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Logan instructor teaches signing to the hearing

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Arie Kirk - AP Member Exchange | Posted: Sunday, March 28, 2010 12:02 am | No Comments
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In this Saturday, March 13, 2010 photo, Leslie Briggs shows teachers in her "Signing in School" class the alphabet in American Sign Language (ASL) at Mount Logan Middle School in Logan, Utah (AP Photo/The Herald Journal, Alan Murray)



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LOGAN -- Four years into her teaching career, Leslie Briggs discovered the benefits of using sign language in her classroom -- behavior management became easier, class participation increased and students learned faster.

But she said using sign language in the classroom isn't just for students with hearing loss.

"People don't realize that sign language is so amazingly helpful for hearing kids," Briggs said.

In realizing these benefits, she said she also found what she describes as her calling -- helping other educators "catch the vision" of using sign language with hearing students.

Briggs, who has known sign language for 25 years, is teaching "Signing in School" workshops to local educators. During a recent workshop at Mount Logan Middle School, she told those in attendance that the opportunities are endless. Sign language, she said, "really, truly will enhance every aspect of your classroom."

Using sign language can influence auditory, kinesthetic and visual learning, Briggs said.

Involving sign language in classroom activities can help with literacy, she said, because it is a more intriguing way for students to learn and it makes them want to learn. Briggs said sign language allows students to hear, see and feel words, turning the "English alphabet into a finger play."

"It makes a world of difference," she said of the benefits regarding literacy.

Sign language can help behavior management because it's fun and requires students to remain active, Briggs said.

"Kids are fascinated by sign language itself and so they want to pay attention and they want to be involved and they forget to misbehave," she said.

Briggs said another benefit of using sign language is to help students establish and remember routines. Students can look at word lists, picture lists and sign language lists. That way, she said, "their reminders are on their hands."

For transition activities, she said, "Sign language is, hands down, the most effective tool you'll ever run across."

She said cognitive development can be affected by sign language, as well.

Briggs said she thinks using sign language has a place in any grade but is more effective for younger students in preschool through third grade.

At the workshops, Briggs teaches select signs from American Sign Language. She said educators can choose the extent to which they use sign language in classroom activities.

"Sign language can be used as a tool in any way," she said.

Briggs is the author of "Signing in School: Enrich the classroom experience through sign." She also helped write "Signing Time: Classroom Edition." Briggs taught at a middle school in Cedar City for four years. She became a certified interpreter in 1993 and now teaches a sign language class at Utah State University during the summer.

During a recent workshop, Briggs taught participants the signs for commands such as watch, take turns, share and help. She also led them in songs that use sign language, which she said educators could find helpful in their classroom.

Briggs said teachers who attend her workshops like, and implement, the idea of using sign language for hearing students.

"I've never had a teacher that learned about it (who hasn't) chosen not to do it with their kids," she said.

Briggs said students love it, too, because gestures are "their first language."

Teachers and students are enthusiastic about sign language, Briggs said.

"Sometimes the fact that it is fun is enough," she said.

• **Arie Kirk** writes for The Herald Journal.

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