Why Sign with Children?

Benefits of Signing with Children

- 2-sided brain activity that increases brain functioning
  - Visual right brain usage
  - Cognitive second language left brain usage
  - Creates additional connections or synapses in the brain
  - Creates an average IQ increase of 12 points per child
- Enhances fine motor coordination
- Accelerated speech and emotional development
- Visual activity, as 80% of signs are pictorial representations of the represented concept, it is easier for children to learn than the spoken word
- Enables children to communicate effectively
- Enhances children's vocabulary, concept understanding, pre-literacy and reading skills
- Babies can communicate their pre-verbal wants and needs and be understood to reduce frustrations for parents and children
- A fun activity for child and parent/caregiver that reduces frustration and enhances bond between child and parent/caregiver
- Enhances children's confidence and self-esteem, any children can learn how to sign
- Effectively reinforces the instruction of the positive expression of emotions, self-regulation, problem-solving abilities, and social skills
- Enhances memory retention, with increased muscle memory and more senses involved in learning
- Better grades in school and score 17% higher on standardized tests

Classroom Instructional Benefits

- Enhances children's vocabulary, provides a secondary way to memorization (a back-up that enables children to learn concepts faster and recall them better)
- Enhances children's confidence and self-esteem, all children can sign
- Enables children to control their hyperactive tendencies
- Reinforces the learning of educational concepts

Classroom Environment Benefits

- Lowers children's noise levels in the classroom
- Reduces need for teachers to raise their voice
- Enables class to support special needs children
- Children pay better attention, they have to look directly at you
- In a short time sign language gets children's attention better than the spoken word
- Increased ability to express emotions reduces instances of misbehavior
- Increases children's use of manners

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American Sign Language in Education

According to Dr. Marilyn Daniels, the authority on the benefits of sign language use with young children, in Hubler (2003), sign language is both a visual and kinetic language and provides unique benefits. The brain creates individual memory stores for each language a person learns. In sign language you intake sign with your eyes, which uses the right side of your brain. Then as with any other language, sign is processed and stored in the brain's left hemisphere close to the ear. The process of visual communication creates additional synapses in the brain, furthering its growth and development. Also, it helps to establish two memory stores in the left side of the brain, one for English and one for sign language. This process develops a built-in redundancy of memory, storing the same word or concept in two formats in two places (p. 7).

Most signs are iconic, visually representing the word or concept. Visual associations are easier for children with autism to learn than spoken language. Sign language can act as a bridge to spoken language by "turning on" areas of the brain necessary for speech (Babies and Sign Language).

Other research findings support the many benefits inherent in the use of sign language for young children. According to Larson and Chang (2007), "Sign language has been shown to promote language development, improve reading skills, maintain behavior control, foster self-esteem, increase enthusiasm, cause children to be more actively involved in play, and increase ease of classroom management" (p. 239). Further, Capirci and Cattani (1998) hypothesized that "learning a visual-gestural language such as LIS (Italian Sign Language) may improve children's attentional abilities, visual discrimination and spatial memory" (p.135). These enhancements benefit the child individually and the classroom as a whole.

The resulting academic boost for young children is tremendous. Dean (2008) wrote that children who have learned American Sign Language at a young age exhibit an average IQ that is eight to thirteen points above average. According to Acredolo and Goodwyn (2000), "a National Institute of Health study also showed hearing 8-year-olds who had been signing at an early age had higher IQs, greater self-esteem, higher frustration tolerance, enriched parent-child bonding, and more sophisticated play experiences."

Teachers who use signing report fewer acts of violence, such as biting, hitting, and screaming, because the children are happier and less frustrated because they are better able to communicate (Sign2me.com, n.d.). Vallotton (2009) states that educators of young children are more responsive to preverbal children when children are using signs. Teachers made better eye contact with them, talked to them more individually, were warm and affectionate, and responded to their needs.

Sign language has been utilized to improve communication in special education classrooms for decades. Carrow (2003) writes that many abnormal behaviors related to autism and other developmental disabilities, such as aggression, tantrums, self-injury, anxiety, and depression, are actually negative effects of their inability to communicate to others. Sign language increases the child's ability to communicate, lessening these undesirable outcomes. These benefits are transferrable to the general population. Improving communication improves social, emotional and academic learning (SEAL). Further, it reduces instances of misbehavior by providing a frustrated or angry child a positive outlet for expression.

"It has been shown that through extensive therapy with a speech language pathologist, some children with Apraxia can, in fact, resolve some of their problems with talking" (Babies and Sign Language). "ADD and ADHD children learn better when information is presented visually (create a mental picture) and kinesthetically (through movement). Using sign language signs with these students can give them that visual and kinesthetic representation that will help them to learn successfully" (Orfano & Gromisch, 2012).

"Studies show that foreign language learning increases critical thinking skills, creativity, and flexibility of mind in young children. Students who are learning a foreign language out-score their non-foreign language learning peers in the verbal and, surprisingly to some, the math sections of standardized tests (Caccavale, 2008).

The aforementioned research demonstrates the amazing benefits of sign language for children, class instruction, and the children's environment. To learn more contact Time to Sign at (321) 726-9466.

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