL: Online begins at the child's current age, based on the information collected from the background questionnaire. What about older children with little to no exposure to language? Will the program automatically start at the first item?

The VCSL: Online should not be used with children older than five years of age as the system will be unable to begin the assessment. The VCSL can be given by hand using the paper version in the manual.

Will you only use data from children up to age five, or will lower-functioning older students' data be used as well?

Only children from birth to age five can be given the VCSL: Online. Therefore, only their data will be maintained in the database.

When administering the assessment, do evaluators select a language sample to analyze, ask parents for their reports, observe the child, or ask the child to provide an example?

Instead of a static assessment--one point in time--such as a language sample, the VCSL uses a dynamic process, requiring ongoing observation of the child and documentation of the child's language use in natural environments. Older children may be filmed during conversations or when asked to retell a story (see example from California School for the Deaf of pragmatic language use: https://youtu.be/bDFxr6dMJUE). Parents may assist by filming their child using a targeted language structure in the home. It is important that a lead team evaluator confer regularly with other team members and maintain an ongoing record of the child's language development from multiple environments.

Do the results provide a developmental age--both receptive and expressive--for the child's language skills?

The VCSL primarily tracks expressive language development. There are a few items listed on the VCSL that begin with "Understands," but these are verified through expressive language output.

The child's chronological age (years: months), the basal age, and the ceiling age provide comparisons to the norms. The basal age is the last item (in a series of 10) that is "mastered"; the ceiling age is the first item (in a series of 10) that is not-yet emerging. Establishing a basal and ceiling level focuses on the child's language skill levels: the basal level means that we can reliably assume that the child knows all the previous items on the VCSL; the ceiling level means that we can reliably assume that the child does not know the more advanced items on the VCSL.

Comparing these two "ages" allows the evaluator to determine if the child is developing appropriately compared to the norms.

Can I use this checklist for CODAs (even though this is not the norm population sample used)?

Yes, you may use the VCSL on all children who are learning a signed language.

What is included among the 114 questions in the VCSL? Does the VCSL include critical thinking skills and more complex language skills?

The VCSL covers most of the syntactical features of ASL and includes some cognitive skills. Language and cognition have a symbiotic relationship: one impacts on the other. As a child increases ASL use, cognition is simultaneously increased.

Questions About Specific Items or Terms in the VCSL

In the one year to two year section, for the item "Communicates Wants," can you clarify this? Is pointing sufficient? Is pointing and signing "want" sufficient? Does the child need to produce a full sentence (e.g., "I want milk.")?

Evidence of "Communicates Wants" in younger children could be pointing and signing WANT, or signing MORE or FINISHED consistently. By age two, children are forming simple sentences such as "ME WANT MILK."

In the one year to two year section, for the item "First ASL signs using simple handshapes (e.g., C, A, S, 1, 5)," is production of these five handshapes required for the child to have mastered this skill?

C, A, S, 1, 5 are examples of handshapes that are usually acquired first. Those handshapes along with B and C make up the seven basic unmarked handshapes that children usually acquire early. As their dexterity improves, more complex handshapes will be used to form signs.

In the two year to three year section, for the item "Uses descriptive classifier (e.g., CL:F spots), does the child have to specifically know the CL:F to meet this item?

The CL:F was only used as an example of a descriptive classifier. The child could use any descriptive classifier to indicate that this skill has been acquired.

In the two year to three year section, for the item "Uses commands with two-steps (e.g., YOU GO TO ROOM, BRING BOOK)", does this mean that the child needs to give someone a command?

Correct. For this item, the child signs the command that requires a two-step process (e.g., COME HERE, PLAY; SIT, READ).

In the two year to three year section, for the item "Begins to make multi-word productions (e.g., COOKIE WANT)," how does this item differ from the previous one (i.e., "Produces three/four sign sentences")?

An early stage in normal language development occurring right after first signs is multi-sign combinations. Consider that "Begins to make multi-word productions" means combining two signs into a unit of meaning (e.g., FROG JUMP), while "Produces three/four sign sentences" means an expansion of that language output (e.g., FROG GREEN JUMP). In the VCSL Version 2 we will clarify those two items.

What do the indicators look like?

If you are referring to the NOT YET EMERGING, EMERGING, INCONSISTENT USE, AND MASTERED, we suggest that teams work together to define what these look like and develop consistent scoring practices. Once regional trainers are available, they will be able to work with groups to assist in defining these measures.

What does "typically developing" mean? A child whose parents both use ASL?

Typical language acquisition and development means that a child is acquiring language in a similar way to other children who have complete language access in natural environments. Since most deaf and hard-of-hearing children have hearing parents, these parents most likely will be learning ASL at the same time as their child. In this case, families need fluent signers for support (e.g., Deaf mentors) to help them stay ahead of their child's language development.

Questions About Future VCSL Efforts/Additional Requests and Assessments

What curriculum is best for elementary Deaf students? Is there a published ASL curriculum?

An ASL curriculum has not been published for Deaf students. However, the Clerc Center recently published ASL Standards for K-12. More information may be found at this link: http://www.gallaudet.edu/k-12-asl-content-standards/standards.

What kind of assessment tools are best for Deaf students with autism?

The VCSL can be used as a screening tool for autism, especially the items listed in the birth to 12 months category. Children who fail to develop visual engagement should be referred for more diagnostic assessments. The VCSL norms should not be used for children with autism.

Is the VCSL also helpful for Deaf students with dyslexia? How many hours per week would one have to spend using it for this purpose?

The VCSL is a language acquisition and development checklist that tracks language development in children from birth to age five. It would not be appropriate to use the VCSL to evaluate dyslexia in children.

How does VCSL compare with Cottage Acquisition Scales for Listening, Language, and Speech?

The VCSL monitors visual/sign language acquisition; the VCSL is standardized. The Cottage Acquisition Scales is for listening and spoken language; it is not standardized.

What language activities do you recommend, assuming there are gaps found after assessing a child?

Deaf and hard-of-hearing children need abundant, language-rich, play-based environments and exposure to storytelling and conversations with fluent signing models. Specific activities are currently being gathered that will be shared with VCSL evaluators after they are finalized.

What other ASL assessments do you recommend?

There are only a few assessments of language development in young children who use a signed

language: The ASL Receptive Skills Test by Enns
(http://www.northernsignsresearch.com/shop.php) and P-Levels by French
(http://clerccenter2.gallaudet.edu/products/?id=183).

Are you planning on making assessments for older deaf children?

The VCSL team is focusing on birth to five years of age because these are the most critical years
of language development.

**Do you have lesson plans for teaching students ASL skills that they need to learn? Right
now teachers and parents get the results from the VCSL: O, but what can they do with
them?**

As of now, we do not have lesson plans; however, we are collecting activities from VCSL
workshop participants that we will share with VCSL evaluators in the future.

How do you recommend that we pursue further training on the VCSL in our region?

We are in the process of identifying individuals who would like to become regional VCSL
specialists. The summer training is the first step in becoming a certified VCSL evaluator. Please
share with individuals who might be interested in pursuing this certification:
https://form.jotform.com/NASLECE/clone-of-assessing-a-deaf-childs-as.

**Can you make a DVD for the videos you have produced of each item in the assessment for
those of us who will be using the VCSL assessment manually?**

We are sorry, but the videos in the VCSL: Online can only be used during evaluations due to
limited parental consent.

**What language activities do you recommend to remediate gaps found after assessing a
child?**

ASL Storytelling, ASL Rhythm and Rhyme activities, Sign play, and ASL vocabulary games, etc.

**Sharon mentioned that she is working on an ASL Standards curriculum that was just
released. Is this different from the release of ASL Standards in January by the Clerc
Center?**

For clarification, the K-12 ASL Standards Sharon mentioned are the standards that were released
by the Laurent Clerc Center in January 2018:
http://www.gallaudet.edu/k-12-asl-content-standards/standards.

The ASL Roundtable and the Clerc Center have worked for many years to create these
standards. While we do not have an ASL K-12 curriculum, having standards is the first step in
launching curriculum development work.

Is there another assessment to use for older deaf children?

Yes, the ASL Receptive Skills Test.

Questions About Pricing/Tickets/Procedures

Will participants get a certificate of completion?

The VCSL webinar is an introduction to the VCSL. We do not give a certificate or professional development credit for viewing. You should have received an email verifying that you registered for the webinar. To be a certified VCSL evaluator requires specialized training. Gallaudet University is offering summer training programs focusing on assessment of young children. Contact Laurene Simms at laurene.simms@gallaudet.edu or check out https://form.jotform.com/NASLECE/clone-of-assessing-a-deaf-childs-as.

Do we need a ticket for each student every year? From our understanding, we can use the same ticket for each student twice a year within eight months.

That is correct. You can use the same ticket and update the student twice a year with an eight-month period of time. You will be charged a ticket after eight months from the first assessment.

Is the Informed Consent form online? Can you send us the form electronically so we can share it with our parents?

A sample copy of the Informed Consent form is publicly downloadable from the VL2 website and may be used for sharing with parents. However, the downloaded form may not be used as a substitute for the automated online form that is sent to parents for an electronic signature when the online checklist is to be used. For families without access to email, evaluators can have the electronic forms sent to themselves and invite parents to provide an electronic signature in person.   The link to the sample form is: http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/files/5715/1957/6693/VCSL001.pdf.

Since we have done the VCSL on our students over the past several years, can we transfer the most recent information from June 2017 to the students' VCSL: O once we have access to it?

No. The online system employs a testing strategy that automates the assignment of basal and ceiling levels and automatically presents items to the evaluator for rating. Evaluators can, however, can request EXCEL spreadsheets with the results of their evaluations. Score and rating information can be hand entered into the spreadsheet from previous evaluations to facilitate reporting.

When using the VCSL, if I am testing a four year old, do I start at the beginning of the test (if this is the first time testing the child) or do I start at the four-year level?

The first time a child is evaluated in the VCSL: Online, you will provide background information on the child including the child's date of birth. The VCSL: Online will automatically start at the child's age group. Therefore, for the four-year-old child, the assessment will begin at 4:0. If the child has not mastered the first item, the VCSL: Online will automatically go backward to the items in the younger category until 10 items are mastered in a row in order to establish the basal level. This is done automatically; you do not have to do it manually.

The panelists have not yet explained whether one electronic ticket corresponds to one evaluation. Is it possible to use two tickets for the same student?

If two assessments occur within an eight-month period, the second is free. Thus, it is possible to assess a child in the fall and spring for the cost of one ticket. Then, in the following fall, the evaluation will require a new ticket and the new data will be linked to the child's previous ratings in the database.

When is an appropriate time to start assessments (which period of the school year--e.g., middle of the year)?

It would be best to start assessments in early fall and again at the end of the school year; however, for children younger than three, assessments should be done more often to ensure that language is developing typically.

Do you have an already-made template for teachers to use for data results to put in students' IEP/triennial evaluations?

We have not attempted to create templates for IEP evaluations. However, the online system allows evaluators to enter observations and recommendations onto the student's results form, which will become part of the student's record.

The online version shows examples of each skill with videos. When we evaluate our own students, is there a place we can upload videos or documentation notes showing what our students have demonstrated for each skill to use as evidence for the team?

There is no place in the VCSL: Online for you to upload your own videos that document children's language use. It would be better for you to create a folder on your school's secure server to store video data.

Regarding the parents' consent forms, is there step-by-step guidance for us on how to explain the purpose of this?

No examples are available that explain the purpose of the Informed Consent form. However, this YouTube video by Laurene Simms translates the VCSL manual into ASL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uG85SMJg2IY.

Also, note that the Consent Form has a section called "Contact Information." Parents are welcome to use this information if they have any questions or concerns about the data sharing and archiving options.

How much is a ticket?

See the VL2 online store for pricing information: http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/products. Discounts are available for bulk orders.

It is possible that more than one agency would evaluate the same child? If so, should they conduct the evaluation on the same "ticket"? Or can a child be evaluated separately by different agencies?

When you log into the system, you will search for a child's name to see if he or she has already been evaluated. When multiple agencies serve the same child/family, our recommendation would be for one to be designated as the "lead" VCSL: Online evaluator. Perhaps this determination could be made during the IEP or IFSP meeting.

The other professionals providing services to the child and family would be considered as part of the VCSL team. They could use the paper version of the VCSL to track progress in the specific environment in which they work with children and families. If taking this approach, a team meeting throughout the year should be conducted to compare results and to inform the "lead" VCSL evaluator who will be in charge of the formal assessment results.

In the online system, children are linked to the person who evaluates them. We are working on an update that will allow site coordinators to reassign children to new evaluators in a way that will allow their previously collected information to "move" with them.

Can we access the manual without buying a ticket?

Yes, the manual may be downloaded.

If we send you a video of a student's signing skills, can you evaluate him or her based on the video? Or are we responsible for the evaluation?

Given that the VCSL is a dynamic assessment, it is impossible to evaluate a child with a single "snapshot" of their language production. We do not offer video analysis of children's signing skills; the local team members are responsible for the evaluation. We are in the process of training and certifying regional VCSL specialists who will be able to provide additional training and assist with more complex evaluations.

Is this available in Canada now? Or are the videos just not working currently?

The VCSL is available as a paper copy along with the manual. The VCSL: Online is available too. Check out the VL2 Online Store for purchasing information: http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/products.

How long do the tickets last once purchased?

Tickets do not expire.

How long does it take for a teacher to complete the online checklist?

Teachers often maintain a file folder and use a paper copy of the VCSL to prepare informal observation notes, to document language use, to prepare lesson plans, and to create language experiences based on a child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The time required for a formal evaluation using the VCSL: Online will depend on the age of the child; evaluating younger children would take less time than older children. For an initial evaluation, a teacher with the child's current file folder should allow approximately two hours to enter data into the VCSL: Online and provide a narrative explanation of the findings. This information will be saved and subsequent evaluations will only require an "update" of the information already entered.

Just FYI: each electronic ticket can be updated within eight months at no additional cost.

Is there a cost for trainers?

Yes, trainers are available and pricing depends on the number and type of participants. But, as mentioned previously, our goal is to train regional VCSL specialists who can serve as mentors.

Where do I purchase an ASL curriculum? How much does it cost?

An ASL curriculum is not available; however, we are working on gathering activities for all items on the VCSL and will share them with VCSL evaluators.

Questions About Trainings

Can you provide VCSL training in Canada?

Yes, we can train in Canada as long as signers use ASL.

Where in Canada will you be visiting?

The VCSL developers worked with Silent Voices in Toronto, Canada last fall to train their family support specialists. No other trainings are scheduled in Canada at this time.