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Curricular Infusion in the Secondary Foreign Language Classroom: Does One Size Fit All?

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Academic Leadership Journal

Introduction

Across the nation, public schools are focusing on increasing student achievement on standardized tests at the state and national levels in order to comply with federal legislation under the *No Child Left Behind Act* that requires all students to score at or above proficiency levels in math and reading by the year 2014 (United States Department of Education). In response to this emphasis on accountability and increasing student performance—primarily in the “core” subjects such as English, math and science—many public schools have adopted professional development plans designed to infuse their curriculum with general, effective teaching methods that are to be implemented by all teachers, in all subject areas (i.e. curricular infusion). The impetus behind this reform is rooted in educational research; however, the research supporting these models of curricular infusion is often based on the core subjects and largely ignores the non-core or elective subjects such as foreign language. As a result, secondary foreign language instructors who are required to adapt general educational research to their areas of expertise may be left wondering about the effectiveness of applying such instructional techniques that are not directly related to foreign language pedagogy. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to adapt a general model of instructional improvement methods to foreign language instruction and assess its perceived importance among secondary foreign language instructors in a Midwestern state.

Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement, by Marzano, Pickering & Pollock (2001), is an example of a resource that is commonly used by public schools in the United States in order to infuse all subject areas, or classrooms, with research-based practices with the intent of exposing students to effective models of instruction that will hopefully result in increased achievement on local, state and national-level standardized tests. The study by Marzano et al. (2001), offers the results of a meta-analysis that sought to extrapolate the most effective instructional strategies found in over forty years of educational research. According to Krathwohl (1998), a meta-analysis combines “the statistical results of studies of the same question into a single result to enhance statistical power” (p. 687). The results of the Marzano study produced nine strategies, or method groups. Cohen (1988) reminds us that, within the context of social science research, an effect size of .20 is considered small; an effect size of .50 can be considered medium; and an effect size of .80 can be considered large. The hierarchy of the Marzano method groups and their average effect sizes for general core subjects are:

1. Identifying similarities and differences (1.61)
2. Summarizing and note taking (1.00)
3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition (.80)
4. Homework and practice (.77)
5. Nonlinguistic representations (.75)

6. Cooperative learning (.73)
7. Setting objectives and providing feedback (.61)
8. Generating and testing hypotheses (.61)
9. Questions, cues and advance organizers (.59)

(Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 7).

The Method Groups

To offer a clearer understanding of the Marzano method groups, and, the extent to which they might be adapted to the foreign language classroom, the nine method groups will be summarized. These method groups could best be categorized as a general, non-foreign language specific approach in which the authors make no mention of the method groups' effectiveness (or adaptation) in the foreign language classroom.

Identifying Similarities and Differences

The strategies associated with identifying similarities and differences of instructional content are centered on the concept of explicit (teacher-directed) and implicit (student-directed) identification of similarities and differences. These tasks require students to assess higher level thinking skills and are supported through the use of graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams that provide students with a visual representation of the comparisons and/or delineations being targeted. In addition, this strategy is comprised of subcategories that require students to perform such tasks as comparing, classifying, creating metaphors, and creating analogies.

Summarizing and Note Taking

Summarizing and note taking are common classroom activities that must be explicitly taught to students to be used effectively. This method group involves the production (written or oral) of missing and/or synthesized information that can be presented to students in written, visual and aural formats. In addition, summarizing and note taking challenge students to analyze information at a higher level by requiring them to identify what information to keep, modify and/or delete. Furthermore, well-constructed summaries and notes can be an effective introduction to new learning objectives as they assist students in predicting upcoming structures beforehand. Finally, summaries and notes can serve as effective study guides for assessments related to classroom objectives and activities.

Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition

Reinforcing effort and providing recognition is not a direct method but rather a teaching philosophy. Reinforcing effort is based upon the premise that people generally attribute success to one of the following categories: (1) ability, (2) effort, (3) other people, and (4) luck (Covington 1983; Harter 1980). Of these, belief in effort is the most powerful as it enables students to feel confident when confronted with a difficult task requiring a great deal of effort, regardless of their preconceived notions of ability. Students can learn to focus on effort when they realize its connection with success. This can be accomplished through student-based data tracking and reflection that requires students to record their

grades as well as their thoughts and reactions about their progress.

Working in tandem with reinforcing effort, students' accomplishments should be recognized by their instructors. This recognition does not have to be connected to high grades but rather steady improvement. Recognition-which is different from praise-is most effective when it is used sparingly, contingent upon completing a task that is not easy or repetitive, and acknowledges that the completed task is an improvement over previous work.

Homework and Practice

Homework refers to out-of-class and in-class work and gives student the opportunity to practice new information in an independent or unsupervised (teacher-absent) environment. Homework and practice should have meaning by being directly connected to instructional objectives and students should be made aware of its purpose. The effectiveness of homework and practice is contingent upon instructors providing students with both a grade and written comments (Walberg 1999).

Nonlinguistic Representations

This method group focuses on increasing students' knowledge and content retention by drawing upon both linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of expression designed to give students the opportunity to experience the material at hand. By representing their knowledge through both imagery (pictures/charts) and words, students are able to elaborate on prior knowledge. The use of nonlinguistic representations also enables students to experience newly learned material visually and physically which can be accomplished through the use of graphic organizers, creating manipulatives, mental imagery, drawing pictures, and physical engagement.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a popular method that lends itself well to the foreign language classroom. However, the Marzano study cautions that it is not to be misinterpreted as merely placing students into groups with no instructional purpose. When properly used, cooperative learning provides the best possible learning environment for all group members as it promotes positive interdependence, social skills and individual and group accountability. Ideal group size consists of three to four students (Lou et. al, 1996). Groups can be formed to accomplish an immediate task-such as brainstorming or completing an assignment-or can serve as long-term social structures for students in which they begin each class with their "base" group and may then form different groups to complete the daily objectives of the class. Finally, cooperative learning should be used sparingly and not serve as the only medium of classroom instruction (Johnson & Johnson 1999).

Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback

It is of equal importance for both students and instructors to have direction and input pertinent to instructional goals. Within this method group, the Marzano study found that instructional objectives should be effectively communicated to students and should not be too specific or narrowly defined. In other words, the objectives should be clear but also allow for multiple modes of interpretation and application. In doing so, students are able to focus their attention on more global aspects of the learning-the "big" picture-and will be more likely to internalize and apply the objectives in a meaning

way. Furthermore, when students are assessed on these goals, feedback must be timely (soon after the assessment), explain to students what they are doing correctly and incorrectly, and allow students to assess or reflect upon their own work by correcting incorrect items.

Generating and Testing Hypotheses

The strategies in this method group challenge students to apply learned information in a way that promotes complex thinking skills. Students are first exposed to rules or principles before generating and testing relative hypotheses. To do this, students identify the elements of a process—such as a scientific experiment—and predict, test and summarize—written or verbally—the effect of the given hypothesis on the overall process.

Of interest to foreign language instruction is that the Marzano study contends that while both inductive (whole to part) and deductive (part to whole) approaches to generating hypotheses are effective, deductive tasks produce larger effect sizes (Hattie, Briggs & Purdie 1996; Lott 1983; Ross 1988). The reason that this is important in foreign language education is that traditionally, foreign language classes focused on teaching the grammatical rules of the language and did so deductively. A grammar rule was presented, students practiced the form through drills and if the rule was practiced communicatively, it wasn't until the end of the process. This practice, however, has changed over the last two decades as foreign language researchers and practitioners favor an inductive, communicative, approach to foreign language instruction.

Cues, Questions, and Advance Organizers

This method group is actually a combination of tasks whose primary focus is to provide students with a sound introduction to the learning experience, thus enabling them to activate or retrieve prior knowledge and make connections between what is already known and the new objectives. The Marzano study reported that cues and questions are actually hints directly related to the content that provide a preview of what is to come and can be teacher or student-generated. Similarly, advance organizers are visual representations of new information designed to serve as a road map, not a mere summary, of what is to be accomplished. Advance organizers should contain very specific information and can be effective tools when presenting difficult information to students.

Method

Survey

To adapt the Marzano study's nine method groups to foreign language instruction, the author developed a survey (Appendix A) comprised of demographic information and method group perception questions (N=27). The aim of this survey was to determine the extent to which, if any, the Marzano model was thought to be effective in the secondary foreign language classroom. In developing the survey, each of the nine method groups was illustrated by three, specific classroom tasks represented by a five-point Likert-type scale in which respondents indicated their perceived importance of the respective examples. These classroom tasks were developed through research, consultation with experienced secondary foreign language instructors and the author's own personal experience and observations as a foreign language teacher. Presenting each method group through three different tasks/adaptations also provided a certain degree of triangulation for subsequent data

analysis. Because the author designed the survey specifically for this study, analyses of internal reliability were conducted and produced a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.84. Measures of internal reliability-such as Cronbach's alpha-indicate the extent to which an instrument or survey would generalize and be applicable upon replication. When testing internal validity, a Cronbach alpha coefficient of at least 0.70 or higher is desirable (Nunnally 1978). Therefore, if this study's survey instrument were administered to a different sample of secondary foreign language educators, similar results would be expected.

Subjects

The survey was conducted over a two-month period during the fall of 2004 and was administered via mail. Using an electronic data base obtained from the Kansas State Department of Education (<http://www.ksde.org>), all secondary Spanish teachers who taught in schools with an overall 9-12 enrollment of at least 200 students were selected as potential participants. This produced a total of 277 potential participants who received the initial survey mailing and a follow-up post card as a reminder one week later. Non-respondents to the initial mailing and follow-up received a second reminder and ultimately, another survey. A total of 144 (52% response rate) secondary Spanish teachers in Kansas took part in the study (Table 1).

Results and Analysis

Using a five-point Liker-type scale, data gathered from the survey instrument were analyzed quantitatively based upon mean scores which represented teachers' perceived importance of instructional tasks related to each of the nine method groups.

Table 2 is a summary of the survey items and their respective mean scores and standard deviations. The scale ranged from a low score of one (*method is of no importance*) to five (*method is very important*). Most scores were at a level of 3.00 or higher, which suggests the instructional tasks were perceived as being at least moderately important.

The results of the meta-analysis produced by the Marzano study presented a ranked order of the nine method groups based upon their effect sizes. Therefore the effectiveness of their implementation upon student achievement was presented as a hierarchy from one to nine with number one (*Identifying Similarities and Differences*) being the highest or most effective related to student achievement. Table 3 shows the results and subsequent method group hierarchy, based on mean scores, of this study compared to the Marzano study. The range of mean scores within each method group is 3 (low) to 15 (high). Using these mean scores for each of the nine groups, a one-way, between subjects ANOVA was conducted (Table 4) to determine if the overall perception (rank of mean scores) among each of the nine method groups varied significantly; analyses revealed significance ($F(7, 958) = 42.64, p < 0.001$). Therefore, the nine method groups were not perceived as being equally important. Furthermore, pairwise comparisons indicated three significant pools of instructional methods (Table 3). The high and medium pools vary significantly from each other while the methods in the third pool significantly vary from both each other and the other two pools. This indicates that, among the secondary Spanish teachers who participated in this study, the perceived application of Marzano's model of instructional improvement represents a significantly different hierarchy of method groups. These data indicate that when applied to the secondary foreign language classroom, the perceived importance of the nine method groups is, in fact, different for secondary foreign language instruction.

Limitations

First and foremost, the findings presented in this study rely upon the perceptions reported by participants who were responding to a survey instrument developed by the author. Furthermore, the survey instrument represents the author's attempt to adapt previous findings by Marzano, et al. (2001) to secondary foreign language instruction. Therefore, the author acknowledges the fact that the results are indeed contingent upon such factors as sample size and the validity and reliability of the survey instrument and while the replication and/or adaptation of the study is encouraged, the aforementioned factors might yield different results. In addition, it is important to note that this study is not the result of an experiment conducted by the author in which the characteristics of the nine Marzano method groups were actually presented to students in a foreign language class and assessments were used to determine the extent to which these methods were effective as opposed to if students had not been subjected to their direct implementation.

Finally, regarding the findings of the Marzano study, the author is not claiming that the use of these methods is ineffective or even undocumented in foreign language education. The impetus for this study's design was simply to examine the Marzano methods as a whole within the realm of secondary foreign language instruction due to the popularity of Marzano's work among secondary schools and their school improvement initiatives.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a general instructional improvement model in the secondary foreign language classroom. The results should be of interest to current foreign language teachers as well as to school administrators at both the building and district-levels who are charged with making curricular decisions and/or mandates that affect all subjects. Additionally, this study's results could serve as a framework for informing secondary administrators-without a foreign language education background-about current best practices in foreign language and how they differ from effective strategies in non-foreign language classrooms. As a result, this should be helpful to administrators when they observe and evaluate foreign language classrooms and instructors. In fact, a teacher's professional evaluation can often times be linked to how well he/she implements and documents required school-wide methods or strategies. The model presented by the Marzano study is certainly an excellent synthesis of the literature as it relates to effective instruction and student achievement and without question, a great number of teachers and students have benefited through its integration. However, it is imperative that all teachers across all subject areas use discretion when implementing new approaches and ultimately do what's best for students in their particular fields.

Finally, this study's design could prove effective outside of foreign language instruction as it could be adapted to a number of subject areas-and levels of instruction-thus adding to the body of research related to the practice of curricular infusion at the secondary level.

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Table 1

Frequency and Distribution of Teachers by Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	N	%	Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Summarized Survey Items
Gender			
Male	24	16.67	

Female	120	83.33
School Enrollment		
200-499	27	18.75
500-999	34	23.61
1000-1499	31	21.53
1500 or More	40	27.78
No Response	12	8.33
Teacher Education		
Bachelor's	52	36.11
Master's	89	61.81
Doctorate	3	2.08
Years of Teaching Experience		
0 (first year) – 4	18	12.50
5 – 9	29	20.14
10 – 14	16	11.14
15 or More	66	45.83

No Response	15	10.42
Highest Level Taught		
Spanish I	17	11.81
Spanish II	35	24.31
Spanish III	34	23.61
Spanish IV	26	18.06
Spanish V	12	8.33
Spanish VI (Advanced / Honors)	20	13.89

Method Group / Survey Item Summary	M	SD
Identifying Similarities and Differences		
1. List / sort important information.	3.59	1.04
2. Identifying cultural differences.	3.85	0.94
3. Identifying linguistic differences.	3.97	0.94
Summarizing and Note Taking		
4. Summarize the main points of a reading.	3.76	1.01
5. Summarize the main points of a dialogue.	3.88	0.92
6. Summarize the grammatical points of a dialogue.	3.58	1.03

Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition		
7. Using student self-assessment charts.	2.98	1.09
8. Oral exam focused on communicative competence.	4.48	0.65
9. Oral exam focused on form / grammar.	3.87	0.90
Homework and Practice		
10. Objective-related homework.	4.28	0.88
11. Written summaries of articles.	3.16	0.94
12. Written translations of articles.	2.61	1.02
Nonlinguistic Representations		
13. The use of visuals to explain concepts.	3.57	1.19
14. Webbing new vocabulary words.	2.80	1.21
15. Delineating grammar concepts.	2.87	1.13
Cooperative Learning		
16. The use of small groups to perform tasks.	4.07	0.96
17. Small group role-playing in Spanish.	4.27	0.94
18. Small groups reviewing grammar concepts.	3.86	1.03
Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback		
19. Feedback is timely and corrective.	4.66	0.59
20. Feedback on a composition is based on function.	3.92	0.83

21. Feedback on a composition is based on form.	3.80	0.85
Generating and Testing Hypotheses		
22. The use of prior knowledge to test new hypotheses	4.10	0.84
23. The use of contextual clues in reading.	4.60	0.59
24. The production of new grammar patterns.	3.65	1.09
Cues, Questions and Advance Organizers		
25. Previewing upcoming instructional objectives.	3.72	1.15
26. Previewing communicative skills / objectives.	3.72	1.06
27. Previewing grammar skills / objectives.	3.61	1.15

Table 3

Method Group Ranks and Perception Pools

Method Pools (Study's Rank)	M*	SD	Marzano Rank
High Importance Pool			
1. Setting objectives and providing feedback	12.36	1.56	7
1. Generating and testing hypotheses	12.36	1.83	8
3. Cooperative Learning	12.20	2.47	6
Medium Importance Pool			
4. Identifying similarities and differences	11.40	2.18	1
5. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition	11.31	1.94	3

6. Summarizing and note taking	11.16	2.23	2
7. Cues, questions and advance organizers	11.04	3.02	9
Low Importance Pool			
8. Homework and practice	10.02	2.04	4
9. Nonlinguistic representations	9.15	2.83	5
<i>*Represents a mean score (range 3-15) of three instructional tasks for each method group.</i>			

Table 4

ANOVA of Total Mean Perception Scores Among the Nine Method Groups

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Nine Method Groups					
Between subjects	1340.61	7	200.15	42.64	0.00*
Within subjects	4496.28	958	4.69		
Total	5836.89	965			
<i>*p < .001</i>					

Appendix A

Foreign Language Teaching Methods Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of the perceived importance of general effective teaching methods in the foreign language classroom among secondary Spanish teachers in the state of Kansas. Your responses to this survey are greatly appreciated and will be held in complete confidence.

Demographics:

Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Approximate number of students enrolled in your high school: _____

Level of Education: (Mark the highest degree that you currently hold.)

_____ Bachelors

_____ Masters

_____ Doctorate

Years of foreign language teaching experience: _____

Check all of the levels of Spanish that you currently teach:

_____ 1st year _____ 2nd year _____ 3rd year _____ 4th year _____ 5th year _____ A.P. /
Honors Spanish

For the purposes of this survey, a method refers to an instructional task used within the framework of foreign language instruction that is designed to improve student achievement.

Please respond to the survey items using the following scale:

1 = Method is of **no importance** in the foreign language classroom.

2 = Method is of **minor importance** in the foreign language classroom.

3 = Method is of **moderate importance** in the foreign language classroom.

4 = Method is **important** in the foreign language classroom.

5 = Method is **very important** in the foreign language classroom.

Method Group 1: Identifying similarities and differences.

- 1) Students identify information from which they list important characteristics and then sort these characteristics into categories based on similarities and/or differences.
- 2) Students are shown pictures depicting various cultural/ethnic facets of the Spanish speaking world (clothing styles, architectural design, physical traits, etc.) and then asked to identify (through written and/or oral expression) similarities and differences between the target culture and their own.
- 3) Students are presented with charts of Spanish verbs in various tenses and then asked to identify (through written and/or oral expression) similarities and differences that exist within the given structures.

Method Group 2: Summarizing and note taking.

- 4) Students write summaries of information they have read in order to emphasize the main points of the reading.
- 5) While listening to a dialogue in the target language, students take notes focusing on such aspects as the main ideas and pertinent vocabulary and then provide an oral summary of the dialogue to other

classmates.

6) While listening to a dialogue in the target language, students write examples of targeted vocabulary and grammatical structures found in the dialogue.

Method Group 3: Reinforcing effort and providing recognition.

7) Students maintain records (charts) of their assignments and grades as a means of self-assessing their performance levels.

Given an instructor administered oral assessment in the target language, students are provided with immediate, positive feedback which is primarily focused on the students' overall level of communicative competence. 🤗

9) Given an instructor administered oral assessment in the target language, students are provided with immediate, positive feedback which is primarily focused on the students' overall level of grammatical competence.

Method Group 4: Homework and practice.

10) Students are given specific, out-of-class homework assignments in order to practice and reinforce information that was taught in the classroom.

11) To reinforce instructional objectives focusing on the domain of news/media, students retrieve newspaper articles (in the target language) from the internet and provide a written summary of the articles in the target language.

12) To reinforce instructional objectives focusing on the domain of news/media, students retrieve newspaper articles (in the target language) from the internet and provide a written translation of the articles.

Method Group 5: Nonlinguistic representations (Representing knowledge).

13) Students make items such as pictures, graphs, maps and charts and write brief explanations of the information portrayed in the visuals.

14) Working within the domain of "school life", students write the word/main topic "school life" inside a circle and create "webs" by drawing lines connected to smaller, subordinate circles into which students write the various words/phrases associated with the main topic.

15) Given sentences in the target language which focus on the domain of "school life", students are given charts consisting of columns with titles such as noun, verb, adjective, etc. After reading the sentences, students complete the charts by placing the words from the sentences into their correct columns.

Method Group 6: Cooperative learning.

16) Students work in groups of 3-4 in order to accomplish tasks such as improving interpersonal relations, completing a specific task, or completing a long-term project.

17) Students are placed in groups of 3-4 in order to role play (in the target language) a restaurant scenario given by the teacher.

18) Students are placed in groups of 3-4 in order to review verb conjugations and vocabulary associated with food and restaurants.

Method Group 7: Setting objectives and providing feedback.

19) Students are given feedback in a timely, corrective manner that allows students to correct their mistakes.

20) When assessing a composition in the target language, the primary focus of error correction and feedback is that of function (meaning) and/or cultural relevancy.

21) When assessing a composition in the target language, the primary focus of error correction and feedback is that of form (grammatical structure).

Method Group 8: Generating and testing hypotheses

22) Presented with new information, students are required to draw upon existing knowledge in order to generate and test hypotheses related to the new material.

23) Students read a passage in the target language and use contextual clues and existing knowledge to generate the meaning of new vocabulary and grammatical structures found in the reading.

24) Presented with sentences containing the conjugations of an unknown verb tense, students use their existing knowledge about verb conjugations (roots, endings, etc.) to generate the conjugation pattern of the new tense.

Method Group 9: Cues, questions and advance organizers.

25) At the beginning of each instructional unit, students are given detailed information in the form of notes or a narrative that explicitly state what the students will be learning.

26) At the beginning of an instructional unit, students are presented with a detailed list outlining the communicative tasks that they will be learning.

27) At the beginning of an instructional unit, students are presented with a detailed list outlining the grammatical structures that they will be learning.

VN:R_U [1.9.11_1134]