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Deaf Action Committee for SignWriting
La Jolla, CA

The following material consists chiefly of excerpts from our report to the sponsors of two teacher trainees attending the school in Bluefields. I have changed the names of the trainees to A and B, and I have excised material that does not relate to the literacy program. At the end, for comparative purposes, I have attached a list of sample sentences from trainee C (who is younger than A and B and has been schooled only in Bluefields.)

As you are aware, the Level I Spanish primer uses SignWriting extensively to compare and contrast the rules of Spanish and Nicaraguan Sign Language. The accompanying glossary lists Spanish words contained in the Level I and II primers alongside their sign glosses (written in SignWriting). The testing material requires adequate literacy skills using SignWriting.

Evaluation: A and B in Bluefields: January - March, 2003

Program Structure for Teacher Trainees:

Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects, Inc. conducted three weeks of teacher training morning, afternoon and evening in January while the school was suspended for winter break. The regular afternoon school sessions resumed on January 27. However, we continued holding morning and evening tutorials for the three teacher trainees, including A and B. Ms. A and Ms. B returned to Condega on March 22.

The philosophy of the Bluefields School is that all classes are to be taught directly or with the assistance of Deaf teachers using Nicaraguan Sign Language. We recognize that these Deaf teachers require intensive schooling themselves. Our intention is to provide instruction to the teachers at a pace and level of sophistication well above that presented to the students in the regular school classroom. Accordingly, this evaluation treats the trainees from two perspectives: their achievement as students in the tutorial sessions and their performance as teachers in the classroom.

The tutorial sessions emphasized the following topics:

- 1) Phase 4 of the Literacy Program: Spanish Level I and an introduction to Spanish Level II. The Level I text compares and contrasts basic Spanish syntax (subject-verb-object) with the syntax of Nicaraguan Sign Language (grounded object - moving figure.) The

Level I text focuses on simple present tense sentences using nouns, verbs, objects and adjectives. Future tense is limited to IR + infinitive constructions. The Level I text stresses the concept that many words in Spanish have multiple meanings and can only be understood in context. The text introduces comparatives and the preposition "EN". Verbs are described as transitive, intransitive, reflexive or copulative. We want the trainees to be able to consistently produce simple, but grammatically correct present and future tense showing proper word order, agreement and verb form.

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The regular afternoon school resumed activities on January 27. School classes were more structured with greater incorporation of SignWriting into the daily curriculum. We were aware that in past sessions in Bluefields and in Condega, the teachers [A and B] have been hesitant to teach their students to read the sign language. We realized that while the teachers were able to read Nicaraguan Sign Language by whole word recognition, they tended to feel uncomfortable with their own abilities to decode words using SignWriting. Therefore, we devoted time to working with the teachers in their ability to understand the SignWriting system. This in turn allowed the teachers to take better advantage of the SignWriting reading material when teaching stories in the classroom in Bluefields. We would hope that the teachers are now using many of these reading lessons (three volumes) in Condega.

Evaluation of A:

Spanish: The Spanish Level I and Level II texts present grammar lessons based upon approximately 525 Spanish words. A's ability to recognize most of the vocabulary words used in the Level I text is good. Our emphasis, however, is more upon rules of grammar and syntax than simple word recognition.

Example of testing format:

A. Circle the nouns: *El hombre viejo da la leche al gato negro.*

B. Select the correct sentence:

_____ *Yo lavo la cara.*

_____ *Yo se lava la cara.*

_____ *Yo me lava la cara.*

_____ *Yo estoy lavandome la cara.*

C. Spanish Comprehension:

Juan compra una camisa celeste y una gorra roja. La camisa celeste cuesta cincuenta cordobas. La gorra cuesta treinta cordobas. Sandra compra una camisa blanca. La camisa blanca es tan cara como la camisa celeste. Cuánto cuestan la camisa celeste y la gorra roja? _____ Cuánto cuesta la camisa blanca? _____

D. Filling in the blank: *La mujer está _____ la tarta.*

A was first tested on January 22, 2003, less than three weeks into the program and before completion of the Level I curriculum. (We intend to concentrate on Level II in mid-2003.) The test takes about 3 hours and was given intentionally prematurely more as a learning experience than as a measure of progress. A week later, A contracted conjunctivitis and

was unable to attend to her regular teaching duties in the school. We took advantage of this respite to retest her on January 31.

Test results: January 31, 2003:

Identification of written signs (no Spanish): 16 correct; 0 errors.

Spanish days of the week: 6 correct; 0 errors.

Matching Spanish months with signs: 11 correct; 0 errors.

Spanish to signs: multiple choice: 39 correct; 0 errors.

Present tense conjugations (matching): 11 correct; 0 errors.

Adjective, verb, noun recognition: 35 correct; 5 errors.

Selection of grammatically correct sentence in a series of 4: 18 correct; 5 errors.

Comprehension of a paragraph in SignWriting (questions in Spanish): 2 correct; 3 errors.

Comprehension of Spanish paragraphs: 4 correct; 0 errors (with assistance)

Organizing 10 Spanish captions to illustrations in a story sequence: 100%

Filling in the blank:

Correct root word: 28 correct; 1 error (but only a misspelling).

Correct conjugation or agreement: 22 correct; 6 errors.

Sentence creativity: Correct syntax. Correct use of quotation marks. Correct punctuation. Correct pluralization. Correct use of articles. Correct adjective agreement. Usually correct conjugation. Errors: mixing of SER and ESTAR, failure to convert A EL to AL, improper form of verb following IR, failure to use preposition A after IR in creating future tense.

Overall impression: A already had a limited repertoire of Spanish sentences learned in her experience at the convent school in Ciudad Dario. These sentences often contained errors in diction, grammar or syntax, although A's meaning could be discerned. Our objective was not to present a list of sentences to be memorized. Rather, we wanted to teach basic sentence equations, that is to say, rules of grammar and syntax to be followed in constructing sentences. A's instinct was to generate Spanish sentences with a level of complexity beyond her abilities. Our goal was to encourage her to produce at this stage more simple, but grammatically correct sentences. We wanted A to think of Spanish as rule governed and for her to stay within the framework of rules that we were teaching. A's testing scores (and class performance), we believe, clearly demonstrate she has the aptitude to do this. Her raw achievement scores listed above are quite good.

The sentences below are samples of A's homework in February. She was furnished with a list of words (usually verb infinitives) and was required to construct a sentence for each word. She was encouraged to use the glossary that accompanies the Level I and II texts. A then had to type her sentences for email transmission. There are some obvious typographical errors, and we are assuming that some of the punctuation errors may be attributed to her unfamiliarity with the keyboard. While there are also some errors in spelling and grammar, overall these sentences demonstrate very good progress.

Amar = Yo amo a mi mama

Comprar = Claudia compra zapatos y pantalon

Dar = Geovanny no puede dar el pañuelo rojo a Tomasa

Decir = Mi mama dice ;No quiero a mi novio

Dolor = Yo tengo dolor de cabeza
 Donde esta = Donde esta la casa de Jhondra
 Dormir = Nosotros estamos durmiendo en la cama
 En = Yo estoy en Bluefields
 Ir = Yo no puedo ir a managua
 Ir futuro= Yo voy a hacer una casa.
 Jugar= Yo juego con la pelota.
 Lavar = Zelideth lava la ropa
 Lavarse = Yo estoy lavandome los pies.
 Llevar = Tomasa lleva los zapatos
 Mas Que = El barco blanco es mas caro que el carro rojo
 Me duele = Me duele la boca
 Poder = Tomasa puede bailar por la noche.
 Poner = Tomasa pone la caja en su cama
 Pregunta = El hombre pregunta ‘ ‘ cuantos cuesto los pantalon hoy ‘ ‘
 Querer = Yo quiero visitar a mi mama en Palacaguina.
 Ser = El gato es feo y flaco
 Tan como = La casa de Tomasita es tan grande como la casa de Claudia.
 Tener = Daphny tiene 19 ano.
 Tener ganas = Yo tengo ganas de mirar a Managua.
 Tener que = Yo tengo que ir a Condega
 Vender = Andrew vende repollo y papas.

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During February and March, Claudia has been teaching SignWriting everyday, and should now be more comfortable using the system in Condega.

Evaluation of B:

Spanish: B has sufficient Spanish vocabulary and reads SignWriting well enough to use the textbook material effectively. She does not have the repertoire of Spanish sentences that A learned at the convent school. That may actually be an advantage since B tends to confine herself more to our curriculum. B tends to generate sentences that are simple and, usually, correct.

B was tested on January 22, 2003, less than three weeks into the program. and before completion of the Level I curriculum. The test takes about 3 hours and was given intentionally prematurely more as a learning experience than as a measure of progress. Due to time constraints, B was not retested. Her January 22 test results are not available, and in fairness, cannot be compared to A's results in a retest following class discussions of the testing material. However, B's performance was commensurate with that of the other students in the class.

The sentences below are examples from various February homework assignments originally entered by pen in a notebook. It is obvious that B had difficulty with capitalization and punctuation using the computer keyboard. In class, her use of capitalization for the most part was correct. We note in these and other examples that B at times forgets to conjugate the verb. For the most part, however, her conjugations are correct. Her use of comparatives is correct. A very few words are misspelled. She does not understand that the verb "preguntar" introduces an interrogative sentence. She confuses at times Spanish possessive pronouns (no doubt because possessives are conveyed quite differently in her native sign language.) All in all at this stage, this is very good work.

amar=yo no amo a mi primo
 comprar=zoila compra las frutas y las verduras
 dar=yessica da un helada a adela
 decir=claudia dice'yo estoy enferma'
 dolor=yo tengo dolor de menstruacion
 /donde esta/ /donde esta la casa de zoila
 dormir=los ninos estan durmiendos en la cama
 en= la nina barre en el patio
 estar=el pajaro esta mojado
 ir=yo quiero ir a nueva guinea
 ir futuro=yo voy a comprar una camisa y un brasier
 jugar= daphny y claudia juegan beisbol
 lavar=mi mama lava la ropa
 lavarse= yo me lavo el cuello
 llevar=nosotros llevamos las frutas y las verduras
 mas que=claudia es mas flaca que daphny
 me duele me duele los brazos
 menos que=la camisa roja es menos cara que los pantalones
 poner=la muchacha pone la camisa en el ropero
 preguntar =claudia pregunta' mi novio se llama geovanny
 ser = yo soy flaca y alta
 tan como=la tarea de uldita es tan facil como la tarea de pedro
 tener=mi mama tiene sententa y tres anos
 tener ganas=yo tengo ganas de visitar managua
 tener que=daphny tene que comprar caramelos y chocolate
 vender=zoila y yuri vender unas zapatos

The school day at the primary level in Bluefields was divided into periods, as follows: 1) SignWriting,, 2) sign language and literature, 3) arts and crafts, 4) math, 5) Spanish (three days per week), and 6) geography (two days per week). The schedule for the older students was somewhat different, with a greater emphasis on social studies and history. In the sign language and literature period, which was the longest period, the teachers select a

story from the SignWriting reading texts. The teachers read and explain a page. Students then take turns either reading the passage or paraphrasing it. Small groups of children then dramatize the storyline before proceeding to the next page. B had more experience with this format since A tended to be working with the older group. However, both teachers have mastered the language and reading skills needed to implement this structure. Their performance as teachers under this format in Bluefields was excellent, and we are eager to know whether they have been able to follow a similar structure in Condega.

[ADDED FOR DEAF ACTION COMMITTEE]

Sample Sentences from C's Homework:

Amor = Yo amo a mi hermano
 Comprar= Yo compro una camisa negra
 Decir = Yo digo. "Yo tengo mucho sed."
 ¿Dónde esta? = ¿Dónde esta la casa de los sordos?
 Dormir = Yo duermo con Tomasita.
 Estar = Yo estoy en la casa verde.
 Ser = Yo soy feo.
 Ir = Yo voy a la casa de Ruth.
 Ir (Futuro) = Yo voy visitar a mi amiga en la casa.
 Jugar = Yo quiero jugar en el parque.
 Lavar = Yo voy a lavar la casa.
 Lavarse = Yo me lavo el pelo.
 Mas---Que = Daphny es mas alta que su hermano.
 Menos---Que = Tomasita tiene menos dinero que Daphny.
 Tan---Como = La suma de Daphny es tan suave como la suma de Denis.
 Poder = Yo puedo manejar un carro.
 Poner = Yo quiero poner la camisa en la caja.
 Llevar = Maria lleva una libra de carne.
 Preguntar = Yo voy preguntar. "¿cuanto cuesta el arroz hoy?"
 Quierar = Yo quiero visitar a mi novio en Condega.
 Tener Ganas = Claudia tiene ganas de mirar televisión.
 Tener = Daphny tiene 19 anos.
 Tener Que = Yo tengo que comprar frijoler.
 Vender = Zeli vende una y manzanas.
 Me Duele = Me duele los ojos.
 Dar = Yo doy unos pantalones a mi amiga.
 En = EL libro esta en la mesa.
 Ir (Futuro) = Yo voy a visitar a Ruth en Palacauina.