

ABSTRACT

**“Using SignWriting to Teach Hearing
American Sign Language Students:
A 10 year Retrospective”**

by

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SignWriting was brought to my attention by one of my students at a small magnet high school in Tucson, AZ during the 2002-2003 school year as part of a series of student-initiated projects and presentations. I taught for a decade at this facility, co-instructing deaf and hard of hearing students in general education classes, and introducing and coaching hearing students to American Sign Language fluency.

The program was based on a co-enrollment model, and many of the students at the high school had gone to school together all through elementary and middle school. Often, the hearing students acquired ASL on the playground as well as in the classroom in an informal manner. I had the challenge of teaching students who had no knowledge of ASL alongside students who had a usable contact version of signed English as well as some more fluent ASL signers. These students had also been exposed to adult models of sign language via interpreters and classroom teachers, some of whom used ASL and others who used pidgin signed English and also some Signed Exact English in the course of the school day.

I often found my biggest challenge was to help students identify and separate unique aspects of both American Sign Language and English. Having a written form of sign language immediately afforded me a way to give concrete, visual examples of both ASL parameters and ASL grammar.

I moved from teaching both deaf and hearing students, to exclusively teaching hearing ASL students at the high school level during the last four years, but the integration of SignWriting into my lesson plans has remained as I continue to note the benefit of student literacy in ASL.

I will focus in this paper on various ways my students and I have incorporated SignWriting into lessons and student-generated writings and anecdotally comment on outcomes when SignWriting is used.