



SIGN WRITING

as an aid in teaching and learning

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WHAT IS SIGN WRITING?

Sign Writing (Sutton's SignWriting) is a system that gives the ability to write Sign Language - any signed language. It is part of a larger system, Sutton's Movement Writing, which the ability any and all movements that humans (or even animals) can do.

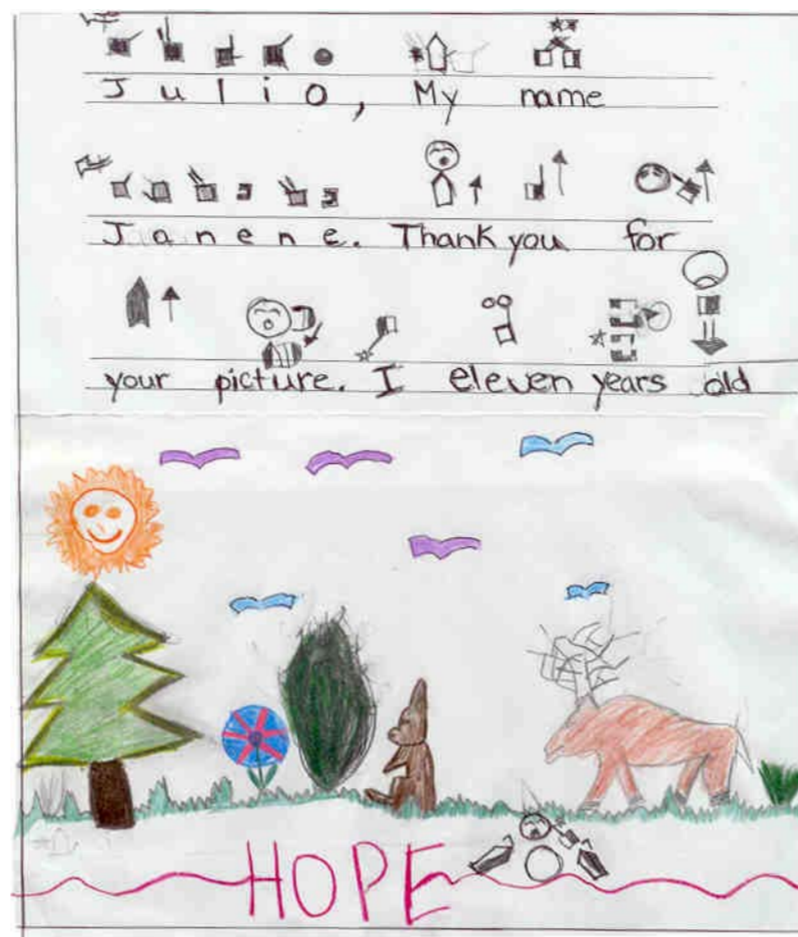
The system consists of a large number of symbols, so that anyone can write what they need to write. But the system is made up of a small group of 'building blocks', which are put together in a logical and consistent manner.

In contrast to other systems that are invented for writing signed languages, SignWriting is based on movements, handshapes and other parameters in a 2-dimensional pattern. This means that it is not linear, like the Stokoe system or HamNoSys. Nor is it written from the perspective of the observer, but rather from the perspective of the signer him/herself.

As this system is not made especially for researchers, it is also used as an everyday writing system by some Deaf people around the world. This is the only system currently available for such use. Still, the system is not fully developed, this means that when the system has been in use for a longer period of time, it will probably be simplified and adapted to the Sign Language for which it is used.

Here you can see a small sample from schools where SignWriting is used:

All people should have the right to learn their mother tongue.
[...] real education is impossible through a foreign medium [...] the vernacular medium alone can stimulate originality in thought in the largest number of persons.
Mahatma Gandhi (1920), Young India 16/6



Joanne har skrevet brev til Julio

<http://www.signwriting.org>

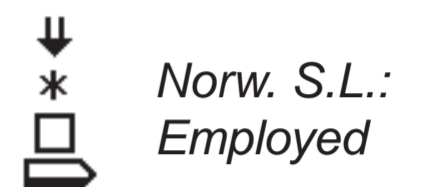
Here, I see my own right hand with fingers spread, fingers upward.
The back of the hand is black, the palm is white.

The palm is facing:

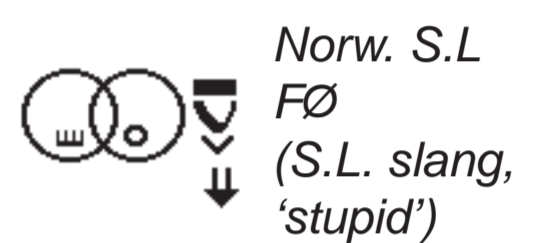


This rule goes for all handshapes.

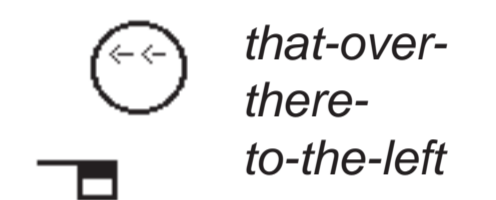
The right hand is a fist, palm facing me. It moves down onto the left flat hand, which lies with palm up.



The system can write facial expressions, mouth patterns, gazing, eyebrows, the posture and the movements of the body - all those things that make the signed languages alive and vibrant.



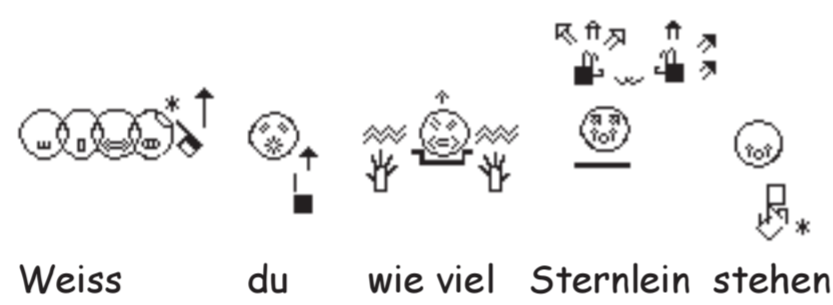
Yet we must take into account that signed languages in written form will be somewhat 'stiffer' than the living Sign. The same thing is true for all spoken languages..



GERMANY



A student is translating from German Sign Language (DGS) to German.



In Germany, SignWriting is also used to learn deaf children to speak and lip read German spoken language.

Especially at the school in Osnabrück, where many of the children come from families with other home languages, this method has been used with great success.

Go to: <http://www.gebaerdenschrift.de>

SOUTH-AFRICA

At Fulton School for the Deaf, outside Durban, I met (in 2000) one of the two Deaf teachers in South Africa, Ingrid Foggitt. I showed her a little about SignWriting, and the URL.



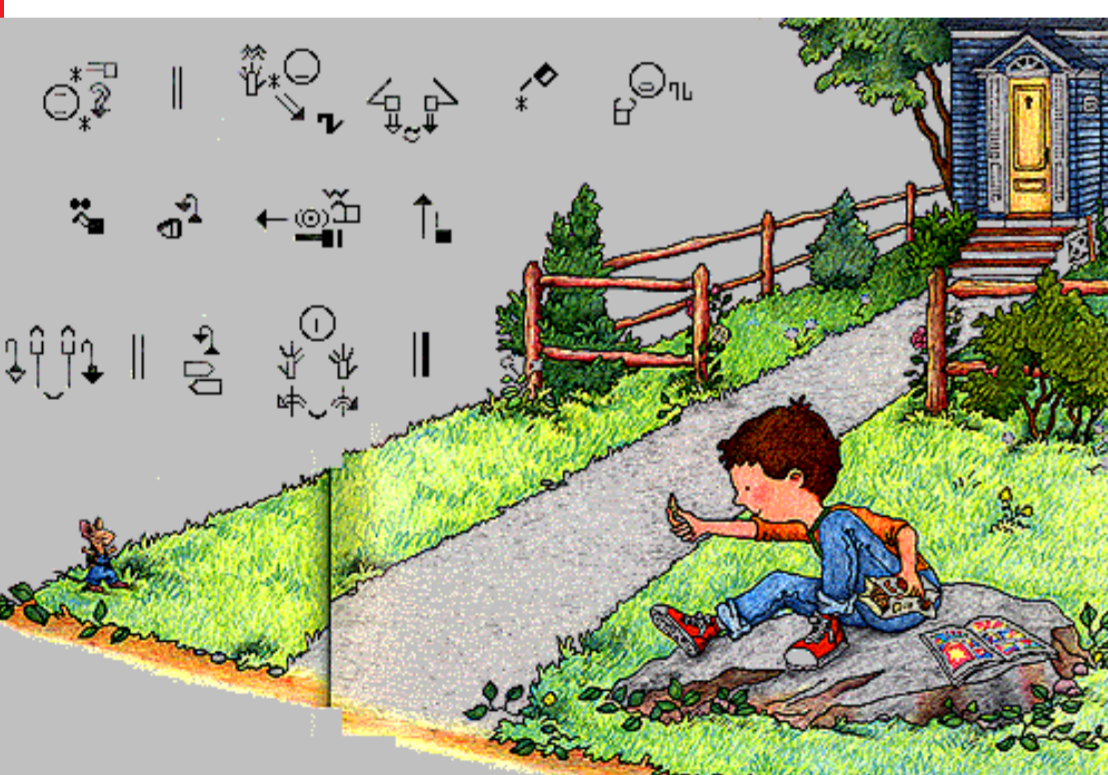
The class is discussing the signs and how to write them.

Since then the school has used this in its teaching, where they have 11 different signed languages and also a number of spoken languages.

Ingrid Foggitt says: the reason I decided to get involved in Sign Writing and experiment in it is rather simple: I am an educationalist and anything that furthers the education of ANY group of people deserves looking into. I do not know enough about SW to be able to go deep into this but I think that the reason above is enough? Well, well, if you are NOT convinced :) then I have another reason that no-one can argue: I showed some samples of SW (gained from the Internet) to the kids. The response was overwhelming — I cannot say NO to a response like that. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The secret of education is respecting the pupil" — Something I like to aspire to.

NICARAGUA

Here, the researchers have been able to see the birth and growth of a new Signed Language.



Deaf children get to meet this Sign L. as their first language, both written and signed. There are now many books in this newborn Sign Language. The books have a clear pedagogical profile, that is, there is a progression in their complexity, and they give a lot of grammatical and other information in their funny stories.
- Some adult deaf persons, who never got the opportunity to go to school when they were young, now use only Sign Language. The children go on to learn Spanish as well.

Frank and Judy Shephard-Kegl are responsible for this work. An MA-thesis has been written on testing of literacy. (see more on SignWriting's homepage)

If you give a mouse a cookie

USA - New Mexico

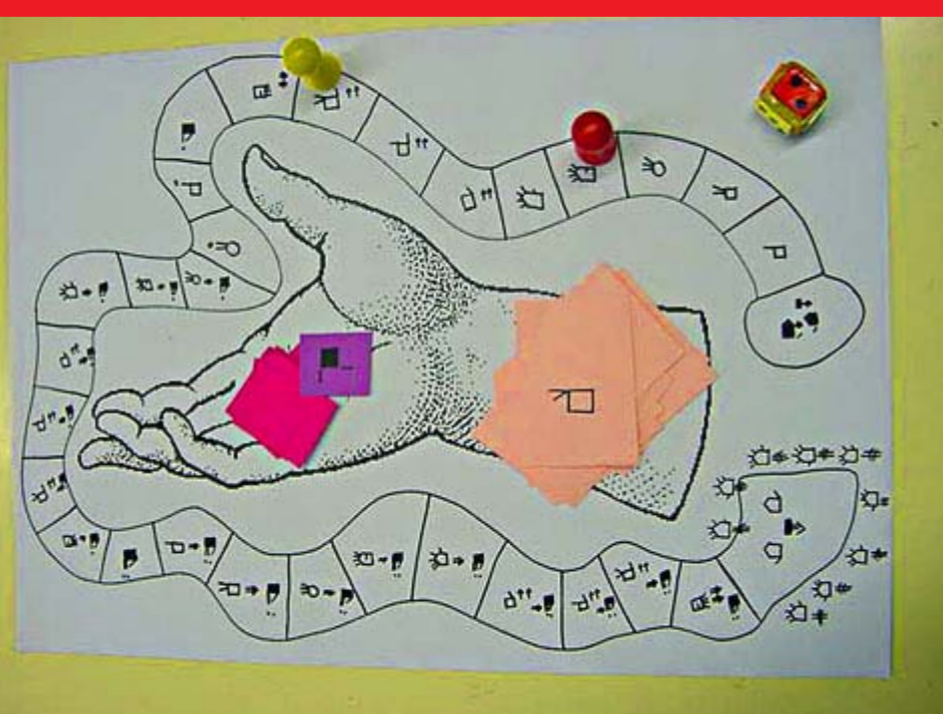
Many schools and educational programs in the USA use Sign Writing. At the school in Albuquerque in New Mexico an experiment was conducted that resulted in a doctoral thesis.

Dr. Cecilia Flood in her dissertation describes how each of the students had an experience of 'Epiphany', which gave them the ownership of their own written expressions.

SignWriting is used both in lessons in Sign Language, and in other subjects. The students write partly by hand, and partly by computer. In the computer there is also a dictionary, which gives the students a picture of the right way to write the sign, and in addition can control if they have grasped the English expression correctly.



BELGIUM



Both Flemish-Belgian and French-Belgian schools now use SignWriting.

These pictures are from Kasterlinden Bilingual School near Brussels. The children get training in Sign Language grammar and in sign spelling, and they train their metalinguistic abilities.

SPAINIA - Madrid

Here Deaf and hearing adults together have made quite a lot of literature, both for education and for the joy of reading. The first novel ever to be written in any signed language is published here. They also have booklets on cancer, about Pedro Ponce de León who pioneered deaf education, and lots of other topics. Responsible for this work are Steve and Dianne Parkhurst, who are with the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

