

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of my action research which was conducted in several 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts class periods in a Spanish immersion program over a two week period. The target of the research was the fossilized errors of grammar that the students were making. The research and results show that the students continued to make the same errors, but observations and work imply that the students most likely know the grammar rules and are making a variety of choices and mistakes leading to low homework and quiz scores.

## **Introduction**

In the Education senior seminar Urban Education in Theory Policy and Practice, we as students had an internship component in which we spent upwards of 70 hours in one or two classes throughout the semester. The times spent in our respective classes allowed for observation, participation, and implementation of an action research project. Before deciding upon the topic of our research, we observed our classes and the possible projects we could conduct with the classes.

I would like to be a Spanish language teacher at any level, and since our internships were tailored to our current possible teaching interest, I was placed in a 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade combination class. The subject was language arts and I worked with one teacher supervisor and my supervisor's four class periods. The part of the school that my supervisor worked in, however, was a language immersion program and we were in the Spanish language section. The students in my class had all of their classes in Spanish and were discouraged from speaking English in class, some teachers even docked points for words spoken in English. Most of the students had been in a Spanish immersion school since their kindergarten or first grade class. About 15% to 25% of each class period was a native Spanish speaker but this did not necessarily ensure that these students were literate or received the best grades in the class.

At the start of my observations and action research, I thought I would tackle the, what I found to be, excessive talking and note passing of the students in my teacher supervisor's class. In each of the four classes that I spent time in, students stood up, passed notes, walked around, chatted, and even yelled with each other throughout the entire class period. Upon speaking with my teacher supervisor, however, I changed the direction of my Action Research. It was my teacher supervisor who informed me of the concept of fossilized errors of grammar. I realized that targeting the grammar errors was much more interesting to me than targeting the behavior issues present in the class. Also, although targeting student behavior is a teacher concern, it is not paramount to actually teaching the subject matter.

The main obstacle in my internship and conducting my action research was that, due to scheduling differences, I saw the same two classes only every other week. Fortunately, I was presented with a two week period in which the school maintained the same schedule rather than implementing its usual rotating schedule, so I had four class periods in which to conduct "mini" lessons that I developed to target the present tense conjugations of -ar, -er, -ir, and irregular verbs.

I collected three sets of work of the students: one before I began instruction, one during my instruction, and one from the end of my instruction. I graphed the scores on each exercise and then made graphs that contained every period's grades. I used these

graphs as visual aids to approximate whether or not the scores of my students improved, worsened, or remained the same relative to my instruction.

This paper presents the questions I asked, the literature I reviewed, as well as the results of my work.

### **Area of Focus Statement**

The purpose of this study was to describe the effects of direct instruction of present tense verb conjugation on present tense homework and quiz scores relative to a present tense verb homework assignment prior to the direct instruction on two seventh/eighth grade Spanish immersion language arts classes. This area of focus statement satisfies my central tenets of action research in that it involves teaching and learning, is something that I am interested in teaching, is something that I understand, is something that I have some control over, and is something that I care about.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the effect of direct instruction on the students' homework and quiz scores during and at the end of the several direct instruction sessions?
2. How do the scores of the students during and at the end of the direct instruction sessions compare with their scores on similar work from before the instruction?

### **Review of Related Literature**

Looking at the work that I have done in this action-research, I am inclined to be surprised and proud of myself. Previous to this course, I had not had experience being in the classroom as more than a student, let alone an authority figure. The class that I am conducted this research for, in which I remain a student, has provided for me the opportunity to learn a great deal about what being a teacher requires, though I am sure that we only scratched the surface.

Teachers are needed everywhere in the world, yet considering where I plan to live and teach, I will most likely be teaching in an urban school with an ethnically diverse student body. Lois Weiner's book *Urban Teaching The Essentials* provides a very frank and easy to relate to description of what life is like for the urban teacher. Weiner covers almost every aspect of teaching, which I found quite helpful; her book reads almost like a new-parent guide, telling me what to expect in my first years as not only a teacher but also an urban teacher. I especially found insightful her writing on how to establish my authority.

Presenting myself as an authority figure in my classroom has always been a small concern at the back of my mind. In all of the relationships that I have maintained thus far in my life, I have never wanted anyone to think of me as unkind or stern, frankly because I am the opposite of stern and/or unkind. I have ruminated over the fact that I will have to present a slightly more professional and serious and stern image of myself to my students, especially if I soon begin teaching, for I am still young.

In my experience during this internship, I was slightly appalled at the behavior of the students in my classrooms. These boys and girls stand up and walk around, pass notes, talk from across the room, and even stand up and deliver notes, all during class and while the teacher is talking. Although I was not teaching but observing and walking around, I even felt overwhelmed at the students' behavior. As soon as I told one student to listen, another was walking across the room to pass a note and the next one I spoke to continued to speak to another student while I was talking to her. Almost every week, my

teacher supervisor had to stop class and ask the students to be quiet; she directly told them that it is not fair to her or to their classmates.

Weiner mentions that "...students who are already alienated from school are not likely to be convinced to do as the teacher says because of his or her superior knowledge of the subject area or teaching" (77). This causes me to think, and I believe that Weiner even mentions this as well, that I will have to make myself approachable to my students while maintaining my authority. This will be a fine line to walk and will undoubtedly present a challenge, yet I am hopeful that experience will aid me.

Upon first thought, or memory, I imagine all of the teachers I had growing up as individuals; experts in their field or, in the case of my elementary teachers, leaders of classrooms. Within my first two days at my internship, I was introduced to the "team" that my teacher supervisor was part of. This concept of teaming was obviously foreign to me but came to seem only elementary. Each team at my school consists of several teachers who teach the same large group of students. The idea of teams of teachers makes so much sense to me. These teachers are able to discuss the progress of almost every one of their students with other teachers who know the students just as well as they do. If a particular student acts up in one class the issue can be brought to the team and each teacher tends to give advice to the others.

*Teaching As Principled Practice Managing Complexity For Social Justice* is a compilation of papers regarding the concepts about teaching and learning by professors in the Education Department at Mills College in Oakland, California. Many issues are covered but what I connected to the work done on Collaborative teaching by Ruth Cossey and Philip Tucker. Team teaching is an example of collaborative teaching and I saw first-hand the benefits of said collaboration. I especially liked the authors' suggestion on pages 116 to 117 of what makes collaboration of teaching worthwhile, listing the following: assuring the project is complex enough for the teachers involved, considering whether each teacher involved has sufficient interest in the project, whether or not there is a diverse assortment of opinions present, and taking into consideration that projects take time and patience.

The book I found the most helpful in this class has been *Action Research A Guide for the Teacher Researcher*. This book presents an outline of the entire process of Action Research and how to write-up one's results. Apart from being informative, this book really walks one through the process of Action Research step by step in a very detailed manner.

CARLA is the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. The center's website acts as a database for research articles regarding second and first language acquisition and provided me with several bilingual education resources. One resource I found at

[http://72.14.203.104/u/carla?q=cache:RDuO2GZ4oHAJ:www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol6/bridge-6\(2\).pdf+Spanish+grammar&hl=en&ie=UTF-8](http://72.14.203.104/u/carla?q=cache:RDuO2GZ4oHAJ:www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol6/bridge-6(2).pdf+Spanish+grammar&hl=en&ie=UTF-8)

This article explores different learning methods, such as direct lecturing, creative writing, and small group work, and how language and grammar acquisition varies between different learning methods. Though not directly relevant to my research, this article is interesting and possibly helpful because the ways in which different immersion teachers teach can be different and therefore have an affect on their students' grammar habits.

The professor of my class did an excellent job in choosing the literature for this class, yet I wish I had more time to read more; there is such a large amount of information available. Especially exciting is that the bank of knowledge and literature present is constantly being updated; I can only hope that I will one day contribute to this knowledge.

### **Data Collection**

A variety of qualitative data collection techniques were used in my research.

- *Observation*- I began my internship with observations. I observed and studied the seating charts of the students, which I connected to the talkative groups that most often disrupted the class. Though my research centered on grammar, I had originally planned to cover misbehavior of the students that was dependent upon which students happened to be sitting close to each other.

I observed my teacher supervisors teaching. This helped me to see what the students were being taught but it also helped me to observe her teaching manner for my own personal interest; I am still forming my teaching philosophy and it is beneficial for me to observe various different teaching styles. How the students are taught and which teaching methods are used (direct lecture, creative writing, etc.) plays a role in how students learn.

On all of my observations I recorded notes. I placed myself in various areas of the classroom, usually behind the desk at the front of the class or in a desk at the back; either way, the students were aware of my presence.

- *Homework*- I used the scores on two separate homework exercises that focused on grammar; the first exercise was assigned before my instruction and the second in the middle of my research. I then graphed each individual class periods' scores as well as every class period onto one graph.
- *Quiz*- I gave the students a quiz after all of my "mini" teaching sessions. I graphed the quiz scores in the same manner as for the homework.
- *Work from activities (Artifacts)*- I saved several samples from the learning exercises the students did during the second and third of my "mini" sessions.
- *Discussion with teacher supervisor*- my teacher supervisor provided a great deal of aid during my research. It was my "teacher" who told me about fossilized errors. This teacher also enlightened me as to what activities work well in the classes we were working with. The supervisor was also able to explain that some students in our classes had learning disabilities and/or emotional behavioral classifications. This knowledge, however, would have been better to know after the research in order to avoid possible bias.

- *Matrix*-

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data Source</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

Effect of direct instruction on the students' homework and quiz scores during and at the end of the several direct instruction sessions	Quiz and homework scores	Observation of student participation in class grammar exercises and knowledge in class (including but not limited to observation of social behavior)	Graphs of scores		
How the scores of the students during and at the end of the direct instruction sessions compare with their scores on similar work from before the instruction	Quiz and homework scores	Observation of student participation in class grammar exercises and knowledge in class (including but not limited to observation of social behavior)	Graphs of scores		
Why might certain students and/or classes be performing poorly		Observation of student participation in class grammar exercises and knowledge in class (including but not limited to observation of social behavior)		Discussion with teacher supervisor	

What causes fossilization of errors and why do these students suffer from such errors				Discussion with teacher supervisor	Related literature
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### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The following themes emerged from the results of data collection:

- Students' scores did not appear to improve from before and during to post lesson, according to the graphs made of scores.
- Though scores did not appear to significantly improve, from observing the class, students knew the correct answers and were able to even put correct answers up on the board

The following was concluded from the previous observations:

- Students appeared to learn from the direct instruction, or even recalled previously learned material.
- Consistently low scores might be attributable to "laziness". Many students received "zeroes" on their homework because they failed to even turn in the work. In correcting the work, I noticed that many students correctly did several questions and exercises but failed to correctly answer similar to identical questions, as if they did not feel like thinking about the correct answer
- Many students continued to talk in class and pass notes subsequently not hearing the instructions for the homework, class work, and even the quiz; students are just not paying attention to the teacher, rather to each other or they are lost in their own thoughts.

### **Action Plan**

According to the my results and observations, I could propose the following:

- Smaller class sizes: if the classes were smaller, it would be easier for the teacher to control the students' behavior without as much class disruption. Students might also be less tempted to interact with each other because there would be fewer students and therefore opportunities to interact. Also, students might be more inclined to ask questions of the teacher if they did not hear in the first place or if they are confused; the teacher can give more attention to each student. This solution, however, is much more easily said than done.
- Study Class: this could be a mandatory class for all students entering into the school that teaches basic study habits, classroom etiquette, and how to approach teachers if and when

one needs help. This however, is also easier said than done but might be beneficial in the long run.

- Go to the root of the problem: study the primary years of immersion schools to observe the teaching styles and possibly correct students mistakes before they are allowed to fossilize.

#### **Final Thoughts**

Most of the ideas I have for an Action Plan would require increased spending, funding, and manpower (more money and teachers). A difficulty that I foresee as a teacher is that there will always be a lack of funding and teachers. Although pessimistic a view, I can only hope that it will serve as a personal motivation to do my best job as a teacher and to put in extra time and effort to ensure that my students and their families as well receive the best education that they are entitled to.

As I mentioned earlier, this research has been difficult due to scheduling conflicts, so I was very fortunate to have a two-week period during which the classes did not switch. I only wish that I had been able to spend more time with the students. They responded very nicely to this project and although they are very enthusiastic the students have also been quite charming and helpful.

#### **References**

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