

# Teachers' Experiences with SignWriting

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I did a story time with the elementary school students at the Oregon School for the Deaf last Friday using your Goldilocks and the Three Bears. It was one of the most awesome experiences I've ever had with kids!!! The kids not only read the signs, they fixed up one of the signs I had read incorrectly, they put periods next to the darkened lines, they added commas at the double lines and they READ the story. We then transferred it to written English and they labeled the Sign Writing and wrote in English. IT WAS AWESOME!!!

I think that because they had no preconceived notions of what is and is not ASL, they felt comfortable with the Sign Writing. They LOVED the activity. The way I introduced the story and how I explained the ASL sentences and facial expressions, etc. worked really well. Sometime, when I have the time, I will have to write down the procedure. I wish you all could have been there. It was MAGICAL!

PS. One of the students came up to read a signed sentence and just told the story in his own words. I was able to say "Are you reading the story or telling us about it". He then looked at the Sign Writing and READ the story. By the third page of the story, the kids were figuring out the signs by themselves with no assistance from me.

**Stefan Woehrmann**  
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One of my Deaf students, Irina, was so happy this morning. I explained the basic handshapes - when we came to the gap - palm parallel to the floor - I accidentally made a mistake - all of a sudden she contacted my elbow with her pencil pointing at my mistake. This is something we will never forget. We realized that we are learning together.

The first time my little students - three weeks at school now... went to the blackboard where I wrote several SignWriting signs (car, Mama, Frau). They wrote the German words in big letters underneath. You know what I'm talking about? Without any effort at all they accepted that they have to be sure to interpret these signs into the German language as well. The timetable is becoming more and more complex - filled with SW symbols - "Good morning" - "today is Wednesday", "first lesson", "Mr Woehrmann" ... and all the other teachers names (hopefully written correctly in SW)

I don't know how to tell you clearly what is going on with me, with us. My family and my students realize that "something is happening". My biggest concern at the moment is that I don't want to get them into trouble by presenting or teaching wrong SW-symbols.

Can't tell you how exciting things are turning out to be...When little Irina entered the classroom - she went straight to the blackboard and wrote (really!!!!) "Good morning" in SW in "b i g" signs. I wasn't sure how to write it correctly - and then the whole class (all my little friends) took a seat on the floor and I showed some pictures from your SW materials to them. So now we know the difference between flat hand, open fist, closed fist, palm facing towards myself, receptive view - You were right - little Irina - coming from a deaf family - loves to learn and write SW as much as I had not imagined before!

It's a hard job to look for all single symbols I can get in order to figure out how I can adapt them to our DGS - sometimes I've got to change only a little bit. This afternoon I spent several hours writing lots of cards with SW hands symbols. Step by step...

Your ideas are working. I feel the spirit that's growing in our learning groups. My students can't wait to see the second video. The first video took two school hours. And - believe it or not - my students seventh grade got big, big smiles on their faces when they happened to identify the one or other SW symbol I simply wrote on the blackboard.

My little students love to write the signs at the blackboard. I'm writing a timetable with more and more SW-symbols. Later on I'll show that to you. You may post that into our website! I'll let you know all I learn from my little friends. I'm taking photos during lessons so you will get soon the first impressions. It's simply very fascinating, how quickly they understand what you had in mind when you developed this system.

When I teach and show to my students the difference of light and black signs - they have to produce "dark" parts with white chalk at the blackboard! Next week I'm going to change that. I'm going to buy a real block of paper on which we really can draft black on white. This problem I never thought about before...

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Hi Valerie! Things are going well. What a nifty project!!

I had rather an interesting experience with the flashcards so I wanted to let you know about that. My group has just returned to it's regular sessions so we're still a bit disorganized from the summer. We just decided to get together as I wanted to

explain all the particulars of the Project, etc. What I DID do for that gathering (it was very informal), however, was to set the flashcards up around the room. Some were with the picture showing, some with the SignWriting showing. I also put the two introductory videos (Lessons In SW Videos) on to play on a small TV we have in the meeting room.

Our purpose in gathering was really just to organize our sessions for the next part of the year, but I wanted to see who would be drawn to the materials and when. It was most interesting to note that everyone, adults and children, sooner or later (adults...after we had finished the 'official' discussions and were down to the tea and cookies part, children... whenever the mood took them...) wandered over and watched the videos (or parts thereof) and all the students took turns working with the flashcards. This really whetted their appetite to start the Project and we did that at our next meeting by having everyone watch the two videos and, afterwards, working with the flashcards.

I found it best to have everyone (adults and children alike) see the two introductory videos as they all seemed to get different things from them and then, as a group, were able to help each other remember the handshapes. I was surprised at how much the younger children (like my four-year old) seemed to remember from the videos and it was most successful for us to do it this way. The smaller flashcards (showing the separate handshapes) were invaluable after the tapes were turned off as reminders when we got a bit mixed up.

As we are not a formal group, we have the freedom to display materials as we like, when we like, etc. I have noticed vast differences in the students learning styles and being able to allow them access to the materials like this with me there to answer questions (or remain silent) for them seems to really be working out well. I noticed that a few of the children took new signs and attempted to draw what they thought would be the corresponding SignWriting. They wouldn't let me keep their attempts (I did try, Valerie!) but it was fascinating to note that, basically, they were on the 'right track' as to how the signs might be written.

Another truly interesting development has been that one of the adult students is really a sloppy signer (sorry, I haven't another word for it, initially I had the dickens of a time trying to receive from him!). Again, to remind you, they were raised

orally and the school they attended actually punished them for signing - hence, he picked up what I can only assume is the basic equivalent of street slang for his signing. The nice thing that has happened now, (and I think even he is pleased) is that, in an effort to help his children understand and "learn to write their language", he must slow down and actually THINK THROUGH the components of a sign. This has helped him to sign more clearly (because he knows he's being watched and because he is now more aware of the correct placement of his hands, etc.). I, of course, am very grateful for this turn of events (:), but it's also nice to see him feeling better about himself and knowing he's helping the others while at the same time improving his own ability.

Well, enough for now. Just wanted to let you know the latest. Am pleased to hear that the reports will be placed on-line and we'll try to fill ours out as soon as we can. Take care, and thanks again for all your work in setting up this Project and in SignWriting in general!