

Update from South Africa to all in the Blissymbolics world

So many things have happened since 2014. Platorand Special School opened a Blissymbolics class in which I teach learners with invisible disabilities how to read and write.

Let me give the first time readers a quick recap and a short introduction. I started to work at Platorand School in 2010 and quickly realised that some of the learners at the school cannot read. Some of them could not write either. To be honest, I did not realise that this was such a big concern in most communities in South Africa, let alone other countries.

I enrolled for the BA HONS AAC course at the University of Pretoria, where one of the lectures was about different symbol systems and symbol sets. It was presented by Drs. Johnson E., and Tönsing K. Blissymbolics immediately caught my attention, for it has language values.

I have decided to test it, with permission and consent from the principal and the parents, on one of my learners. It worked. The learner started to read with the symbols within a month. Thereafter I needed someone to assist me with Bliss lesson plans. To my surprise there was nothing available on Google.

Dr. Ensa Johnson put me in contact with Dr. Margareta Jennische, Speech Language Pathologist, at Uppsala in Sweden. Dr. Jennische is still moderating my books to date; Shirley McNaughton, Toronto Canada; and Mats Lundälv, who assisted me a great deal with this intriguingly magical new journey of mine.

I went to Sweden in 2015, attending an introductory course in Bliss which was offered by Dr. Jennische and Britt Amberntsson, Speech Language Pathologist, Norway. It was very insightful and I am still grateful to this day for it. Thank you for making it possible for me Margareta.

In 2014, Platorand opened a Blissymbolics classroom to see if Blissymbolics will definitely assist more learners who cannot read. I was given 3 month trial period to show progress. This is a short time frame as most of you will know; especially those who work with persons with disabilities.

Progress is an understatement. My first student of mine started her own business in catering. This is the same learner, who all else believed, would not gain any success in life. She is one of many, whom I call shadow learners. These learners are the ones hiding at the back of a neuro-typical classroom, in the darkest corners, furthest from the teacher's desk that they can possibly find. They skip classes; are not catered for; left alone; and most of the time progressed to another grade due to their age. These learners ends up in the streets, becomes addicted to all kinds of substances and most of the time, they are left for the wind. They have no confidence in themselves. They are my learners.

Progress from then until now.

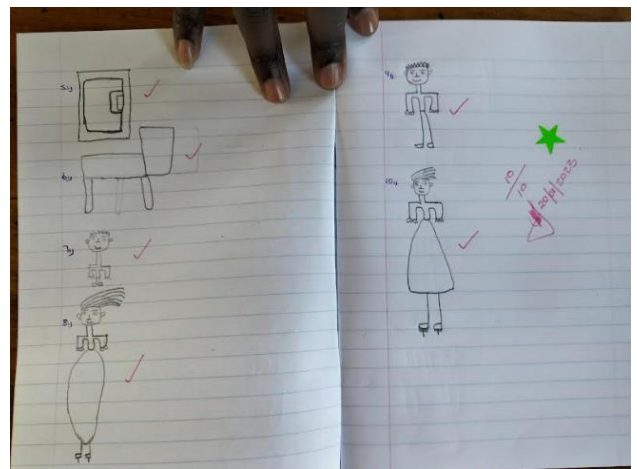
- Learner 1: Catering business in Mbombela;
- Learner 2: Became a farmer. He also assists the Department of Labour with housing projects in and around Belfast.
- Learner 3: Has his own taxi business, (minibus transport in South Africa).
- Learner 4: Currently finishing his 2nd year in Advanced Welding at MRT college in Witbank;
- Learner 5: Assistant paramedic at Midmed Hospital in Middelburg, Mpumalanga;
- Learner 6: Hospital worker;
- Learner 7: Grounds man at a school;
- Learner 8: Truck driver in Mbombela;
- Learner 9: Taxi business;
- Learner 10: Now this learner I have worked with separately. He could read and write a little and I gave him extra classes in which I taught him with symbols and words. He became a full time paramedic and also obtained his private pilot license for small aircrafts.

I am excited to say that **the list just goes on.** My learners bridge from line drawings to Blissymbols and from Blissymbols to text. This year alone, I had 12 learners bridging from line drawings to Blissymbols; 7 learners bridging from Blissymbols to text; and 6 learners are now reading with text only. Progress mostly depends on their cognitive abilities. I have assisted teachers in

Cambodia and America, a parent in Australia, SID and MID schools and parents in South Africa.

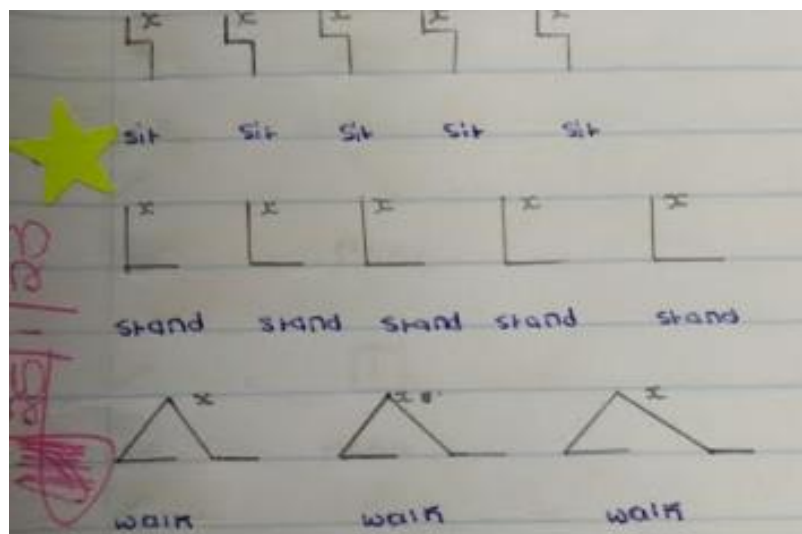
A colleague of mine came into my classroom, about two weeks ago. He was highly upset to learn that one particular student was placed in my classroom. He wanted to know why, this was my reaction:

I showed him the learners' work from January 2023 until now.

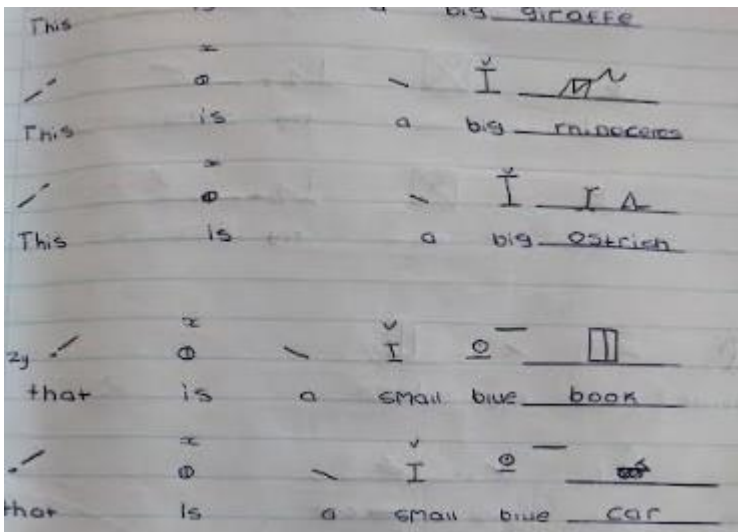


He wrote his first test with line drawings.

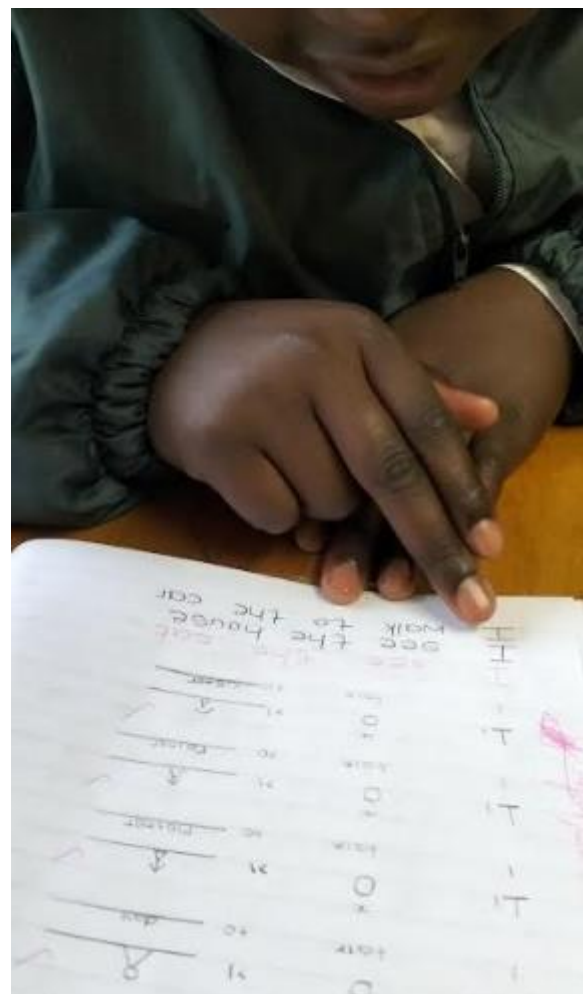
He started with repetitive writing just after 20 January 2023.



February to March 2023

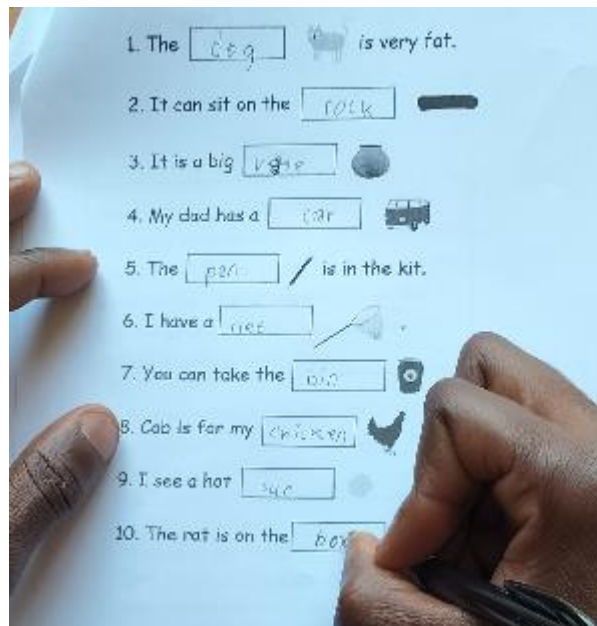


July 2023



He wrote his 3rd Term examination with words only on September 20, 2023.

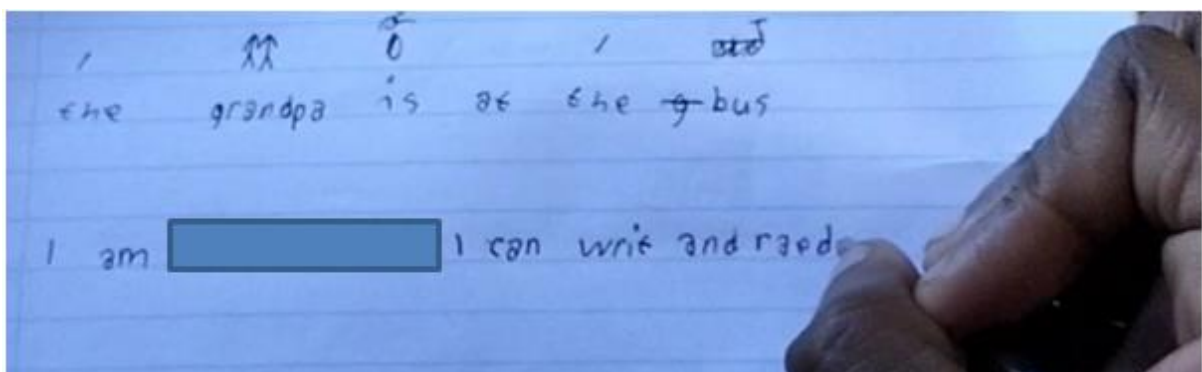
This specific photo is another learner who also wrote his 3rd Term examination with text only.



Both examination papers are available for evidence.

The teacher was stunned when he saw the results. I must say, I am very proud of my learners. Once they start to read with 'words' as we call it in class, they are moved to our "mainstream" classes. These classes are all about written text. They keep up with the workload and will from time to time come to me for assistance with words they do not understand. The lovely thing about starting to read with Blissymbolics is that the learners read with understanding.

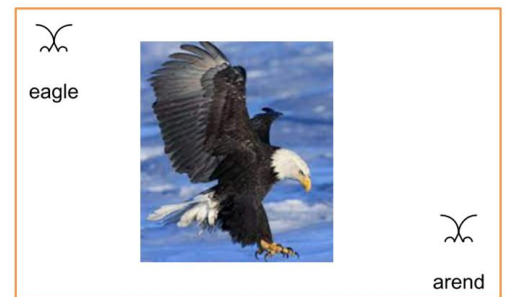
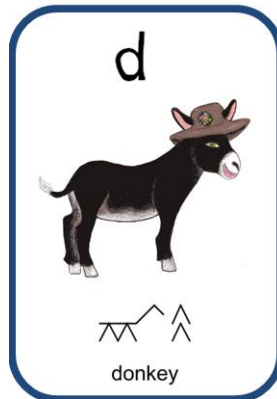
I asked him to write a few sentences of his own. This is what he wrote:



I do not want to admit it, but yes, I did wipe a tear or two of happiness where he could not see me.

Not all of them will learn to spell, because of various cognitive delays. I found that they recognise letters in a word and start decoding from there. Due to all the repetitive writing, and a print rich classroom they also recognise whole words.

Including learners who suffers from colour blindness



The learner in the latter photo is in Year 4. He finishes school in November this year, and was already offered employment in Middelburg, Mpumalanga. He is excited to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to get his attention on his work. He absolutely loves the fact that he is now able to read.



Extract from my new book: Bliss English, Year 1, Semester 1

house	door	window	floor

Last but not least, I just want to urge all teachers who want to try something different to please contact Margareta Jennische for assistance. I have written a Bliss Curriculum, which I call a Development program. I based it on the Foundation Phase Curriculum of the Department of Education in South Africa. All my new books are based on it. Lessons, lesson plans, and rubrics are available for those who need assistance. I am more than willing to assist anyone who needs it.

Thank you BCI for making this journey possible for me. I truly appreciate it.

Louisa Alberts
 Special Needs Teacher
 Platorand School



Thank you



You
 let
 my
 children
 bloom
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