

A New Sign of the Times: incorporating American Sign Language into English Teaching

By *Susana López Lagos*

s.lopez06@ufromail.cl

Sign Language (SL) is a way of communication using gestures and the body; it is a language that you can see but not hear. As an English teacher, I have used American Sign Language (ASL) in my classroom for some time now. It has been a wonderful experience because it has allowed me to communicate with my students, in ways I would have never imagined when I just started teaching. However, through the years, I have also faced important challenges in applying this language, which I am still learning to sort out.

Undoubtedly, the positive outcomes of using ASL in the classroom are both social and educational. We live in an era when inclusion is needed and demanded inside and outside the school, and the use of ASL has helped with this issue. For children, it is quite amazing when someone is talking in a different language, and it is even more eye-catching when people are not making any sounds but signs. However, adult users of the SL may feel uncomfortable if someone looks at them while they are communicating. This would not be an issue if we used ASL in the classroom since it would be common and natural for children to sign when talking in whatever place they are. In addition, the use of ASL lets children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), like hearing impairment, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia or those who are nonverbal, still have the confidence to share their opinions with their peers.

On the other hand, the downside is that this practice demands time and resources, which are often in short supply for teachers. I have been teaching for five years and the main problem I saw during my first years was the lack of time to prepare material, plan and complete the administrative work. If any of the readers at this point were willing to try this, I would recommend considering the time spent in preparing the material, looking for signs according to the context of the vocabulary you are teaching, and finally learning the sign and the correct way to deliver an utterance following the linguistic rules of ASL.

To summarize, the use of ASL in the classroom has become a new sign in times of inclusion. Although it is considered a different and uncommon means of communication for most people, it turns into something ordinary which can naturally be incorporated in our English classes. This point is remarkably important as children are the future individuals who will shape our society; thus, if they are raised accepting and adopting a distinct form of dialogue, the future world and the classroom will be a more friendly place for people with certain

conditions. Of course, we cannot ignore that in order to reach that utopian point we must pay a certain price at the beginning of this journey. Someone must shape the students' thoughts so we can include everybody in the daily activities at school, and to do so, someone must spend time doing it. From the point of view of this writer, the final result is worth it.