COLUMNSIST

A Controversial Approach to Communication: SignWriting, The "Alphabet" of Signs

by Alexandra Han

Twenty-five years after it was invented by a hearing woman and dancer who began to use a sign writing system called "Sutton Movement Writing" to record sign languages, SignWriting continues to face a great deal of opposition. Opponents of the system question whether sign writers have used it for many purposes, including linguistic (language), educational, or simply reading-explorative purposes.

The Center For Sutton Movement Writing, in California, is the primary advocacy organization for SignWriting, which has been used in other countries such as Norway, Nicaragua, Brazil and Denmark, for linguistic and educational purposes. Ironically, even though SignWriting was originally invented in America as a lingua franca for the deaf, it has become more widespread in other countries.

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Why would there be such strong resistance to learning SignWriting? One possibility is that there was a desire for sign language instruction in Deaf education, because they believe that Deaf children should be taught in their own language. However, opponents of the system question whether sign writers have used it for many purposes, including linguistic (language), educational, or simply reading-explorative purposes.

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