

Developing a Standards-Based Curriculum
for the St. Anthony Middle School Spanish Program

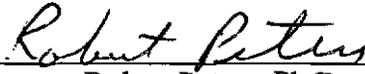
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Sara K. Doering-Fiedler

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Robert Peters, Ph.D.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

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**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Doering-Fiedler, Sara K.

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ABSTRACT

During the 2006-2007 school year, the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District of St. Anthony, Minnesota instituted a Spanish program in its middle school. As St. Anthony Middle School is currently in the application phase of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program certification, the Spanish program was established to meet with MYP criteria. With few exceptions for students with specific special needs, all students in the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District are now required to participate in Spanish courses during their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade years. This program evaluation determines the priorities of the stakeholders as they relate to the new Spanish program at St. Anthony Middle School, evaluates the current middle school Spanish program for its degree of adherence to the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education*, and makes recommendations to ensure that a quality middle school Spanish program is developed.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District of St. Anthony, Minnesota implemented a new middle school Spanish program. In accordance with the requirements of the Middle Years Program (MYP), a middle school counterpart to the International Baccalaureate (IB) system of which St. Anthony Middle School (SAMS) is a part, students are **required** to study a foreign language at the middle school level. Therefore, students at SAMS will take one semester of Spanish in both sixth and seventh grade and then a full year of Spanish in eighth grade. These three years of Spanish will equal Level I of Spanish at the high school; thus, students who successfully complete Spanish at the middle school level may begin high school Spanish at Level II. Seventh and eighth grade students entering the program during the 2006-2007 school year will still have the opportunity to progress into Level II Spanish during their freshman year of high school. Subsequently, the curricular demands of the middle school program will evolve during the first two years of its existence to accommodate students entering the program after the intended sixth grade starting point. Two middle school Spanish teachers were hired beginning in the 2006-2007 school year to develop and implement a middle school Spanish curriculum which will meet the needs of students in the St. Anthony-New Brighton school district.

The St. Anthony-New Brighton School District of Minnesota serves the village of St. Anthony and a small part of the town New Brighton with an elementary school (K-5), a middle school (6-8), and a high school (9-12). This geographically tiny district borders the Minneapolis Public School District and accepts approximately 42% of its students

through open enrollment. Administrators, faculty members, school board members, and parents have long supported the development of a middle school Spanish program.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, a total of 403 students were enrolled at St. Anthony Middle School during the 2005-2006 school year. Records indicate that the racial demographics of students this year were 81% White, 7% Black, 7% Asian, 4% Hispanic and 1% American Indian. One percent of students were categorized as Limited English Proficient, 9% of students received special education services, and 16% qualified for Free and Reduced Price Lunch (Minnesota Department of Education, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

There are three primary goals of this program evaluation. First, the priorities of the stakeholders (middle school Spanish teachers, middle school principal, district superintendent, school board members) will be determined as they relate to the new middle school Spanish program. Second, the middle school Spanish curriculum currently in place will be evaluated for its degree of adherence to the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education* (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999). And, third, recommendations will be made to ensure that a quality middle school Spanish program is developed. A quality program would emphasize curricular excellence while simultaneously giving attention to the specific needs of the students of the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District.

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed that the stakeholders will place a high importance on the Communication Standard of the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education*

(ACTFL, 1999). This Standard relates specifically to the ability to read, write, speak, and listen in the target language. It is also assumed that stakeholders will value a middle school Spanish program's ability to differentiate between the diverse needs of students and to motivate and inspire students to continue their study of foreign language at the high school level.

Definition of Terms

Differentiation. Providing activities and/or assessments which accommodate the diverse needs of students.

International Baccalaureate (IB). The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is an international program which aims to develop schools with a high quality, standardized philosophy of curricula and rigorous standards of assessment. IB schools around the world encourage students to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand and value people of different cultural backgrounds and perspectives.

L1. Language 1, or a student's native language.

L2. Language 2, or a student's foreign language of study.

Middle Years Program (MYP). The Middle Years Program is the middle level version of the IB. MYP schools operate under the IBO philosophy of curriculum and assessment. Normally the MYP program is offered from grades 6-10. The St. Anthony-New Brighton School District, however, is offering a modified MYP program which includes only grades 6-8.

National Standards for Foreign Language Education. A set of guidelines developed by the *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages* to influence the development of curricula, the selection of teaching methods, and the incorporation of assessments in foreign language classrooms around the country. The Standards include five primary areas of focus: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

SAMS. St. Anthony Middle School.

Target language. The language of study in a given foreign language classroom. In this case, the target language is Spanish.

World Languages. A more current term used at times instead of *foreign languages*. The term recognizes that a student's L2 might be spoken widely within that student's native country and, therefore, the language is not foreign. Foreign language, however, continues to remain a frequently used term.

Limitations of the Study

This program evaluation is limited, in part, by the content and methodology knowledge of some of the stakeholders. While administrators and school board members may carry general philosophies about creating an effective Spanish program, they are not trained in specific content knowledge, including knowledge of the Standards or foreign language methodology. However, because these stakeholders do have influence in the

development of the SAMS Spanish program, their opinions must be taken into consideration. It is fortunate, however, that both the administration and the school board are generally very supportive of this new program, and both groups demonstrate a willingness to trust and support the new SAMS Spanish faculty.

The three-week sample of lessons (See Chapter III: Methodology and Chapter IV: Results) is a limiting factor as well because this sample may not be representative of all of the varied activities which occur in the SAMS Spanish classroom throughout the year. Some other units of study not included in the sample may focus more intensely on other Standards not adequately addressed during the sample period.

Methodology

This study will incorporate surveys to determine the values and goals of the stakeholders. A three-week sample of lesson plans will then be evaluated as to how they reinforce the *National Standards for Foreign Languages* (ACTFL, 1999) and the interests of the stakeholders. Literature will be reviewed to determine other qualities of a successful middle school Spanish program. This evaluation will generate specific recommendations to improve the current program, especially recommendations which take into account the individual needs of a diverse learning population.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The Standards

As noted in the Introduction, the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL, 1999) guide foreign language educators in their development of curriculum and their use of various methods and specific activities. The Standards focus on five main areas of language and cultural development: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Though all of these areas are valuable within the L2 classroom, undoubtedly the greatest emphasis is often placed upon “Communication,” or, more specifically, the instruction of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the target language.

Gifford and Mullaney (1999), like most L2 researchers, advocate the use of “meaningful situations” to best help students to develop the Communication aspect of their target language (p. 12). They state that it is the role of the foreign language educator to “create and provide learning environments that offer these [meaningful situations]” (Gifford & Mullaney, 1999, p. 12). Foreign language educators must consider realistic, and authentic uses of language for reading, writing, speaking, and listening purposes and develop activities which allow students to use their L2 knowledge in natural, true-to-life ways.

The North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction (1996) echoes this sentiment and further makes the connection between the skills required in meaningful situations in a student’s L1 with those needed for a student’s L2. They encourage foreign language educators to utilize some of the same strategies and activities used in L1 instruction of reading (prereading, engagement while reading, and response/postreading

activities) in their instruction of the target language (North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, 1996, pp. 5-6). The Communication Standard in foreign language, therefore, relates very intimately to the goals of L1 curriculum. This connection demonstrates an opportunity for an interdisciplinary exchange between a school's English Department and its World Languages Department. The educators in these departments may find that their curricular goals complement and enhance the goals of the other.

Though the Communication Standard typically receives most concern and attention within a foreign language department, the Culture Standard is often close behind in importance. Failoni (1993) recommends the incorporation of music into the L2 classroom as one easy and motivating way to address the Culture Standard. Failoni (1993) notes that

“since music does not exist in a vacuum, it provides an interesting mirror of the history, literature, and culture of a country. Music also represents a common interest uniting many American students, and it appears to be an important aspect of their life...” (p. 97).

Thus, the foreign language educator can use music to create a bridge between students' interests and the cultures of the target language. Using music as a gateway, foreign language educators can then delve into some of the more profound and pervasive aspects of culture as well.

In an increasingly technological world, foreign language educators are fortunate in their ability to use technology to address the Communities Standard with greater ease. The Internet abounds with authentic information (newspapers, local websites, chat rooms, etc.) that can be used to connect students directly with people from their L2 cultures.

Allen (2004) comments on the numerous websites which allow teachers to create partnerships with other classrooms around the world, providing opportunities for students to engage in pen pal relationships with other students, all while using their target language. Naturally, these activities also connect to each of the other standards, as well, as students use their language in authentic, meaningful situations to communicate and learn about other cultures, while simultaneously making connections and comparisons between the L2 culture and their own, and developing a more global sense of community. Allen (2004) reminds us, though, that “professional development, more than the technology, is the critical factor in winning support for these new teaching approaches...” (p. 8). For foreign language educators to truly be able to utilize the myriad of curriculum resources available for reaching all five Standards, they must be provided with adequate and sufficient training before they can know how best to bring these resources into the classroom.

Differentiation

Since Spanish is a required course for St. Anthony Middle School students, the SAMS Spanish teachers must accommodate the needs of a diverse population of students. A limited number of students are excused from this Spanish requirement because of severe special educational needs or because of significantly lower reading comprehension scores. Students who struggle with reading take a remedial reading course instead of Spanish. However, the majority of SAMS students still participate in the required L2 course, complying with the MYP guidelines.

Because foreign language courses generally tend to attract more academically-motivated students, the SAMS Spanish teachers balance the needs of these students with

those who struggle academically, particularly those who receive special education services. Finamore (1993) reminds us that there are actually several similarities between the special education (SE) student and the traditional L2 student, most notably that SE and L2 students are both struggling to acquire linguistic competence for communication in a specific setting. The difference between the SE student and the L2 student, however, is that the SE student typically has not yet developed this linguistic competence in his or her first language, while the L2 student has. Finamore (1993) advocates providing a variety of “high-interest activities of varying difficulty to meet the varying ability levels” of all students in a mainstreamed foreign language classroom (p. 22). This requires the foreign language teacher to remember that any given classroom is going to contain students of a wide range of strengths and needs. By requiring foreign language, SAMS must recognize this increased diversity present within their foreign language classrooms and plan accordingly.

While many schools do excuse students with learning disabilities from foreign language classes, Pritikin (1999) posits another option: the creation of an alternative foreign language curriculum to meet the specific needs of these students. Pritikin (1999) emphatically holds that students with special needs can still effectively learn a foreign language, but that they may require different methods, such as more explicit direct instruction of grammar and more extensive tactical or kinesthetic reinforcement. While the creation of an alternative foreign language curriculum might not be a viable option at this point in the SAMS program, it is a recommendation that merits serious consideration. If SAMS wishes to require foreign language of nearly all of its students (as it must under MYP guidelines), then it must learn to effectively serve a population which might not

otherwise participate in foreign language at the middle school level. Creative solutions must be devised to serve these students within the constraints of the resources currently available.

Motivation

Student motivation is an increasingly important factor of the SAMS Spanish program because some students might prefer not to study a foreign language at all. Gardner (2001) notes that though intelligence and verbal ability were once considered to be the most important factors in foreign language learning, today “motivation is a central element along with language aptitude in determining success in learning another language in the classroom setting” (p. 3). This statement is, perhaps, even more true in the SAMS program, since students are not able to make the decision whether to participate in a foreign language course.

Gardner (2001) cautions that some beginning language students believe they will be able to speak proficiently in a short period of time. He remarks that these students “are generally unaware of the demands that will be placed on them” (p. 3). For this reason, SAMS Spanish teachers must realistically explain to students how much Spanish they can expect to learn by the end of middle school and how much daily practice and work will be required to meet that standard.

Gardner (2001) also encourages the teaching of effective learning strategies as a means of improving student motivation. He explains that “the use of such strategies can influence achievement by providing schema and techniques to help learn the material” (p. 12). SAMS Spanish teachers can, therefore, actively teach these strategies as a means of motivating all students, as well as providing tools for success for struggling students.

Learning Strategies

To ensure that all SAMS students can be successful in Spanish, the Spanish teachers must prepare them with the necessary skills for learning a foreign language. Lee (1995) and Stuart and Pearson (1995) encourage the direct and explicit instruction of learning strategies to foreign language students. Stuart and Pearson (1995) recommend a variety of specific strategies, which include: approximation, self-repair, clarification requests, language switches, and rephrasal. They explain that “presentation of the most successful strategies combined with in-class practice offers learners the opportunity to expand their communicative resources despite linguistic deficiencies” (p. 122). It cannot be assumed that all students naturally develop these learning strategies without guidance from the teacher. In fact, the instruction of these strategies could help to close the achievement gap between the strongest students in a foreign language class and those who are not as academically competent. Lee (1995) also advocates for repeated in-class practice of learning strategies in the foreign language classroom and cautions against providing too many strategies too quickly. She states that “students should not be intimidated...[or]...overwhelmed by the list of L2 strategies” provided to them (p. 12). Instead, she recommends practicing one strategy repeatedly in a variety of learning tasks until students feel they can begin to use that strategy independently from the teacher. In time, Lee (1995) writes, “students should choose the learning strategies most suitable to themselves based on their learning style and characteristics” (p. 13). It is the teacher’s responsibility, then, to educate students about the various learning strategies available to them.

Chapter III: Methodology

The three primary goals of this program evaluation are to: (1) determine the priorities of the stakeholders as they relate to the new Spanish program at St. Anthony Middle School, (2) evaluate the current middle school Spanish program for its degree of adherence to the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL, 1999), and (3) make recommendations to ensure that a quality middle school Spanish program is developed. This evaluation will be conducted using the methods described below.

Subject Selection and Description

First, surveys will be conducted with the middle school Spanish program stakeholders. These stakeholders include: middle school Spanish teachers, middle school principal, district superintendent, and school board members. The surveys will reflect the goals of the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL, 1999) as well as goals related to student learning and motivation. The survey statements are divided according to which Standard they reflect. From the survey, Statement 1 addresses the Communication Standard, Statements 2-3 relate to the Culture Standard, Statement 4 addresses both the Connection Standard and Strategies, Statements 5-6 reflect the Comparisons Standard, Statements 7-8 highlight the Communities Standard, and Statements 10-12 address Differentiation. The remaining statements relate to other areas of interest in the development of the SAMS Spanish program, including the topic of student motivation. The results of these surveys will help guide future development of the SAMS Spanish program.

Second, a three-week sample of lesson plans from the current eighth grade Spanish curriculum will be evaluated for its adherence to the *National Standards for*

Foreign Language Education (ACTFL, 1999). Each activity during this three-week period will be listed under the Standard which it most adequately addresses. The Communication Standard will be divided into four subcategories: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening. In addition, the categories of Strategies and Differentiation will be added, and activities will be listed under those categories if they address those student needs. After the three-week period, this sample will be analyzed to determine which Standards are being addressed thoroughly and which Standards are not being addressed as regularly. Recommendations will then be made to highlight Standards which were not adequately addressed during this sample period.

Literature has been reviewed to determine other qualities of a successful middle school Spanish program. These qualities include the use of differentiation to meet the needs of all students, the attention to student motivation in learning a second language, and the direct instruction of learning strategies. Specific recommendations will be made to improve the current program, especially recommendations which take into account the individual needs of a diverse learning population.

Data Collection Procedure

All subjects will receive the surveys by mail, along with a letter explaining the research project and how the results will be used. E-mail reminders will be sent to these individuals as necessary. These surveys will be completed anonymously, and the subjects may decide to withdraw completely from this research project. The completed surveys will be mailed to the researcher's home address using the self-addressed, stamped envelope included with the surveys. The surveys will include the statement, "My participation in this research is an indication of informed consent." All surveys will

be kept in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed upon completion of this research project.

Data Analysis

The results from the surveys will be tabulated and ranked according to importance. The questions receiving the highest scores will be considered of greatest priority to those stakeholders and will influence the direction of future curricular development in the SAMS Spanish program.

The three-week sample of activities will be compiled onto a log which divides the activities according to which Standard they most adequately address. This log will then be analyzed to determine the current strengths and weaknesses of the present SAMS Spanish program. Through the identification of curricular deficits, the middle school Spanish faculty will revise the curriculum to account for these needs.

Limitations

Ideally, surveys would also be completed by current student participants of the SAMS Spanish program and their parents. It was the belief of the researcher, however, that their participation in this project would not be feasible within the present context of this school district. This omission is unfortunate, as it would offer interesting insight into the priorities of these stakeholders in the program. Nonetheless, though the input of students and parents is appreciated, it is the input of administrators, middle school faculty, and school board members which has the true influence in the development of the SAMS Spanish program.

And, though the three-week sample of lesson plans provides great insight into the daily practices within the current SAMS Spanish classroom, it does not account for the

wide range of activities and methods used throughout the entire school year. Thus, it must be analyzed for what it is, a select sample and not a complete representation of the current SAMS Spanish curriculum and all of the methods employed by the middle school Spanish teachers.

Chapter IV: Results

The research collected for this program evaluation involves two different samples. For the first sample, surveys were given to the SAMS Spanish program's primary stakeholders: the middle school Spanish teachers, the middle school principal, the district superintendent, and school board members. The results from this survey will help generate the priorities of the SAMS Spanish program. For the second sample, a three-week selection of lesson plans from the current eighth grade Spanish curriculum was evaluated. Each activity during this three-week period was categorized according to the *National Standard for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL, 1999) which it best represented. The results of this sample will help determine which Standards are currently being addressed adequately in the SAMS Spanish program and which Standards require more careful attention.

Item Analysis: Surveys

Seven out of ten surveys were completed and returned anonymously to the researcher. The other three surveys were never returned. The results of the survey (See Table 1) rank the statements in order of importance to the subjects. Included next to several statements in the table is the *National Standard for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL, 1999) which that statement represents. Some statements do not highlight specific Standards. Next to those statements is "N/A" along with that statement's area of interest to the SAMS Spanish program stakeholders included in parentheses. These areas of interest include: Differentiation, Student Motivation, Curricular Continuity, and Continuity of Specific Curricular Resources.

The results of the survey indicate that the Communication Standard is of greatest importance to the program stakeholders. This Standard is frequently viewed as the most important of the five *National Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL, 1999) by foreign language educators. Following closely behind were the topics Differentiation and Student Motivation. The other Standards were also declared “important” overall by stakeholders. The topic of Continuity of Specific Curricular Resources was decidedly viewed as unimportant by program stakeholders. With the exception of the statement involving the use of textbooks, all statements were considered at least “Somewhat Important” by the subjects.

Table 1

SAMS Spanish Program – Survey Results

5 – Very Important

4 – Important

3 – Somewhat Important

2 – Minimally Important

1 – Not Important

Order of Importance	Survey Statement <i>In a successful middle school Spanish program, students...</i>	Average Ranking	National Standard for Foreign Language Education
1	have frequent opportunities to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening in Spanish.	5.0	Communication
2	have options for receiving extra help (e.g. tutors, modified test, etc.) when regular classroom material is too challenging.	4.7	N/A (Differentiation)

3	have opportunities for enrichment when regular classroom material is not sufficiently challenging.	4.6	N/A (Differentiation)
4	are inspired to continue studying foreign language (Spanish or French) at the high school level.	4.4	N/A (Student Motivation)
5	learn strategies for learning a foreign language (<i>especially</i> strategies which can be used in <i>other subject areas as well</i>).	4.3	Connections
6	learn about the cultural practices and beliefs of people from Spanish-speaking countries.	4.1	Cultures
7	can identify similarities and differences between the Spanish language and the English language (or another native language). (Examples: similar vocabulary or <i>cognates</i> , similar grammatical forms, etc.) find Spanish to be an exciting, unique, and enjoyable class .	4.0 4.0	Comparisons N/A (Student Motivation)
8	can identify similarities and differences between their own cultural practices and beliefs and those of people from other cultures. are well-prepared to begin Spanish 2 as high school freshmen.	3.9 3.9	Comparisons N/A (Curricular Continuity)
9	have opportunities (<i>provided by the teacher</i>) to use Spanish outside of the classroom . (Examples: Spanish Club, field trips, community service projects, etc.)	3.7	Communities

	have the individual option to discontinue Spanish if teachers, administrators, and/or parents feel that a student is not able to be successful in Spanish at this time (for academic or behavioral reasons).	3.7	N/A (Differentiation)
10	learn reasons why it is important to study a foreign language in today's society.	3.3	N/A (Student Motivation)
11	are familiar with the geography (countries and capitals) of the Spanish-speaking world.	3.1	Cultures
12	use a textbook (rather than teacher-prepared packets or materials) regularly.	1.9	N/A (Continuity of Specific Curricular Resources)

Item Analysis: Three-Week Sample Period of Lesson Plans

The results of the three-week sample period of lesson plans (See Table 2) were not surprising. The greatest attention was given to the Communication Standard, which includes the subcategories of Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening. The amount of Reading activities was somewhat unforeseen, however, as this is often a difficult area to adequately address in a first-year L2 course because of students' limited L2 knowledge.

The other Standards were decidedly of secondary importance based upon the results of this sample. The Culture Standard is particularly in need of attention. The lack of culture-based activities, however, may be attributed to the condensed timeframe of the Spanish curriculum this year. Eighth grade students have to complete the entire high school Level I Spanish curriculum during the 2006-2007 school year. In subsequent years, students will begin this curriculum in the sixth grade, thus providing more time for culture-based activities.

The Connections, Comparisons, and Communities Standards were also addressed in a limited fashion. The Communities Standard in particular, though, is a challenging Standard to highlight within the classroom setting since it is, by definition, a Standard which invokes the need for connection with the larger *community*. Activities which address this Standard are more likely to occur at specific, concentrated times throughout the school year.

The apparent use of Strategies and Differentiation during this three-week period was satisfactory, though additional methods can continue to be incorporated into the teaching of the curriculum. The number of Strategies and opportunities for Differentiation listed during this three-week period suggest that students are being actively instructed in specific ways to be successful in a foreign language course, as well as being given frequent choices in personalizing their learning according to their individual talents and needs.

This three-week sample, though somewhat revealing and useful, is limiting in that it only portrays a small slice of classroom activities within the context of the overall school year. Presumably, other units from different times throughout the year may address the Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities Standards in greater detail. This sample also cannot communicate overall teacher effectiveness in presenting this information to students.

Table 2

Standards-Based Activities
(March 5-23, 2007 – Three-week Sample)

Communication

Reading

- *Family vocabulary puzzle
- *Personality survey
- *Birth order reading
- *Family descriptions (2 textbook activities)
- *Family tree fill-in-the-blank
- *Family quotes
- *Weather project – brochures (sharing in groups)
- *Circling chores they do at home
- *Reading comprehension on test
- *Short readings on family vocabulary and descriptions

Writing

- *Weather project – 2 work days
- *Daily homework assignments
- *Sentence translation
- *White boards – possessive adjective practice (3 times)
- *Weather project – revision day
- *Answering questions on test
- *Partner writing activity about chores (responding to pictures)
- *Short fill-in-the-blank writing activity about chores

Speaking

- *Question of the Day (daily)
- *Tortuga – possessive adjectives game
- *Volunteers to read passages in textbook aloud
- *Weather project – forecast presentations

Listening

- *Teacher instruction in Spanish
- *Movie with subtitles
- *Possessive adjectives video
- *Total Physical Response (TPR) drawing activity
- *Listening activities (2) – family descriptions
- *Listening activities (2) – chores/new verbs

Culture

- *Family vocabulary (hijo/a, tío, mujer)
- *Nota cultural – cito/cita/mi cielo/mi vida – terms of affection in Spanish
- *Grandparents extended family more likely to live with family

Connections

- *Weather project (Science, Meteorology, Business – Travel Agencies)
- *Mayor, medio, menor, único survey – connect with other teachers
- *Difference between stepsibling and half-sibling
- *Birth order research as it relates to own family

Comparisons

- *Southern United States use of “honey, sweetheart” compared to “hijo/a”
- *US “man, dude” vs. Spanish “tío”

Communities

- *Spanish Club activity (after school and open to all students, grades 6-8)

Strategies

- *Learning family vocabulary (chunking)
- *Listening activities – listening for key words (not EVERY word)
- *Writing – using writing models found in weather project instruction sheet
- *Circling irregular forms on new verbs to make for less material to memorize and reinforce patterns of the rest of the verb forms
- *Crossing out extra, unnecessary information on readings
- *Emphasizing “2-for-1 Deal” on conjugating double verbs

Differentiation

- *Choice of individual or group project
- *Extra credit project – artistic option or geography/history option
- *Listening activity – transcription shown during second time listening to help some students with listening comprehension
- *Allowing students to complete 4 out of 5 sections of an assignment (they choose which section NOT to complete)

Chapter V: Discussion

The results of the survey indicated that stakeholders valued the incorporation of the Communication Standard in the SAMS Spanish curriculum above other Standards. The issue of Differentiation was also given great importance by stakeholders. All other Standards and topics of concern received a ranking of at least 3.1 (“somewhat important”) by stakeholders, indicating that a varied and balanced approach to the curriculum is a top priority. The only topic that did not receive general support by stakeholders was Continuity of Specific Curricular Resources. Through the survey, stakeholders indicated that they did not believe that the use of a specific textbook was necessary to the success of students in the SAMS Spanish program. Stakeholders did, however, through written comments express concern about the future of the high school French program because of the middle school Spanish requirement now in place in the district.

The three-week sample of lessons demonstrated that the Communication Standard is currently being addressed in a relatively thorough manner in the SAMS Spanish curriculum. The other Standards and issues of concern are receiving somewhat balanced attention, with the exception of the Communities Standard which is currently underrepresented in the curriculum.

Limitations

While the survey provided some interesting insight into the priorities of the stakeholders of the SAMS Spanish program, it would have been enlightening to also survey students who had participated in this initial year of the program as well as their parents. Student and parent participation was not feasible at this time, however, in the

current context of the district and the research procedures necessary to make their participation possible. It was determined, though, that despite the fact that students and parents are active participants in the SAMS Spanish program, they do not have deciding influence in the development of the SAMS Spanish curriculum.

The three-week sample of lesson plans provided an informative view of the current Spanish curriculum in place for this initial year. But, because this sample gives only a small slice of the curriculum as a whole, it must not be mistaken for a complete representation of the year's lessons and activities. Presumably, the curriculum focused in greater detail on different Standards at different times of the year. Therefore, the data can only accurately reflect that three-week sample period.

Conclusions

The survey results indicated that stakeholders in the SAMS Spanish program placed the greatest level of importance on the Communication Standard, which includes the subcategories of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It is apparent that stakeholders value the language aspect of the Spanish classroom over other aspects such as culture and connections with other subject areas. This is not surprising considering that it is the students' knowledge of the Spanish language which determines whether they can advance to the next level of Spanish the following school year. Fortunately, the lesson plan sample also indicates that the current eighth grade Spanish curriculum in place during the 2006-2007 school year also placed greatest emphasis on the Communication Standard. Considering the results of this study, the SAMS Spanish curriculum should continue to emphasize the Communication Standard above other Standards.

The survey statement of least importance to stakeholders regarded the regular use of a textbook in the SAMS Spanish curriculum. The average ranking of this statement by stakeholders was 1.9 (between “not important” and “minimally important”). This finding is significant considering a difference of philosophy between the middle school Spanish teachers and administrator (who do not believe that the use of a specific textbook is crucial to the success of students in a Spanish program) and the high school Spanish teachers (who worry that a lack of continuity in specific curricular resources will cause confusion for Spanish students entering into Level II at the high school).

As is apparent in the results of the survey, stakeholders value the differentiation of the SAMS Spanish curriculum to meet the needs of students with varying abilities. The MYP requirement that *all* students participate in a foreign language course during their three middle school years has presented new and unforeseen challenges to St. Anthony Middle School. Administrators and middle school Spanish teachers struggle with the concept of advancing students to the next level (sixth grade Spanish to seventh grade Spanish, for example) after a student has failed a previous level. MYP officials offer no advice in this situation, saying instead that this decision is to remain at the district level. During the 2006-2007 school year, approximately 16% of eighth grade students received D's or F's in Spanish. Some of these students struggled with Spanish for academic reasons; the course was simply too difficult or moved too quickly for them. Other students achieved low grades for behavioral reasons; they either chose not to complete work or study for quizzes, or their classroom behavior prevented them from learning effectively. These students do not have the option to enroll in Level II Spanish at the high school during their freshmen year. This number is contrasted with the

approximately 73% of students who received A's or B's in Spanish during the 2006-2007 school year. These students were able to remain successful amidst the expectations and the pacing of the course. The remaining approximately 11% of students maintained a C average throughout the year. These students achieved adequate success during their first year of Spanish. Like the students who received primarily A's and B's, these students may choose to enroll in Level II Spanish at the high school for the 2007-2008 school year. Some, however, have chosen to retake Spanish Level I at the high school to secure a more solid foundation in Spanish before advancing to Level II.

In a traditional foreign language elective course, students who fail or receive D's are either required or strongly recommended to drop the course. This is not an option under the MYP requirements. Therefore new and creative solutions must be devised, particularly if the SAMS Spanish program is to address the concerns of the stakeholders in the differentiation of curriculum to meet the varied needs of students. This year, a few experimental solutions were attempted. Six eighth grade students who failed first semester were given the opportunity to begin Spanish again in a seventh grade Spanish class. (This class began during the second semester; thus, the students were able to completely start over with the curriculum.) It was determined, however, that only two of these students went on to become successful in the seventh grade Spanish course. One additional student was marginally successful. Two students continued to fail for behavioral reasons (i.e., they chose not to complete work). One student failed as a result of an undetermined information processing disability.

Another eighth grade student who failed first semester for severe behavioral reasons was placed in an experimental independent study program. He was isolated from

other students and given a daily Spanish assignment to complete. A high school student tutored him three times each week during this independent study time. Quizzes were modified for this student to accommodate perceived, but as yet undiagnosed, special needs. This experimental independent study program, though additional work for the Spanish teacher, was somewhat successful. The student received a C for his completed coursework in this modified program.

Finally, another eighth grade student who failed first semester because of severe behavioral reasons was given a behavior modification plan that was implemented in all classes. He remained in his regular eighth grade Spanish course, but he was given the opportunity to retake first semester quizzes as a motivating factor to allow him to increase his second semester Spanish grade. His parents arranged a tutor to help him relearn previous coursework prior to these quizzes. While the behavior modification plan was somewhat successful, the student and his parents did not follow through consistently with the twice weekly tutoring schedule that had originally been developed. The student did retake two quizzes early second semester with moderate success, but he continued with a failing grade for the course.

Several stakeholders expressed concern through written comments on the surveys that the high school French program would suffer greatly because of the Spanish requirement at the middle school. This concern is well-founded, because enrollment numbers in Level I French at the high school dramatically decreased for the 2007-2008 school year. Approximately 69% of students completing Level I Spanish at the middle school will go on to take Level II Spanish at the high school during their freshman year. Anecdotally, numerous students said they had planned to take French, but were choosing

to continue on with Spanish at the high school because they could enter into Level II as freshmen. Though stakeholders knew that the high school French enrollment would suffer as a result of the new middle school Spanish program, they were still surprised by the dramatic change in enrollment in only one year.

Recommendations

Although the stakeholders considered the use of a specific textbook in the SAMS Spanish program to be of minimal importance at most, it should be recognized that the high school Spanish teachers are concerned about the continuity of specific curricular resources. Therefore, a compromise is recommended in which the middle school Spanish teachers incorporate the textbook where it would be relevant and useful in the SAMS Spanish curriculum. This occasional use would familiarize students with the format of the textbook series, allowing them to successfully utilize the Level II textbook with little confusion when they enter high school. This study does confirm, however, that the stakeholders do not view the textbook as crucial to the success of SAMS Spanish students.

It was determined by the stakeholders that differentiating instruction for struggling students was an issue of importance in the SAMS Spanish program. This year, several experimental options were attempted, including (1) moving failing eighth grade students to the seventh grade Spanish class at the start of second semester, (2) developing an independent study program for a specific student with support from a high school tutor, and (3) creating a behavior modification program in conjunction with an at-home tutoring program. The most successful option was the development of the independent study program with support from a high school tutor. It is thus recommended that this

option be explored further in the coming years when a student is not succeeding in the traditional Spanish classroom at SAMS. Because this option does create additional work for the Spanish classroom teachers, it is suggested that packaged computer tutorial programs be considered as an alternative to individual, teacher-prepared curricula. Fortunately, high school students willing to tutor middle school students in Spanish are readily available. Since several upperclassmen high school students have release time during first period, any SAMS independent study Spanish students should be scheduled to work with tutors during first period to best accommodate scheduling options.

The stakeholders expressed concern about declining enrollment of students in high school French courses because of the new middle school Spanish requirement. Although the middle school Spanish teachers encouraged students to enroll in the foreign language course of their choice at the high school for the 2007-2008 school year, it is clear that the French program is at an inherent disadvantage with students already started in Spanish. It is suggested that the high school French teacher visit the middle school Spanish classes and discuss the value of studying the French language with students. Many middle school students, for example, are not aware that French is spoken outside of France or Canada. In this presentation, the French teacher could share the benefits of speaking French so students could be more knowledgeable about both languages before registering for high school courses.

Because the Communities Standard is currently underrepresented in the SAMS Spanish curriculum, it is recommended that this Standard become an area of focus for the 2007-2008 school year. The SAMS Spanish Club would be an appropriate venue for the further exploration of this Standard. Since the district is part of a larger community (the

Twin Cities metro area) which contains a large population of native speakers of Spanish, students in the SAMS Spanish Club could easily be connected in a variety of ways with Spanish-speaking community members. During the fall of 2006, several students attended *El Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. This activity served as an excellent starting point in the incorporation of the Communities Standard into the SAMS Spanish curriculum. SAMS Spanish teachers can connect students with additional cultural celebrations in the community during the 2007-2008 school year. Over time, this community connection could grow to incorporate the “service” element which is central to the MYP philosophy.

This evaluation of the first year of the SAMS Spanish program has indicated that the current program is clearly moving toward becoming a strong and balanced, Standards-based program which addresses the varied needs of its students. Stakeholders have expressed their priorities for the future of the program, and fortunately, the current program appears focused toward reaching those principles valued by the stakeholders. By implementing the recommendations suggested in this report, the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District of St. Anthony, Minnesota will be well on its way toward developing a solid Standards-based middle school Spanish program which can ensure the success of Spanish students for years to come.

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Appendix A: SAMS Spanish Program – SURVEY

Please read each statement carefully and rate the **IMPORTANCE** of each statement to you.

5 – Very Important (*Please only circle 5 for the statements of greatest priority for you.*)

4 – Important

3 – Somewhat Important

2 – Minimally Important

1 – Not Important

In a successful middle school Spanish program, students...

1. have frequent opportunities to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening in Spanish.	1	2	3	4	5
2. learn about the cultural practices and beliefs of people from Spanish-speaking countries.	1	2	3	4	5
3. are familiar with the geography (countries and capitals) of the Spanish-speaking world.	1	2	3	4	5
4. learn strategies for learning a foreign language (<i>especially</i> strategies which can be used in <i>other subject areas as well</i>).	1	2	3	4	5
5. can identify similarities and differences between the Spanish language and the English language (or another native language). (Examples: similar vocabulary or <i>cognates</i> , similar grammatical forms, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
6. can identify similarities and differences between their own cultural practices and beliefs and those of people from other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
7. learn reasons why it is important to study a foreign language in today's society.	1	2	3	4	5
8. have opportunities (<i>provided by the teacher</i>) to use Spanish outside of the classroom . (Examples: Spanish Club, field trips, community service projects, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

9. use a textbook (rather than teacher-prepared packets or materials) regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
10. have opportunities for enrichment when regular classroom material is not sufficiently challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
11. have options for receiving extra help (e.g. tutors, modified test, etc.) when regular classroom material is too challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
12. have the individual option to discontinue Spanish if teachers, administrators, and/or parents feel that a student is not able to be successful in Spanish at this time (for academic or behavioral reasons).	1	2	3	4	5
13. are well-prepared to begin Spanish 2 as high school freshmen.	1	2	3	4	5
14. find Spanish to be an exciting, unique, and enjoyable class .	1	2	3	4	5
15. are inspired to continue studying foreign language (Spanish or French) at the high school level.	1	2	3	4	5

Are there any other issues you would like to see addressed in the ongoing development of our Spanish program at St. Anthony Middle School?

My participation in this research is an indication of informed consent.

*Thank You, Thank You, **Gracias**, Thank You!!*

Appendix B: Letter of Explanation (Included with Surveys)

April 23, 2007

(Subject's Name Here):

This summer, I will be completing my masters degree through the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, WI. The thesis component of my masters degree requires me to evaluate a current program within my district. Since this is only the first year that the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District has had a middle school Spanish program, I thought it was appropriate to evaluate our current program in its initial stages. My thesis, therefore, is entitled, "Developing a Standards-Based Curriculum for the St. Anthony Middle School Spanish Program." I am hoping to use this project to help determine how we can best align our curriculum with the *National Standards for Foreign Language Education*. In addition, I will be addressing the areas of differentiation, learning strategies for foreign language, and student motivation as they specifically relate to the students in our district.

I am asking members of our school community to aid in this program evaluation by completing the attached survey. If you choose to participate, your survey responses will help me to establish priorities as I assess our current middle school Spanish program.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout requires me to follow strict guidelines for the use of human subjects in research. First of all, I want you to feel no obligation to complete this survey. Your decision to withdraw from participation in this research project will not adversely affect my thesis assignment. If you chose to complete this survey, it should be completed anonymously. There is a minimal, or no risk to participants. I ask that you please mail your completed survey to me by May 31, 2007. I will keep the surveys in a locked cabinet and I will destroy them this summer upon completion of my thesis.

The results of this survey are primarily to be used for my own professional development. A copy of my finished thesis will remain at the University of Wisconsin-Stout and may be reviewed by future masters degree candidates. My thesis will not be distributed for other purposes.

Thank you so much for your time! It is a priviledge for me to work everyday with the students of St. Anthony Middle School! Thank you for all that you do to make our district an excellent place to work and learn!

Sara Fiedler
8th Grade Spanish Teacher, SAMS