

# SignWriting In Nicaragua: A Teacher's Report

Darline Clark Gunsauls



Darline Clark Gunsauls teaching a Deaf child in Bluefields, summer 1996.

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Hello Everyone!

Deaf children are using SignWriting in Bluefields, and I was their teacher. This report is a summary of my experiences, and the purpose of my trip to Nicaragua in the summer of 1996.

My name is Darline Clark, and I work with the Deaf Action Committee for Sign Writing (the DAC) in San Diego, California. I was born Deaf into an all Deaf family. My first native language is American Sign Language (ASL). English is my second language. I graduated from Gallaudet University in Washington DC with a major in Child Development. My work is now focused on SignWriting in Deaf Education. The DAC is sponsored by the Center for Sutton Movement Writing, a non-profit organization that began in California in 1974, directed by Valerie Sutton, the inventor of SignWriting.



Darline with a Deaf woman and her family in Managua.

The DAC sent me to Nicaragua to teach SignWriting to Deaf children in Bluefields. I was in Nicaragua for one month, from June 15th to July 17, 1996. Even though I am not there now, I would like to share my experiences with you. This could possibly be important for Deaf education and research.

SignWriting was the main focus in the Deaf school in Bluefields this summer. It was a great experience for me teaching the Deaf children the basic foundations of SignWriting. If we compare the student's ability at the beginning, and then at the end before I returned to the USA, I can see that the Deaf children in Bluefields like Ancelmo, Zelideth, Eduardo, Javier, Dina and Angela were learning SignWriting quickly, and have the potential to write signs in the future. It is possible that one day they will become SignWriting teachers themselves. They need to be encouraged to upgrade their abilities and self-esteem.



The most unique one is Ancelmo, who is a brilliant student, able to learn very quickly and to write stories in SignWriting, which he had only learned in one month's instruction. I was very impressed with his eagerness and desire to learn SignWriting.

In the beginning, I introduced SignWriting hand symbols to the Deaf children, then showed them signs that use these hand symbols. Each student received a SignWriting Symbol Workbook. They treasured their workbooks so much that they didn't want to write in them! Instead they wrote the workbook assignments in their notebooks.

These workbooks are published by the DAC, but the Bluefields school received these copies through funding from Salk Institute in San Diego. The Salk Institute's Lab for Cognitive Neuroscience is directed by Dr. Ursula Bellugi. Dr. Bellugi's Lab does extensive research in sign language and language development. Both Dr. Bellugi and Dr. Karen Emmorey arranged for this funding from Salk, because they believe so strongly in the project in Bluefields.

The Salk Institute also funded one copy of the SignWriter computer program for the school. So the school has the computer program, but it did not have a computer at the time I was there. Hopefully the students will learn how to type SignWriting by computer later.

There are five SignWriting Workbooks. The first is the "Lessons In SignWriting Symbol Workbook". Then there are four workbooks in the "SignWriting Workbook Series". The Series includes: Cinderella Workbook, Short Stories Workbook, Marine Workbook, and Geography Workbook.

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The two schools for the Deaf in Nicaragua – Escuelita de Bluefields and Escuelita de Condega – were founded by and are coordinated by:

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