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Title: *Providing Individualized Feedback to World Language Students*
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School/Grade: Byram Hills High School: Spanish

SUMMARY OF *INVESTIGATORS OF PRACTICE* ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Context:

As the World Language Chairperson and a Spanish teacher at the high school I am constantly looking for systems to incorporate into the classroom to maximize student learning. Research shows that language acquisition occurs best when students are exposed to a language over prolonged periods of time, with the most possible input of language possible. Due to the fact that class periods are only forty nine minutes, students are limited in what they can experience with respect to utilizing the four skills of language learning (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in addition to being able to receive quality feedback for any language they are producing. I realized that when I worked with students in extra help sessions they received the individualized attention that was needed to improve their skills within a short period of time. Therefore, my attempt with this research project was toinvestigate procedures in the classroom that will allow for one-on-one conferencing with students about their work in order to avoid fossilization of errors as well as to promote a steady improvement in skills. Additionally, I believe it is an important skill for students to learn to be responsible for their own learning habits and to learn to work individually.

Action Plan:

My research question was, "How will small group instruction or student work stations allow for conferencing time with students in order to improve language skills?"

I worked in collaboration with a colleague within the department that was researching a similar focus; together we observed work stations in a second grade class, attended a professional development workshop on workstations, and read the following articles for support:

Salience of Feedback on Error and Its Effect on EFL Writing Quality
By Robb, Ross and Shortreed in TESOL Quarterly, 1986.

The Role of Extrinsic Feedback Feedback in Interlanguage Fossilization
By Lamendella and Selinker, 1979.

The focus group for this research was a small Spanish class of sophomores, juniors, and seniors of varying abilities. Three students were taking Spanish as a second world language, one student was retaking the class in order to receive credit and had an IEP, one student was a transfer from another school and five students followed the standard track.

The stations were implemented at the midpoint of the third quarter when the class was finishing a unit on meal taking while preparing for Student Learning Objectives as well as the speaking section of the final exam. Students were divided into groups based on like ability so that they could move through the tasks at a similar pace. I provided each student with a packet of activities that were scaffolded from simple to more complex tasks, writing to speaking to reading, and each task was completed in twelve minute intervals. While the students worked in their individual groups, I pulled one student at a time out to conference with him/her about a writing sample, their current level of work for the quarter, and what he/she would have to focus on for the remainder of the year in order to be successful for the following year's curriculum.

Results:

I was reminded of several things as a result of this research;

1. Less is more. As an educator I am continuously trying to add more content to the curriculum, however, students are capable of processing only so much during a class period, unit, or school year. If I concentrate on only a few items at a time, student learning increases.
2. Regardless of how often you talk to a whole group and check for understanding, students respond differently when in a quiet conversation one–on–one with the teacher. During lessons I am consistent with checking for understanding of content and instructions. What I am not consistent with is checking for *frame of mind* or how a child *feels* about the content or his or her progress with the material. The one–on–one conversation led to a frankness between student and teacher that was productive for growth.
3. Students work productively and successfully when set to task with a time limit. During my conversations I set a timer to inform students when to change tasks. As a result, students worked diligently and effectively towards finishing each task within time limits.

After implementing the work stations I felt accomplished and realized that my planning has to change in order to accommodate the new format for class time.

Implications:

This research reminded me of the value of one-on-one contact with respect to feedback and student's progress. Second language learning is a daunting task for many students and talking about the process with the teacher in a quiet space allows them to concentrate on their language skills versus their anxiety of talking in front of peers. My research and execution of workstations lead to several follow up questions: "What does conferencing about writing entail? What type of work would encourage students to work independently in stations? How does one organize group work? How much differentiation is needed in stations?

In working with my colleague and considering future areas for focus we discussed the differences between work stations in a small class versus a large group of students and the variety of tasks that could be provided for each group. There is room for more observation, revision, and research so that this practice could become a more frequent practice within the language classroom.