

Worldsign: A New Multi-Sensory Language

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Worldsign is a multi-sensory language having three channels of communication: signing, writing and time varying symbol animation. The latter channel is for use with film, video and micro-computers. All three channels are interconnected and are mutually supportive. When Worldsign is combined with a spoken language, the user is able to employ a fourth channel incorporating hearing in addition to visual and kinesthetic perception. It should also be pointed out that reading Worldsign involves a more extensive use of the sense of sight than does the reading of an alphabetic language. In this respect Worldsign has a kinship with Chinese. In other respects, however, it is very different.

In the Worldsign Symbolbook recently published there are 700 written symbols with directions for signing. There are also approximately 250 compound symbols. It is possible to combine basic Worldsign symbols so as to create thousands of compound symbols. Almost all Worldsign symbols can be turned either left or right and still be correctly understood. In addition all the symbols are designed so they can be seen in an animated form if this is desired.

Worldsign can be presented in a simple manner for beginners. When introducing the written form, the symbols would be made with a greater degree of representation than would be the case at a later stage. For example the kinegraphic symbols such as *me*, *you*, *want* would initially contain a representation of eye and mouth. Worldsign can also be used to present complex ideas. Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 represent the information in this article, for example, written in Worldsign.

A number of professionals in the field of augmentative and alternative communication have expressed an interest in Worldsign and are interested in its potential usefulness. While this is welcomed, it should also be pointed out that Worldsign is a very new arrival on the scene and that for its potential usefulness to become an ongoing reality, it will be necessary for a core group of people within the field to learn Worldsign and then carefully study

and experiment with its possible applications. Because of the multi-sensory, multi-channel nature of Worldsign, a number of strategies would be possible. I would hope that anyone involved in such an undertaking would find Worldsign personally useful and enriching and not simply regard it as something to be only used with the handicapped.

The first two channels of Worldsign, signing and writing, are at a stage of sufficient development that they are now available to be used. The third channel, that of time varying symbol animation, is emerging as a very exciting reality but it will be at least another six months before it will be made available. With the projected use of micro-computers and video there will be, I am quite certain, the possibility of many people being involved in Worldsign communication who would otherwise not be involved. Also, with such means, the possibilities for teaching both Worldsign signing and Worldsign writing will be greatly enhanced.

Who are the individuals who would be the most likely to benefit by using Worldsign? Certainly where deafness is involved it is obviously very difficult for the young child to learn a written language based on sound. Learning first a written language based on signing would make sense. With children who do not have the ability to sign due to physical limitation, perhaps the physical symbol graphically represented (and with the possibility for the symbol to be actually animated) might indeed help their understanding of position, space and movement. A person with an aphasic condition who had progressed with the help of Amer-Ind to where he or she needs a larger sign vocabulary or who would benefit from using a written system based on similar or identical manual signs to which they had become familiar might also be a good candidate for Worldsign. If dyslexia is a problem Worldsign could be of possible use. Also, because of the particular multi-sensory nature of Worldsign, it is possible that a number of children with a variety of learning difficulties might benefit from using Worldsign. These are suggestions, obviously much has yet to be learned.

For now, even though the Worldsign Communication Society is still an emerging organization, we will give whatever help is possible to any individual or group who wishes to learn and use Worldsign. Also within three or four months we will start a newsletter so that useful information about Worldsign and its various applications can be shared.

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FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4