



Aidan, age 13 months, signs "time" with Baby Signing Time.
Photo: C. Brunetti

Spotlight on the use of sign language in the early childhood classroom

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By **Laura Eldredge**, Hartford Preschools Examiner

The use of sign language in the early childhood classroom is not a totally brand new concept. Many caregivers of infants and toddlers employ sign language with the children in their care to help them learn to communicate their needs before they can communicate vocally. But how about once a child is speaking, is there still a benefit for preschoolers to learn sign language?

Sign language can be easier than traditional verbal languages for most children to learn. Children naturally mimic motions, and mastery of sign language motions will help them express themselves. Colleen Brunetti , Certified Advanced Signing Time Instructor and the owner of "[Little Hands, Big Ideas](#)", employs that philosophy into her business. *Little Hands, Big Ideas* is an educational resource company that brings the [Signing Time Academy](#) to Connecticut.

Colleen is a mom who used baby sign language with her own son, seeing firsthand the benefits of signing with infants. She also has a degree in Special Education and a Master's in Literacy.

"As a special educator and literacy specialist, I was looking for curriculum that was engaging and fun, but also uses proven best practices for early learning. As a mom I wanted the same thing, plus music and media that sounded good (Signing Time music is great!) and would be truly enjoyable for the whole family. I was so thrilled when I discovered that Signing Time, a company whose products I had already used informally in my own home, had recently started the Signing Time Academy and created a stand-out program for my home business that I would be proud to share with other educators. The fit has been

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perfect!"

According to [ehow](#), some of the benefits of signing are:

- **Motor Skill Development:** Sign language will facilitate growth of motor skills and dexterity that children need for basic skills such as holding pencils, tying shoes and picking up small items.
- **Reduces Frustration and Encourages Communication:** Sign language helps children communicate their desires before they have mastered a spoken language. They will feel more confident in their ability to express themselves.
- **Facilitates Greater Language Appreciation:** Children who express themselves at a young age with sign language have a greater appreciation of communication and are therefore likely to be strong readers, have an easier time mastering other languages, enjoy reading, and have enhanced vocabularies and test-taking skills.
- **Facilitates Learning:** The combination of signing and speaking keeps children's attention and stimulates both sides of the brain for visual (right side) and auditory (left side) learning.

Colleen offers classes for children ages infant through 3 years, and classes for children ages 3 and up. She also offers professional development workshops for early educators at their facility.

"I offer hands-on professional trainings to preschools. In these trainings we go over the academic research on the proven benefits of signing with preschoolers, both for language and vocabulary acquisition as well as for early literacy. We also discuss the benefits of signing for classroom management. Through these trainings, teachers come away with a solid understanding of how a second language can benefit preschoolers, how to implement it easily into their classrooms, and a set of signs to start using right away." says Colleen.

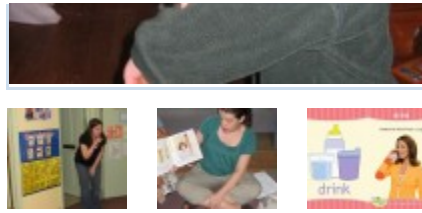
Visit her website www.littlehandsbigideas.com to get additional information on her services.

Come meet Colleen of Little Hands, Big Ideas and see her sign language demonstration at [The SEEDS Network Early Educator EXPO](#) on **November 6, 2010** at the **Lyceum in Hartford, CT**. Find out more information at www.theseedsnetwork.com.

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