SLPI PAPER #15:
MONITORING SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

This SLPI PAPER (#15), *Monitoring Sign Language Communication Skills Development*, provides suggestions for monitoring the sign language communication skills development of individuals and their (good faith) efforts to develop these skills. Originally written in September 2000 in response to a request from Cinnie MacDougall, South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB) SLPI Coordinator, and updated in June 2003 in response to an inquiry from Janice Knauth, American School for the Deaf (ASD) SLPI Coordinator, it was further revised in July 2003 and May 2007. In considering the inquiries from Cinnie and Janice, and my response below, it is important to recognize that the SLPI is only one of several options that may and should be used to monitor skills development. In addition, workshops, courses, and other activities that address techniques and strategies for effective use of American Sign Language (ASL), simultaneous communication, spoken communication, print and graphics, how to effectively work with interpreters, use of distance communication devices and relay services, and knowledge about American Sign Language (ASL), Deaf Culture, and the Deaf Community should be considered as part of a total communication program for supporting individuals in their efforts to improve their communication effectiveness.

E-Mail Request from Cinnie MacDougall, South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind
(SCSDB)

To: Dr. Frank Caccamise, SLPI Consultant
From: Cinnie MacDougall, SCSDB SLPI Coordinator
Date: September 6, 2000
Subject: Response to an urgent question
C: SCSDB -   Dr. Sheila Breitweiser, President, Carol Mabry, Vice-President, Mary Washko,
                Department of Sign Language Communication Director, Claire Bailey, Sign
                Language Instructor

Carol, Claire, and I had a meeting with the Office of Human Resources (OHR) people and ADEPT Coordinator today. We discussed how to write up goals in the Employee Performance Management System (EPMS) for new employees who have not met their sign language communication skills level standards. Since EPMS is written up annually, we face a dilemma of how to benchmark an employee's sign language skills during the three-year timeline for achieving standards. For example, if an employee's rating is Intermediate Range and Advanced is the standard, this employee has a three-year timeline. He/she re-takes the SLPI after a year or two and rating is still in Intermediate Range even though he/she has improved in some areas of sign language communication skills. How do we show progress for this employee who has not yet met his/her standard at the Advanced level? It is not a problem for employees with no sign language communication skills at job entry who have a standard of Intermediate, since we can use rating of Novice for the first year, Survival for the second year, and Intermediate for the third

year. EPMS has to be written in a way to show whether the employee is or is not improving his/her sign language communication skills every year. I hope I am making myself clear.

Your thoughts on this? How do other schools deal with the similar issue if any? We have a deadline to come up with a way of writing the measurement so a prompt response from you would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much.

E-Mail Request from Janice Knauth, American School for the Deaf (ASD)

To: Dr. Frank Caccamise, SLPI Consultant
From: Janice Knauth, ASD SLPI Coordinator
Date: June 20, 2003
Subject: Documenting Progress and SLPI Ratings

We are still working on our SLPI policy, and someday it will be done!

One of the issues we have relates to not using the SLPI "Plus" ratings. Upon hire there is a preferred/standard and entry skill level requirement. Scenario; an applicant hired for a job with a preferred entry skill of Survival Range and a standard of Intermediate Range, has a Survival Range rating at time of job entry. There is a 3-year plan to develop the skills with timelines for improvement at 6 months, 1 year and 3 year. How would progress be shown without using the Survival Plus other than having some sort of narrative report being done that would document progress? How is this handled by other schools? How do you recommend handling this? Some people here at ASD say we need the Plus ratings to show progress before the employee makes it to the next range. I'm looking for some words of wisdom. Please refer to page #s with this one.

Thanks for your help. I hope you all are enjoying better weather than Connecticut is! Will summer ever arrive?

Response to Cinnie and Janice

To: Janice Knauth, ASD SLPI Coordinator
From: Dr. Frank Caccamise, SLPI Consultant
Date: June 20, 2003
Subject: Documenting Progress and SLPI Ratings

It took me some time to locate the information below, which was originally written in September 2000 to Cinnie MacDougall, South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB) SLPI Coordinator (at the time). As noted, I have made some edits to hopefully make this more meaningful and clear to you all at ASD. Hope the attached is helpful, and please contact me if I may be of further assistance.

To: Cinnie MacDougall, SCSDB SLPI Coordinator
From: Dr. Frank Caccamise, SLPI Consultant
Date: Sept 7, 2000 (edits made in June & July 2003, as noted above, & May 2007)
Subject: Response to an Urgent Question
C: SCSDB - Dr. Sheila Breitweiser, President, Carol Mabry, Vice-President, Mary Washko, Department of Sign Language Communication Director, Claire Bailey, Sign Language Instructor

Good Morning Cinnie,

Yes, you are very clear.

I think it is helpful to begin by noting (and reviewing) pages and sections in your SCSDB employee sign language philosophy, policy, and procedures documents that contain information important to your question:

1.   In Philosophy and Policy document, the following statement near the top of page 4 is critical: "...employees must participate in the SLPI procedures on a regular basis until they have achieved their skill level standards <u>and</u> their expectations for taking the SLPI on a regular basis."

2.   In Procedures document, see, Sub-Section II-B (page 1), Sub-Section III-A and B (pages 3-4), Sub-Section VIII (pages 8-9), and Sub-Section IX (pages 9-10). Sub-Section VIII, which is section entitled "Skill Levels Standards and Schedule for (Re) Taking SLPI," is the first section I check when considering expectations for (re)taking the SLPI. As you are aware, this section contains Bill Newell's and my best thinking on how to ensure maintenance of skills without placing undue burden on either persons taking the SLPI or on program resources. On page 8, see the four principles at the beginning of sub-section VIII and the following key statement on page 9, "Employees with sign language communication skill level standards must take the SLPI within two year time frames until they achieve their standards."

3.   Taking into consideration what is stated in your staff sign language policy and procedures documents, my experiences with and knowledge of other programs, and my experiences as a student and instructor of ASL, I recommend you use sub-section VIII and your Employee Performance Management System (EPMS) as discussed in Sub-Section IX of your procedures document for monitoring efforts and progress of staff toward achieving their standards. In addition to SLPI results, as indicated in sub-sections VIII and IX, these efforts and progress may include successful completion of sign language courses, workshops, and other sign language communication learning and development experiences.

4.   Using one of your examples, an employee who is in the Intermediate Range may show no change in their SLPI rating for two years, yet they may be improving. Options for documenting this improvement include successful completion of sign language courses and workshops, and you could request sign language instructors to write brief statements describing improvements. For example, "During September-December, 2000, Bill Jones attended all 14 class sessions for ASL II. During this course Bill has expanded his knowledge of basic and work related sign language vocabulary, showed improved use of space and indexing for comparison and contrast, developed basic to fair use of several classifiers, and improved his receptive skills for sign language produced at a moderate-to-normal rate."

5. Considering your other example, it is true that for an employee with no skills you could "benchmark" Novice for the first year, Survival for the second year, and Intermediate for the third. However, I do not recommend this. Your current procedures address this situation in sub-section V-A, #1b (page 5); that is, new employees having no sign language skills sign a form that includes a statement that they will enroll in an introductory sign language course and take the SLPI within 15 months of their job entry dates. At this point your EPMS can be used to plan what is appropriate for "each" employee. Trying to "benchmark" progress by use of the SLPI only, including one level rating differences would place a tremendous strain on your SLPI resources. In addition, it is important to remember that each SLPI rating has a "range"; that is, an employee could be a low or high Survival, a low or high Intermediate, a low or high Advanced, etc.

6. For employees below their standards, written suggestions for improving sign language communication skills may be provided during SLPI Follow-Up Meetings. Employees could then share these recommendations to assist in selection of appropriate courses and workshops for them, and their instructors could use these recommendations as a base for their statements as discussed in #4 above.

The above is consistent with Bill Newell's and my preference that the focus is on an integrated employee/staff sign language communication skills assessment-development program, not on the SLPI. In brief, the focus is on use of SLPI results to assist employees/staff members in planning sign language communication skill development opportunities that are appropriate for each of them. True, if skills development up to the standard skill level is not achieved, SLPI results may influence job continuance. Initial focus, however, is and should be on use of SLPI results to assist with planning skills development with each employee/staff member. Putting it another way, with or without the SLPI, there would still be a need for a SCSDB Staff Sign Language Communication Skills Assessment-Development Program.

Cinnie, I hope the above is clear, and please contact me if any questions and/or you wish to discuss.