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FileMaker Press Release

Deaf Children Learn To Read With Sign Language Database

http://www.signbank.org/signbank.html

SANTA CLARA, Ca., December 21– Deaf children and adults around the world are learning to read and communicate better thanks to SignBank – a FileMaker Pro database application that stores the movements, hand shapes and facial expressions in a written form of sign language known as SignWriting.

By correlating signs to written words, SignBank helps improve literacy among deaf-born adults and children, who often have difficulty learning to read a spoken language based on sounds they have never heard. SignBank also helps the deaf understand other sign languages.

"Imagine how hard it is for deaf people to learn the printed words of a spoken language when they have never heard any of these sounds," said Valerie Sutton, creator and director of SignBank and inventor of SignWriting. "The database lets them search on words or signs. For many, this is the first time they have looked up a word in a dictionary, and the quick connection they make to written expression is inspirational."

A Key to Literacy Among the Deaf
Illiteracy rates are high among the deaf. Teaching these students to read is an ongoing challenge for educators. At a number of schools in the United States and Europe SignBank provides a vital link between sign language and written language.

"These children have to learn two languages – American Sign Language, which is their native language, and English, which is their written language," said Dr. Cecilia Flood, SignWriting Literacy Project director for Albuquerque Public Schools Pilot Program, who has been using SignBank at the Hodgin school since 1999. "SignBank is the first exposure to a written form of the native language, and the children love it. The competency they instinctively feel to seeing and understanding a written form of Sign Language transfers directly to seeing and understanding the written form of English."

Multilingual Sign Language Dictionary
In addition to improving literacy, the SignBank also translates sign languages. Contrary to popular belief, sign languages are not international. There are hundreds of sign languages in the world that differ from culture to culture and country to country. American Sign Language, for instance, is different from British Sign Language, which is different from Irish Sign Language.

As the written form of sign language, SignWriting is being used by thousands of deaf and hearing-impaired people in 27 countries to improve deaf education.

SignWriting was originally invented in 1974 by Sutton, then a professional ballet dancer, as a way to write dance movements. The SignWriting alphabet is a way to write body movement much as the Roman alphabet writes words in English, French or German. By capturing the individual visual hand shapes, movement arrows and facial expressions that make up in the

SignBank FileMaker Pro database, SignWriting is now searchable and interactive for students and researchers.

The SignBank database includes a dictionary of sign symbols that can be sorted and printed, or viewed as picture dictionaries for children, as well as multi-lingual databases for researchers, complete with video clips and animation.

Originally, compiled as two standalone dictionaries in the 1980s, Sutton and her team reprogrammed the dictionaries in FileMaker Pro in order for the collection of symbols, signs, lessons, and manuals to become completely searchable and interrelated. Also, with a FileMaker Pro web access, the collection of 25,000 symbols that comprise the SignBank is readily available to help researchers around the word develop new software based on SignWriting.

SignBank is available as a free download (http://www.signbank.org/signbank.html) for individual users PC or Macintosh users worldwide. Other users, such as schools and researchers, pay a modest fee to use the software.

About FileMaker, Inc.
FileMaker Pro (www.filemaker.com) is used by millions of individuals and workgroups around the world to be more productive and efficient. Business, education and government customers rely on FileMaker to manage people, projects, images, assets and other information. In addition to being the number one-selling easy-to-use database software, the award-winning FileMaker product line also includes low-cost Applications that automate basic business tasks, ready-to-use Starter Solutions, and tools to create and share solutions from the desktop to the web. FileMaker, Inc. is a subsidiary of Apple Computer, Inc. (NASDAQ: AAPL).

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