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IMPLICATIONS FOR LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN RECENT APPROVED
MODIFICATIONS IN THE MISSIONARY DISCUSSIONS

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Recently the Council of the Twelve of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints approved a modification in the use of the Uniform System for Teaching Families which should affect the teaching approach used by LDS missionaries in a significant way. The Uniform System, commonly referred to as the "discussions", is a series of eight lessons designed for teaching families or individuals about the LDS Church and its beliefs. In the past these lessons have been learned verbatim by missionaries and presented essentially word for word in the teaching process.

As a result of the recently approved modifications, missionaries are now assigned to memorize only the key doctrinal portions of the discussions and are authorized to present other sections in their own words. Discussion presentations will still be carefully structured and will follow the sequence outlined in the Uniform System. However, such elements of the discussions as testimonies, questions, scriptures, and reviews will no longer need to be memorized word for word.

Subsequent to the policy change in the use of the missionary discussions, the Missionary Training Center began development of a training approach consistent with the approved modifications. Our purpose here is to describe this new training approach and report on progress to date in implementing it. We will give particular attention to the challenges faced by missionaries who must cope with the new teaching approach in the context of a foreign language.

THE APPROVED MODIFICATIONS

We would now like to describe in more detail the recent changes in the use of the missionary discussions. Please refer to Exhibit 1, which is an example of the discussions as they now appear.

The bold lines on the sheet are doctrinal explanations taken word for word from the previous version of the discussions. These sections are memorized and presented word for word. The lines in lighter print instruct the missionary to do certain things in the lesson, such as bear his testimony or ask questions to assess understanding. These portions are personalized and are presented in the missionary's own words. Sample sentences illustrating how the personalized sections might be presented are given in parentheses, but their use is entirely optional.

With the discussions in this new format, a teacher or companion can check for mastery of the discussion material by putting check marks in the boxes at the left and totaling the score to see if it equals or exceeds the mastery score at the bottom of the page.

Areas of Special Emphasis

The new approach to the discussions includes increased emphasis on the learning of basic gospel doctrines and teachings, memorization of important scripture references to be used in teaching, and the acquisition of important teaching skills.

Exhibit 2 lists some of the specific gospel doctrines and teachings which the missionaries learn. They do not memorize these points, but are tested on their understanding of them. This particular list of teachings accompanies the discussion segment shown in Exhibit 1. A similar set of gospel teachings has been prepared for each concept of the discussions. Altogether, the missionaries are exposed to approximately 400 of these doctrinal points.

Some of the doctrinal points are accompanied by supporting scriptures. (See Exhibit 3.) Missionaries are required to learn at least one scripture reference for each of these selected points. For example, a missionary should not only understand that faith must be accompanied by works, but should also be able to find a scripture to support that point. Approximately 100 scripture references are learned by the missionaries.

Missionaries are also taught to use examples and illustrations to enhance their teaching. Suggested examples (or similar ones of the missionaries' own choice) are incorporated into the personalized section of the discussions to help clarify or highlight important points. Some of the examples used in the discussions are shown in Exhibit 4.

Throughout the training, emphasis is placed on a variety of teaching skills, such as: (1) asking questions to assess understanding, acceptance, and commitment; (2) using scriptures effectively; (3) using appropriate examples; (4) expressing empathy and love; (5) inviting the investigator to pray; (6) restating reservations; and (7) bearing effective testimony. These skills are taught as principles which may be applied over and over again in the teaching process.

Advantages of the New Approach

The modified approach to learning the discussions has several proposed advantages:

- (1) Because of a significant decrease in the amount of material to be memorized, missionaries should enter the mission field with better mastery of the discussions.
- (2) Missionaries should be better equipped to understand and deal with investigators' concerns and teach with more spirit and spontaneity.
- (3) Missionaries should be more confident in their knowledge of gospel doctrines, scriptures, appropriate examples, and other useful teaching tools.

THE TRAINING PROGRAM

One of the most exciting things about the modified approach to the missionary discussions is the new focus it provides to the training process. Our new thrust in training at the Missionary Training Center emphasizes the development of effective teaching skills rather than simply memorizing the discussions.

Specific training activities include: (1) memorizing the doctrinal (bold print) sections of the discussions and learning to present them fluently and naturally; (2) developing appropriate expressions of testimony, examples, and questions for the personalized sections of the materials; and (3) learning to assess investigator reactions and deal appropriately with investigator responses.

Each of the content areas (i.e. gospel teachings, scriptures, examples, discussions, and teaching skills) receives attention in the training process. The missionaries are evaluated regularly on their progress in each area and a careful record of progress is maintained.

Implications for Training in Foreign Languages

Obviously, some very important questions arise relative to the implementation of the modifications in the discussions and the associated training program with missionaries learning foreign languages.

At least two of these questions are:

- (1) What, if any, will be the effect of this change on the communicative competence of missionaries learning a foreign language?
- (2) Can missionaries learning a second language at the Missionary Training Center be taught to present major portions of the discussions in their own words and deal effectively with investigator responses in teaching situations?

Our assumption concerning these two important questions was that missionaries could reach an acceptable level of linguistic competence within the expectations of the new approach. It was anticipated that this approach would result in greater flexibility in linguistic expression, increased listening comprehension, and improved interactive skills.

THE STUDY

As of March, 1981, the Approved Modifications in the use of the Uniform System and the corresponding training program had been implemented with all English-speaking missionaries at the Missionary Training Center, and some aspects of the program were also being used with foreign language missionaries. However, at the time of this writing, the implementation of the full program, with its emphasis on the total teaching experience and heightened expectations of linguistic competence, has not been attempted in the foreign language area. Consequently, questions about

the feasibility of training missionaries at the Missionary Training Center to actually **teach** (as opposed to simply reciting discussions) in a foreign language are still largely unanswered.

Fortunately, some information has been gathered. We will describe the results of an initial pilot study utilizing the complete program in Spanish. Before doing that, however, it will be helpful to define more specifically the expectations of the new training program and describe the test used to measure those expectations.

The Missionary Performance Test

The Missionary Performance Test (MPT) is the instrument used to measure the teaching ability of LDS missionaries. It is, as the name suggests, a **performance** test, which means that the missionary is required to actually participate in a simulated teaching experience, as opposed to, say, a paper and pencil test. It is also a **criterion-referenced** test (Popham, 1978), meaning that the items on the test are representative exemplars of a carefully specified domain of behavior and are selected so as to measure the respondent's mastery of that domain.

The "domain" referenced by the MPT is a complex one and includes the ability to present memorized or other previously-learned material from the missionary discussions, relate clarifying examples and stories, locate and use relevant scriptures, explain key doctrinal concepts, and use effective teaching skills. The behavior inherent in the domain is interactive in nature. That is, it includes listening to and dealing with investigator responses rather than simply presenting the gospel message. A meaningful level of language competence is a clear prerequisite to the successful mastery of this domain.

In short, the Missionary Performance Test is an attempt to get at and evaluate the kind of total teaching ability which was described earlier as the goal of the new training approach. A sample item from the MPT is found in Exhibit 5.

Design of the Study

In February and March of 1981 one group of missionaries learning Spanish at the MTC was trained using the new training approach. The group included six elders and two lady missionaries.

The program for the missionaries in this experimental group was centered around the Missionary Performance Test, and all missionaries in the group were tested with this instrument twice during their last week of training.

In preparation for the performance activity, the missionaries were involved in language training (the standard MTC program but with added emphasis in some areas), learning the missionary discussions with the approved modifications, learning approximately 20 examples and stories and 100 scripture references, gaining an understanding of about 400 specific gospel teachings and doctrines, and acquiring sixteen specific teaching skills.

Results

While the study was formative rather than summative in nature and was not designed to determine whether the new approach should be used with missionaries learning second languages at the MTC, the initial results were encouraging. Two general observations are worth noting here.

First, in spite of special emphasis on skill areas not usually required of missionaries at the MTC, the missionaries in the pilot group showed no evidence of slippage in the traditional MTC competencies. Final scores on the FSI Oral Proficiency Test were above the average scores for Spanish missionaries, and discussion learning results were also well above average.

Second, the missionaries were, for the most part, able to perform the tasks required of them on the Missionary Performance Test. Some areas of weakness were noted, and linguistic expression was often somewhat ragged and unrefined, but the missionaries were usually able to present the discussion material, comprehend basic investigator responses, and provide suitable follow-up responses in Spanish.

More research is needed, of course, and additional experimentation is planned as soon as needed revisions have been completed. Still, it has been exciting to see missionaries, working with a new set of assumptions and expectations, learn to cope and communicate in ways that we have not seen before. We are optimistic at this point that the new emphasis in missionary training will result in our sending out in the future missionaries who are more competent linguistically and better prepared to teach.

REFERENCES

Popham, W. J. 1978. Criterion-Referenced Measurement. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall.

EXHIBIT 1

SAMPLE DISCUSSION MASTERY SHEET

DISCUSSION D: ETERNAL PROGRESSION

CONCEPT D-2: MORTALITY IS A PROBATIONARY PERIOD DURING WHICH WE PREPARE TO MEET GOD AGAIN.

- Picture of parents with baby. (D-6)
- **Let's talk for a moment about the importance of having this physical body.**
- **God is a God of love, and seeks that which is best for each of us.**
- **Therefore, he provided a plan for us to become more like him.**
- **To gain the wisdom that God has, we needed many experiences, particularly since there are many things we could not learn or do as spirits in the premortal life.**
- **A spirit cannot feel physical pain or suffering, and learn by experience what pain is.**
- **Neither can a spirit be baptized or married, nor experience the pain and joy of having children.**
- **To obtain experiences like these, we have come to this earth and received physical bodies.**
- **A second reason we came to earth was to develop faith in God.**
- **Our Heavenly Father wants all of his children to have faith in him.**
- **Obviously, if we are to have faith in him, we must learn to trust him and have confidence in his promises to us.**
- Alma 32:21 (Faith is a hope in things which are not seen which are true.)
- Give an example to show what faith is. (There is a story told of a father....)
- Assess understanding of what faith is. (From what we've said, what is faith?)
- **In our premortal life, we walked primarily by sight;**
- Picture: "In this life we walk by faith" (D-7)
- **In this life we walk primarily by faith.**
- **Our Heavenly Father made it possible for us to live by faith by placing a veil of forgetfulness over our minds, thus causing us to forget our premortal life.**
- **Therefore, we live not by memory, but by faith.**
- **God measures our love and faith in him by how well we keep the commandments.**
- Picture: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (D-8)
- **He told his disciples that if they loved him, they would keep his commandments.**
- Picture: "As we keep the commandments our faith grows." (D-9)
- **As we keep the commandments, our faith grows and we prepare to live with our Heavenly Father in his kingdom.**
- **No one can ever be saved in his kingdom without showing his faith by obeying the Lord's commandments.**
- Assess understanding of the fact that living the commandments shows our faith. (Mr. Brown, how can you show your faith in God?)
- Bear testimony of the importance of keeping God's commandments.
- **The most important thing we can do in this life is to keep his commandments.**
- **In fact, obeying God's commandments is the only way we will ever be truly happy.**
- **The importance of our message is that as you and your family keep the commandments of God, he will prepare a place for you in his kingdom.**
- **Each of you, your wife, your children, and you, will be judged and rewarded according to your own works.**

SCORE (31 total points, 26+ mastery)

EXHIBIT 2

GOSPEL TEACHINGS

1. In keeping with God's plan, each of us has come to earth to receive a physical body.
2. While on this earth we are separated from the presence of God the Father.
3. We came to this life to be tested to see if we will keep God's commandments while we are separated from His presence.
4. When we enter mortal life we no longer remember our premortal life so that we can learn to develop faith.
5. This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God.
6. We develop faith by being obedient when God is not near.
7. Faith is a hope and belief in things not seen which are true.
8. Faith must be accompanied by works.

EXHIBIT 3

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1. This life is the time to prepare to meet God. Alma 34:32-34; Alma 12:24.
2. Faith is a hope and belief in things that are not seen, but which are true. Alma 32:21; Hebrews 11:1; Ether 12:6.
3. Faith must be accompanied by works. 2 Nephi 25:23; James 1:22-25; James 2:14-16.

EXHIBIT 4

EXAMPLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *To show why it is necessary to come to earth.*

If you wanted to teach your son to ride a bicycle, there are many things you could do to help teach him. You could tell him how to do it. You could have him read books about how to do it. You could even show him. But before he ever learns to ride a bicycle, he is going to have to get on the bike and try to ride it himself. This life is like learning to ride a bicycle. We couldn't learn to become like God just by watching him and listening to him.

2. *To show what faith is.* , "

There is a story told of a father who was digging a well when his little four year old girl came to bring him his lunch. The father told her to jump down into the hole and join him. She could not see him and could not be completely sure that he was there and that he would catch her, but because she trusted him, she jumped. This kind of trust is called faith.

3. *To show why faith must be accompanied by works.*

Suppose that you were a carpenter, and I came and asked for some advice on how to build a table. Later on you came to inspect my work and discovered that I had disregarded your suggestions. How much faith would you say I had in your advice? In the same way, we show our faith in Christ by doing what He says.

EXHIBIT 5

MISSIONARY PERFORMANCE TEST SAMPLE ITEM

DISCUSSION H: OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD'S COMMANDMENTS BRINGS HIS BLESSINGS

CONCEPT H-4: OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF WISDOM BRINGS BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS.

Picture of family in garden (H-11)

El apóstol Pablo se refirió a nuestro cuerpo como el templo de Dios, y dijo que debemos conservarlo limpio y digno de recibir el Espíritu del Señor.

En tiempos modernos, el Señor ha revelado más sobre este tema y ha declarado que los hombres con frecuencia dan a su cuerpo substancias que lo dañan y lo profanan.

El Señor nombró en particular algunas de estas substancias, entre ellas el tabaco, las bebidas alcohólicas, el café y el té.

También quedan incluidas las drogas perjudiciales.

¿Acostumbran usar usted o su familia cualesquiera de estas cosas que acabamos de mencionar?

TOMO CAFÉ, Y FUMO TAMBIÉN.

Hemos aprendido que los mandamientos de Dios son manifestaciones de su amor por nosotros.

Sabemos que el Señor verdaderamente estaba expresando su amor por nosotros cuando reveló que ciertas substancias no son buenas para nuestros cuerpos.

La obediencia a este mandamiento nos traerá la bendición de mejor salud física.

Tal vez de mayor importancia es el hecho de que nuestros cuerpos permanecen puros y dignos de recibir el Espíritu del Señor.

D&C 39:13-21 (Those who keep the Word of Wisdom will be blessed.) (Vamos a leer...)

Picture "Salud, Sabiduría, Fuerza, Mayor gozo" (H-12)

Este mandamiento, conocido como la Palabra de Sabiduría, nos promete cuatro bendiciones importantes si somos obedientes:

(1) Salud; (2) sabiduría, (3) fuerza, y (4) protección.

Assess understanding of what the Word of Wisdom is. (¿Qué es la Palabra de Sabiduría?)

SIGNIFICA QUE NO DEBEMOS FUMAR O TOMAR.

Bear testimony of the Word of Wisdom. (Yo sé que...)

Assess acceptance of the Word of Wisdom. (¿Puede usted aceptar este mandamiento de Dios?)

PARA DECIR LA VERDAD, NO CREO QUE ESA "PALABRA DE SABIDURIA" SEA TAN IMPORTANTE. YO, POR EJEMPLO, TENGO BUENA SALUD. YO COMO BIEN, HAGO EJERCICIOS FÍSICOS CADA DIA, Y TENGO BUENA SALUD. UN POCO DE CAFE, UN CIGARRO A VECES NO ME HACE MAL, ¿VERDAD?

- 1. Did the missionary ASSESS ACCEPTANCE of the Word of Wisdom Yes No
- 2. Did the missionary CONFIRM your statement that eating well, exercising, and taking care of our bodies is a good thing to do? Yes No

FLASH CARD: CONFIRM

Assess commitment to obey the Word of Wisdom. (¿Obedecerá usted este mandamiento?)

NO SÉ. PARA MÍ, SERÍA DIFÍCIL DEJAR DE FUMAR. NO SE SI PUEDO HACERLO, ELDER.

- 3. Did the missionary GIVE AN EXAMPLE to help overcome fears about not being able to obey the Word of Wisdom? Yes No

FLASH CARD: GIVE AN EXAMPLE

FLASH CARD: INVITE TO PRAY

- 4. Did the missionary INVITE YOU TO PRAY for help in living the Word of Wisdom? Yes No

CONCEPT H-5: OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S DAY WILL HELP US REMAIN UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD AND GAIN A GREATER KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL.

- 1. Cuando el Señor terminó la creación del mundo, apartó un día de la semana como día de reposo y adoración.
- 2. Por medio del profeta José Smith, el Señor reveló que el día de reposo todavía debe observarse.
- 3. Nos dio instrucciones sobre lo que debemos hacer en este día.
- 4. D&C 59 9-10 (We should go to the house of prayer on the Sabbath.) (Vamos a leer...)
- 5. Picture of family in church. (H-13)
- 6. Por medio de profetas modernos el Señor nos ha instruido que asistamos a las reuniones de la Iglesia y estudiemos el evangelio con nuestras familias en el día del Señor.
- 7. No debemos participar en actividades que tiendan a apartarnos del espíritu del día de reposo, tales como ir al cine, días de campo y deportes.
- 8. Hay que evitar ir de compras los domingos y reducir al mínimo los quehaceres del hogar.
- 9. Assess understanding of what activities are appropriate for the Lord's day. (¿Me podría decir unas actividades en que podemos participar los domingos?)

IR A LA IGLESIA, LEER LA BIBLIA. PERO, DÍGAME ALGO. EN SU IGLESIA EL DÍA DE REPOSO ES EL DOMINGO, ¿VERDAD? BUENO, YO TENGO UN AMIGO QUE ES MIEMBRO DE OTRA IGLESIA. EL DICE QUE EL DÍA DEL SEÑOR ES EL SÁBADO, QUE ASÍ ERA EN LA BIBLIA. SI EL SÁBADO FUE EL DÍA DEL SEÑOR EN EL TIEMPO DE MOISES, ¿CUANDO SE CAMBIÓ A EL DÍA DOMINGO?

5. Did the missionary explain that the Sabbath day has been on Sunday since the resurrection of Christ? Yes No

Picture of family studying together. (H-14)

Se manifestarán en su familia las bendiciones de mayor amor y unidad al asistir a las reuniones de la Iglesia y estudiar juntos las Escrituras.

De esta manera se prepararán para prestar servicio en el reino del Señor, así como para su venida.

Comprendemos que muchas personas piensan que descansar el día del Señor significa participar en actividades recreativas.

Algunos creen que es un día para terminar algún trabajo incompleto.

Sin embargo, el Señor no pudo haber sido más explícito cuando dijo: "Seis días trabajarás y harás toda tu obra; mas el séptimo día... no harás en él obra alguna..."

Share testimony about keeping the Sabbath day holy. (Testifico que...)

Assess acceptance of keeping the Sabbath day holy. (¿Cree usted que es importante observar el día del Señor?)

Assess commitment to keep the Sabbath day holy. (¿Lo hará?)

NO PUEDO DECIRLE QUE SI. COMO SABEN UDS, TRABAJO MUCHO. SEIS DIAS DE CADA SEMANA YO TENGO QUE TRABAJAR PARA PONER PAN EN LA MESA. EL DOMINGO ES EL ÚNICO DÍA EN QUE PUEDO DECANSAR UN POCO. AHORA, SI TENGO QUE IR A LA IGLESIA, ¿COMO PUEDO DECANSAR?

FLASH CARD: PROMISE SPECIFIC BLESSINGS

6. Did the missionary SHOW EMPATHY about having to work so hard. Yes
7. Did the missionary PROMISE SPECIFIC BLESSINGS from going to church? Yes
8. Did the missionary PRESENT at least 31 elements from the discussion? Yes