

OBERLIN

COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY

Department of Anthropology

I am a Linguistic Anthropologist who has used SignWriting (SW) as a tool for research on sign languages and who has also studied its use in other contexts. As such, I can attest to the great value of SW and to its positive impact on its users.

First, as a scholar interested in analyzing the details of sign language use in context, SW has been an invaluable tool, allowing me to produce the transcripts necessary to ground my research on Nepali Sign Language. No other existing transcription system comes close to SW's ability to capture in formal detail the ways in which sign languages are actually used. I have also had the opportunity to learn more about the structure of other sign languages (for example, Maltese Sign Language) by reading studies conducted by other scholars who have used SW in both conducting and sharing their research.

Second, the research I have conducted *about* (as opposed to simply *with*) SignWriting has brought me into contact with many users whose lives have been enhanced by this new form of literacy. To mention only a few: deaf children whose path to literacy has been smoothed by working first with written sign language texts and using that competence to help them add spoken language literacy to their skill set; poets and authors working in a sign language medium and exploring the potential of this new means of both recording and creating signed literature; church members working to make religious literature more

OBERLIN

COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY

Department of Anthropology

accessible to deaf congregation members; computer programmers working to make the internet, with its focus on written texts, more accessible to deaf users.

The global community of SW users is small in number, but widespread (with users in more than 30 countries), hardworking, and ambitious. With increased funding, and increased visibility, this emerging form of literacy is positioned to expand in its reach, scope, and positive influence.

Sincerely,

Dr. Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway
Associate Professor of Anthropology and Chair
Oberlin College
305 King
10 N. Professor St.
Oberlin, OH 44074