

ARE COMMUNICATIVE AND GRAMMATICAL SKILLS MORE EFFECTIVELY  
ACQUIRED IN A TRADITIONAL OR DIFFERENTIATED BEGINNING  
LEVEL FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM?

A Thesis By

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommends that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction.

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## ABSTRACT

Research suggests much controversy exists in design and methodology of foreign language instruction. The purpose of this study was to understand if beginning level foreign language students acquire the language better with traditional methods of language instruction or with differentiated methods of language instruction. The study analyzed grammatical and communicative aspects in two classrooms of ten individuals using both teaching strategies. Subjects comprised various educational backgrounds, professions, gender, and race. Classes completed pre- and post-tests, student learning surveys, and the instructor completed a professional journal. Findings confirmed both classrooms were successful in grammatical aspects of the language, but the differentiated classroom was more successful in communicative aspects of the language.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	
Rationale .....	1
Purpose.....	2
Hypotheses.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Overview of the Thesis.....	5
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	
Introduction.....	6
The Review.....	7
Summary.....	11
III. PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY	
Introduction.....	13
Instruments or Measures.....	16
Design or Procedures for Collecting Data.....	16
Procedures for Data.....	17
Summary.....	18
IV. RESULTS OR FINDINGS	
Introduction.....	20
Presentation of the Findings.....	20
Summary.....	28

TABLE OF CONTENTS (con't)

Chapter	Page
V. CONCLUSIONS OR MEANINGS	
Introduction.....	29
Discussion of Results and Conclusions.....	29
Implications for Future Research.....	32
REFERENCES .....	34
APPENDIX A IRB FORM .....	38
APPENDIX B PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	41
APPENDIX C PRE TEST.....	42
APPENDIX D POST TEST.....	46
APPENDIX E STUDENT LEARNING SURVEY.....	50
APPENDIX F PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL.....	52
APPENDIX G STUDENT POEM SAMPLE.....	57

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### *Rationale*

The world is changing and becoming more diverse. The technology we use is allowing us to live in a more globalized society (Adams, 2006). According to the United States Census Bureau the number of Hispanics of Latino heritage in the country rose from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000. In 22 of the 50 states, the number of Hispanics more than doubled (Timmins, 2002). Although the Hispanic culture is the fastest growing in the United States, the United States Census Bureau shows there are also other cultures that are becoming more prevalent. The world of the Internet is pulling us together to give us more knowledge of the world and people around us (Friedman, 2006). Through this growing diversity, we cannot continue to deal with the different types of people in the traditional manner. Even more communication must occur between cultures to understand the similarities as well as differences so that we can better work together. For this reason, foreign language is becoming a necessity. Additionally, foreign language students want to be able to learn and communicate quickly in the language. Researching how students acquire a second language is the beginning of understanding the best methods in which to teach these students. There has been much controversy in the design

and methodology of foreign language instruction. Should we continue to teach using the traditional methods? Should we try a completely new approach to language instruction? Should we attempt to adapt the traditional teaching strategies with some new trends in foreign language instruction? Extensive research exists in an attempt to answer these questions.

### *Purpose*

In the light of the continuous new developments in the areas of linguistic instruction and psychology, there have been many shifts within teaching strategies used in the foreign language classrooms. These new approaches to language instruction have caused debates between whether a second language can best be acquired using the traditional teaching methods, or if the new differentiated teaching approaches help students acquire the second language easier. The purpose of this study is to understand if a beginning level foreign language student acquires the language better with traditional methods of language instruction or with differentiated methods of language instruction.

### *Hypotheses*

The two major teaching styles of language instruction are explicit grammatical instruction and communicative teaching strategies. Extensive research conducted in these areas has proven that students need explicit grammatical teachings and

communicative exercises to help them acquire the language. However, are these areas developed in a traditional or differentiated classroom environment? This research project attempts to answer if communicative and grammatical skills are more effectively acquired in a traditional or differentiated beginning level foreign language classroom. Beliefs exist that differentiated instruction helps a student acquire a language quicker because the curriculum and instruction is individualized to fit each student's needs and interests.

#### *Definition of Terms*

The following terms are defined as they apply to the project.

Traditional language instruction - Curriculum in which the student has little or no say in what they want to study. The students in the class all learn the same material and little variation occurs between students. There is little if any individualization of the curriculum or teaching styles.

Differentiated instruction - Curriculum and teaching strategies in which the students have choices depending upon their own interests. These choices may build upon the student's background knowledge and give the student confidence. These choices may also motivate the student to learn about what he or she is truly interested in which adds to the motivation to learn. The differentiated classroom sees students as individuals with

unique learning styles, interests, and abilities. The curriculum varies to fit the individual needs of the students.

Grammatical strategies - A teaching strategy that is rules-focused and subject-oriented. There is typically little time for practice of conversation and includes a wealth of written exercises such as fill-in-the-blank and structure oriented practice.

Communicative strategies - A teaching strategy that is meaning-focused and learner-oriented. The strategy emphasizes learning a language through repeated verbal exposure and two-way communication. The teacher acts as a coach.

Explicit instruction- Students acquire the knowledge with formal teacher instruction.

Implicit instruction- Students acquire the knowledge without formal teacher instruction.

Target language- The language that the student is learning.  
*Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations, Boundaries, Constraints*

The following are assumptions regarding the project:

1. The subjects have had little or no prior foreign language experience.
2. The subjects do not have any major disabilities that prevent them from learning the material.

During the development stages of the project, a number of limitations are noted and are as follows:

1. The subjects vary in age, profession, social status and gender.
2. There are only 10 subjects per class.

### *Overview of the Thesis*

The thesis portion is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an explanation of the problem, with the rationale, purpose, definitions, and assumptions and limitations of the project. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature of the prior research in this particular area. Chapter 3 explains the procedures used for the study as well as what data was collected and how it was analyzed. Chapter 4 contains the results or findings of the research project. Chapter 5 is a discussion of conclusions from the results of the research project. Thesis references follow Chapter 5. The Appendices for the project consists of the following: Appendix A IRB Form; Appendix B Participant Consent Form; Appendix C Pre Test; Appendix D Post Test; Appendix E Student Learning Survey; Appendix F Professional Research Journal; Appendix G Student Poem Sample.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

#### *Introduction*

For years, there has been one basic way for foreign language instruction. Students were expected to learn the same material at the same speed with relatively no variation between students, curriculum, or instruction. The two sides of the language instruction, grammatical skills and communicative skills, have been taught in the same way. Students were not seen as individuals each with individual characteristics, learning styles, experiences, or tastes. Recently however, there has been a new trend in language instruction. Many language classrooms are acquiring a more differentiated approach in which the students are seen as individuals, each with unique attributes. The curriculum and instruction are becoming more varied in a class that attempts to reach out to each student in his or her own way. This new differentiated method is supposed to motivate a student to learn what he or she is most interested in and enable the individual to acquire the language with his or her own learning styles and experiences. There has been research in these two areas to see which method is best for student learning (Faingold, 1994).

## *The Review*

The traditional approach to foreign language instruction has always been focused on grammatically based exercises. Grammar provides a framework that helps a person understand how language fits together. The grammatical instructional method has always been rules-focused and subject-oriented with very little differentiation. The students typically would learn a grammatical point and practice it through various mechanical exercises such as fill-in-the-blank, translations, or short oral exercises. This method does not provide room for individualization of any type. Each student completes the same exercises in the same manner.

Various studies have examined how this traditional grammar teaching has an impact on the second language learner (Hassan, 2001). Lightbrown and Spada (1990) examined how learners in classrooms where grammar was taught as opposed to more differentiated communicative strategies were more accurate in the use of some forms of the language. Although the student was more accurate in aspects of the usage of the language, typically grammar-based exercises were not very motivational to the student.

Scott and Randall (1992) concluded that students could possibly learn some kinds of linguistic structures without grammatical instruction, where other kinds of structures required the instruction. There has typically been little time for

practice of conversation but a wealth of written exercises such as fill-in-the-blank and structure oriented practice. Whether or not the grammatical elements of the language were explicitly taught, the students were left with the same exercises and were encouraged to acquire the language at the same rate whether or not the student was considered a fast or slow learner.

James Mannes Bourke (1992) takes a more differentiated approach. He suggests that the traditional approach to grammar teaching has not worked well, because it is more teacher-centered than learner-centered and there is minimal participation from the learner. He states that the traditional approach is not only predictable and does not challenge the learner, but it misses the element facing the learner. He concludes that the traditional approach leaves the learner with a very fragmented view of language.

Bourke's approach to teaching grammar is a problem-solving approach that is learner-centered. It does not have the limitations of traditional grammatical strategies. He believes that the learner should work toward a solution to a problem either individually or in small groups. The language learners are prompted to make their own decisions and thus, the language is viewed as a cognitive event that goes with the natural process of second language acquisition (Bourke, 1992). This method allows more for the individuality of the student and would allow the student to work out his or her way of problem solving.

Bourke's research had some downfalls. First, the grammatical exercises that he used were rather dull for the student. Second, there were not many interesting topics or pictures. However, even though the activities did not have much appeal, the scores of the students were positive. The outcome of the research was much higher than expected. Although the exercises did not allow for much of the individuality of the student, the students' scores were positive. With the dullness of the exercises, the students may not have been as motivated as they would have been if topics or pictures were chosen that were interesting to the students.

Various mixed media research on differentiation has suggested that differentiation also helps a student transition from a teacher-regulated classroom to a student-regulated classroom. This allows the students to take learning into their own hands and become more independent learners. Both qualitative and quantitative research findings have backed this notion (Karasavidis, 2000).

With the communicative approach to teaching language, the teacher becomes more of a coach in the language activities and a co-communicator rather than a teacher allowing the students to use the language in differentiated ways (Xiaoqing, 1997).

In Keck and Kinney (2005), Carol Ann Tomlinson states the following:

...differentiation occurs as teachers become increasingly proficient at understanding their students as individuals, increasingly comfortable with the meaning and structure of the disciplines they teach, and increasingly expert at teaching flexibly in order to match instruction to student need with the goal of maximizing the potential of each learner in a given area. (p. 16)

This tells us that in order to maximize student achievement we must be able to meet the needs of the learner as an individual.

Motivation is very important when learning a foreign language. The differentiated approach is very motivational because the students can use the language through real communication at the same time that they are learning it. This research has shown that it creates a feeling of success for the student that can motivate him or her to learn more (Schulter, 2001). The differentiated method allows for great motivation for the student when he or she can work on the topics that interest them individually.

The communicative teaching strategy is a dynamic and motivating concept that is also very adaptable to various classroom teacher applications. Some of the research from Swan may suggest, however, that the teachers may have been confused about what they should actually be doing, and some of the pedagogical validity has been questioned (Swan, 1985). It is for this reason that the differentiated curriculum and instruction is planned with a set process and specific outcomes for the student in mind.

Keck believes that even though the plans for differentiation may be time consuming on the teacher's part, with a lack of time in the first place, the effort will be worth the while. Even the challenging task of developing a differentiated curriculum can become more manageable over time (Keck, 2005).

### *Summary*

Traditional instruction in foreign language is the subject-centered instruction that has been used in schools for many years. It is composed of many exercises such as fill-in-the-blank and translations. It has typically allowed for little student individuality and motivation which is so important in foreign language instruction.

The differentiated approach in foreign language instruction is a learner-centered instruction that is the new trend in teaching today. This approach sees the student as an individual and allows variation in curriculum and instruction according to the individual student's needs and interests. There has been some confusion from teachers as to how to set up the lessons appropriately and how to implement them. Evaluation of the material for the differentiated approach to teaching has also been a difficult subject for the teacher to handle.

Research has shown that there is some controversy over how a student can best acquire a language. Does the traditional method work better for effectively acquiring grammatical and

communicative skills, or would a differentiated method be more appropriate for the students today?

## CHAPTER 3

### Procedures of the Study

#### *Introduction*

The research project was completed with two beginning level Spanish classes. One class was taught using traditional teaching strategies, and the other class was taught using differentiated teaching strategies.

#### *Sample*

There were ten adults in each of the classes. The students in each class were of various backgrounds and professions. The classes were composed of thirteen white, 5 Hispanic, 1 black, and 1 Asian student. The students' ages ranged between 25-55 years of age. Most of the students in the classes have earned at least a high school diploma with different levels of college education. Most of the students in the classes were professionals who needed to learn the language for work such as construction, medical, and financial fields. However, some of the students were taking the classes just because they had always wanted to learn a foreign language.

#### Traditional Classroom

#### *Description of Context*

The students learned some basic Spanish infinitives and memorized phrases but were not yet able to manipulate sentences to form original questions or statements.

### *Rationale for Teaching*

In order to be able to communicate appropriately in the Spanish language, the student should be able to manipulate words to form sentences and questions that they need in order to get their idea across to the other person in the target language.

### *Teaching Goals*

The student will be able to:

- a. conjugate verbs correctly in at least five sentences.
- b. make up at least three original questions with correct verb conjugation.
- c. make up at least three original statements with correct verb conjugation.
- d. write an original paragraph about themselves using at least five conjugated verbs.

### *Content*

Students had already learned the subject pronouns and some infinitives. The students learned how to take off the verb ending and add correct endings. This enabled them to make up original questions and statements.

### *Product Assessment*

The students took a post test that required them to write out the subject pronouns and their meaning, conjugated ten verbs in sentences, and made up three unique questions and three unique statements on paper.

## Differentiated Classroom

### *Differentiation of Content*

The students learned how to conjugate verbs that describe events that are happening in the present tense.

### *Differentiation of Process*

The teacher demonstrated how to conjugate a verb in the present tense. The teacher wrote a list of three to five infinitives on the board. The teacher held up three pictures of famous works of art by Hispanic artists. The students formed original questions and/or statements on their dry erase boards about their favorite picture by conjugating the verbs on the board to describe the action in the work of art. This differentiation allowed the student to choose their favorite picture and form the sentences at their individual language levels.

### *Differentiation of Product*

The students had to find a picture from a Hispanic artist and write five original questions about the picture as well as five original statements that described what was currently happening in the picture. Some students found a famous piece of art from an artist or a poster and used that rather than a picture from a magazine. This differentiation allowed the students to choose pictures that they particularly liked and explored the artists in their own ways. This differentiation also allowed the students to develop their speaking abilities at

their own levels with original questions and statements. Points were given for the number of correctly conjugated questions and statements. This differentiation process was taken from Carol Ann Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 1999).

#### *Instruments or Measures*

There were three forms of assessment utilized in this research project. The students were given a pre-and post-test (quantitative), a student learner survey (quantitative) with a Likert scale, and the instructor (qualitative) kept a professional research journal.

#### *Design or Procedures for Collecting Data*

There was a pre-test given to both classes to assess students' prior knowledge in the area of verb conjugation. After the unit was completed, they were also given a post-test to compare their prior knowledge with knowledge acquired after the lessons.

The students were given a student learner survey in which they were able to express their opinions on their individual learning experiences using a Likert scale.

The third form of collecting data was through a professional research journal kept by the instructor. This journal documented the struggles that the students faced as well as the students' accomplishments with the lessons taught.

## *Procedures for Data*

### Pre-and Post-Test Data (Quantitative)

The pre and post tests had limited answer capabilities such as verb conjugations and short sentence translations. They also had open-ended questions that had definite right and wrong answers. These questions included making original sentences in the target language and writing a short paragraph with limited criteria in the target language.

Each question in both the pre-and post-tests was analyzed with a percent correct and incorrect. I wanted to see in which particular areas the students had trouble and to see exactly where their areas of strengths and weaknesses were.

Each section (communicative and grammatical) was also analyzed with a percent correct and incorrect as a whole. This revealed how each of the instructional strategies affected the communicative and grammatical areas individually.

### Student Learning Survey (Quantitative)

The students expressed their opinions to the survey questions with a one-through-five number system, with one as strongly agree and five as strongly disagree.

Each question was analyzed with a percent for each of the numbers one through five thus indicating in what areas students did and did not feel comfortable.

Each section (communicative and grammatical) was also analyzed with a percent for each of the numbers one through five

as a whole. I wanted to know how the students viewed the instructional strategies that affected their communicative and grammatical areas individually.

#### Teacher Observational Research Journal (Qualitative)

The teacher wrote observations in a research journal on the classes as a whole, as well as on individuals. This research journal documented any areas that students had trouble with as well as areas in which the students did well.

The teacher journal was broken down into categories and similarities with differences from other research on the topic cited. This allowed a comparison of my observations to the research that others have done in this area.

The teacher journal was also broken down into categories on how the communicative and grammatical areas were covered by student involvement and interaction in the language. The intent was to see how student interaction in the communicative and grammatical areas was different.

The teacher journal also documented some specific comments of students in the classes as they went through the learning process. These comments are helpful in better understanding the students and acquiring more data due to the small research sample of ten students per class.

## *Summary*

In both of the traditional and differentiated classrooms, the students were able to learn how to conjugate a regular present tense verb in various ways. The traditional method used many activities in which the students worked with the language using short exercises and worksheets. The differentiated method allowed the students to choose what kind of picture they would like to learn to talk. Data was collected in three different forms to give information into which class was better able to acquire the language.

The three forms of data collection gave information from three different angles. It showed, through a pre and post test, the specific areas that the students had strengths and weaknesses in for each type of teaching strategy. They also showed how the students felt about their learning as well as what the teacher observed from the students' learning experiences. This data showed different angles of data research, so that answers that were more definite were provided according to which strategies worked best in helping a student acquire a language.

As we will see in the next chapter, each of the data collected gave specific information that helps us to understand to what extent the students were able to acquire and use the language. It also gave us a glimpse into how the students actually felt about their learning with specific student comments.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results or Findings

#### *Introduction*

In this study, three forms of data were used to help give different points of view of the student's learning experiences. The pre-and post-tests were used to provide hard data to see what the students could produce on paper. The student learning survey was used to give data on what the students themselves thought of their learning experience. The professional journal was used to demonstrate the students' learning experience from the teacher's point of view.

The data collected was quantitative and qualitative. The pre-and post-tests and the student learning survey were quantitative. The professional teaching journal was qualitative. Each form of the data collected was put in a chart form and analyzed. The results of each of forms of data showed different strengths and weaknesses.

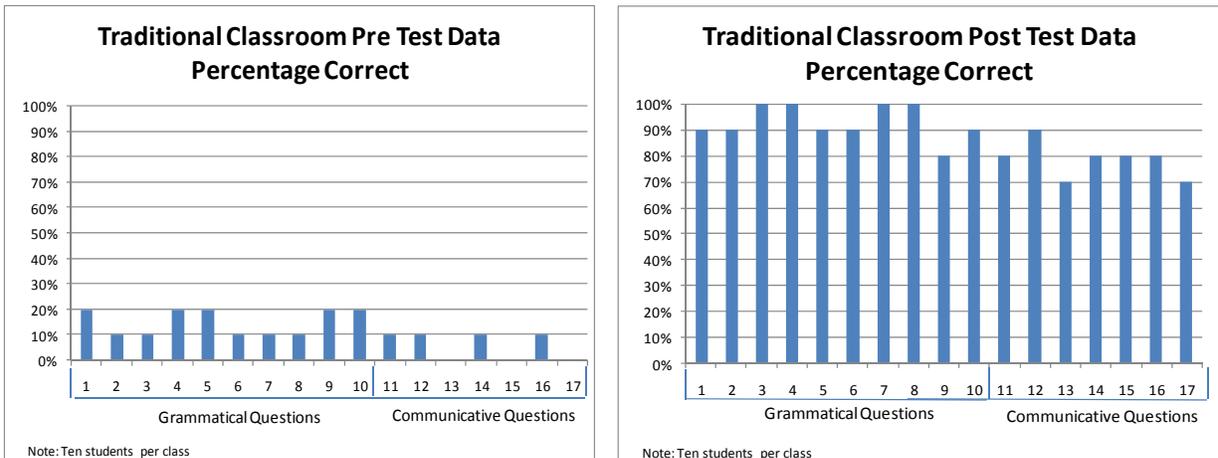
#### *Presentation of the Findings*

The traditional and differentiated classrooms were given a pre and post test to demonstrate what the students could actually do on paper. This test had strictly grammatical questions as well as communicative questions.

The traditional classroom pre test showed that some of the students possibly had some previous foreign language because two

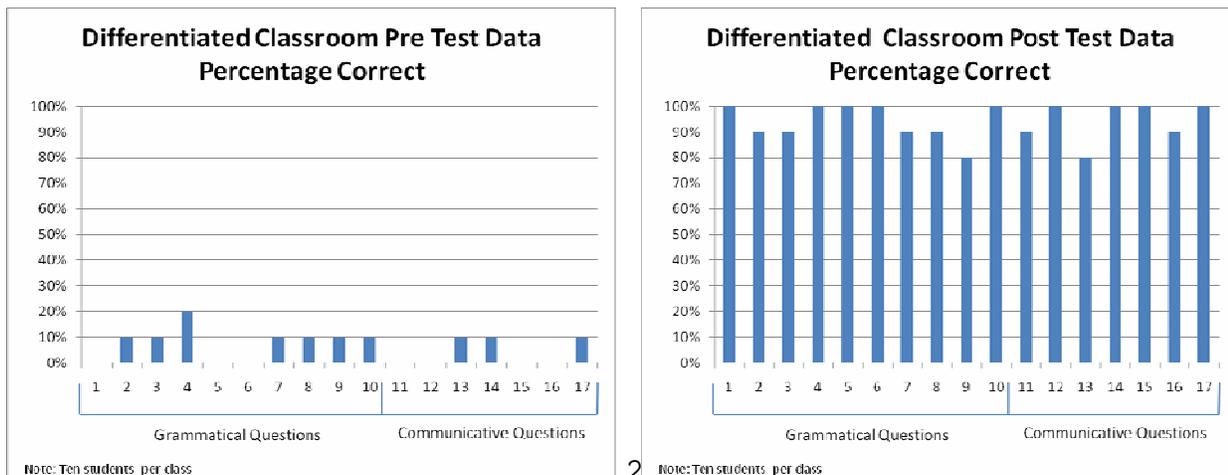
of the ten students were able to conjugate correctly a regular present tense verb for five out of the ten grammatical questions. (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1



The differentiated classroom pre test showed that the students demonstrated little or no previous experience in verb conjugation because no student showed consistency at correctly conjugating a regular present tense verb. (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

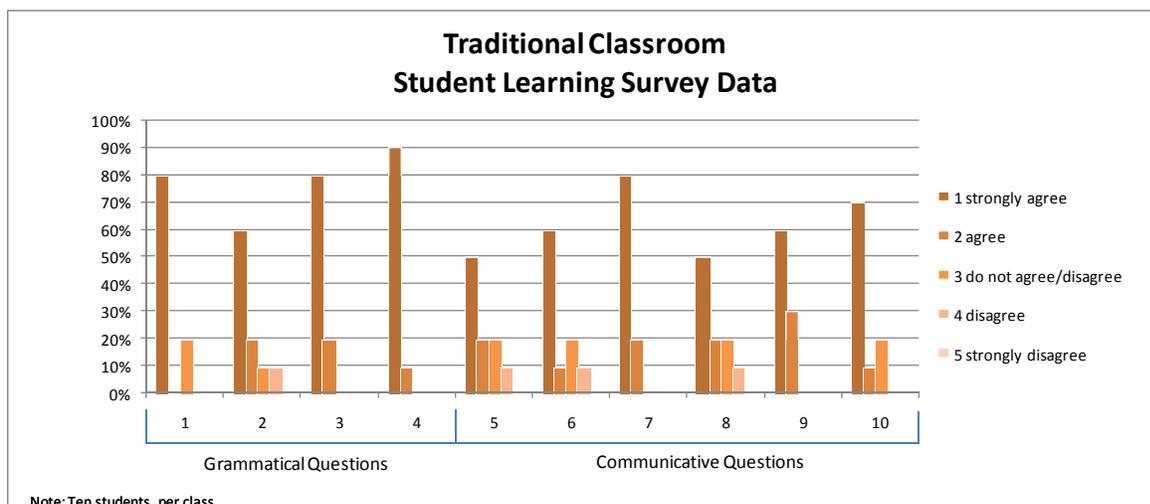


The traditional classroom post test showed that the students did well with the mechanical grammatical questions because they scored between 80%-100% on the questions one through ten. The number correct declined with the more communicative questions as the students scored between 70%-90% on questions eleven through seventeen (see Figure 1). The differentiated classroom post test showed that the students did well with both mechanical and communicative questions (see Figure 2). There was no decline in the number correct from the data collected from the differentiated classroom post test. The students scored between 80%-100% in all of the grammatical and communicative questions.

The student learning survey for the traditional classroom showed that the students felt relatively comfortable but not highly comfortable with their verbal use of the language (see Figure 3). The students showed scores of between 50%-90% indicating that they felt highly comfortable with their use of the language. However, there were also students who scored up to 30% indicating they felt relatively comfortable or not quite able to use the language on a comfortable level. It also showed that the students felt a little more comfortable with the mechanical rather than communicative areas of the language. The students scored between 80%-100% indicating they felt comfortable with the mechanics, but only between 50%-80% in the communicative areas. In four of the comfort level responses, there was only one

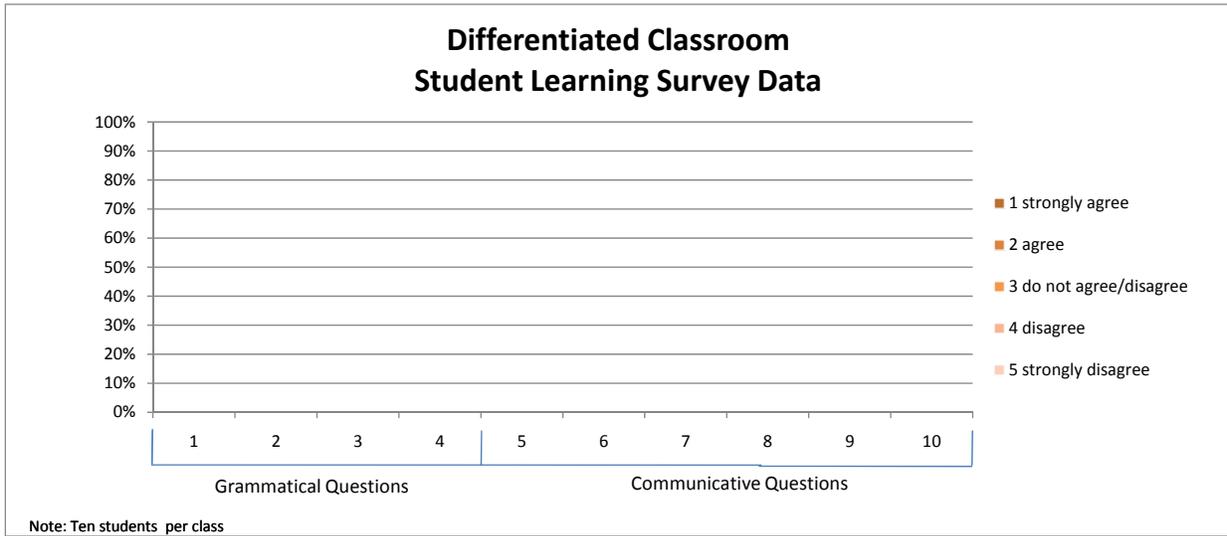
student who cited "disagree". No one cited "strongly disagree" on any of the survey questions.

Figure 3



The student learning survey for the differentiated classroom showed that the students felt highly comfortable with most of their use of the language (see Figure 4). The students scored between 60%-90% in agreeing that they feel very comfortable with the language. They demonstrated that they felt comfortable with both the mechanical and communicative areas of the language because both areas demonstrated consistency in their scores. Two of the students demonstrated that they "disagree" with a couple of the questions, but no one chose "strongly disagree" on any of the differentiated student surveys.

FIGURE 4



The professional research journal showed the students' learning from the teacher's perspective. Many of the results from the professional teaching journal were very similar to the literature review results (Figure 5). The following qualitative data shows some similarities in previous research done in this area.

FIGURE 5

COMPARISONS OF RESULTS FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING JOURNAL

Literature Review Results	Professional Teaching Journal Results
Lightbrown and Spada (1990) examined how learners in	In the traditional classroom, most of the class did well on the mechanical

<p>classrooms where grammar was taught as opposed to more differentiated communicative strategies were more accurate in the use of some forms of the language.</p>	<p>written exercises, but needed to use their chart and all of their notes to do the activities because they lacked confidence in their own knowledge. Many of the students stated that they did not believe that they could conjugate a simple verb without their notes.</p>
<p>Although the student was more accurate in aspects of the usage of the language, typically grammar based exercises are not very motivational to the student (Lightbrown and Spada, 1990).</p>	<p>In the traditional classroom, they became tired mentally of the conjugations, and they stated that they wondered how they were ever going to be able to use it verbally. Some of the students would sigh or just give up completely and lay down their pencil in the middle of the conjugations.</p>
<p>James Mannes Bourke (1992) takes a more differentiated approach and suggests that</p>	<p>In the traditional classroom, students became a little bored with</p>

<p>the traditional approach to grammar teaching has not worked well because it is more teacher-centered than learner-centered and there is minimal participation from the learner.</p>	<p>all of the worksheets. One student asked when they were going to actually be able to talk to someone. This question suggested that the student was ready to move on sooner than the lesson plan allowed.</p>
<p>With the dullness of the exercises, the students' may not have been as motivated as they would have if topics or pictures interesting to the students were chosen (Bourke, 1992).</p>	<p>In the traditional classroom, they became mentally tired of the conjugations. The students asked when they would be able to talk to someone. Some students suggested that it takes a lot of energy to figure out the verbs and the chart. In the differentiated classroom, the students brought pictures and were very excited to work with them. As they entered the classroom, the students immediately started</p>

	<p>comparing pictures and asking questions to each other about where they found the pictures.</p>
<p>This research has shown that the differentiated approach creates a feeling of success for the student that can motivate him or her to learn more (Schulter, 2001).</p>	<p>They also were very impressed about how much they had learned in the previous session. They stated that they were surprised that they could actually develop questions and talk about the pictures in the target language with their small group.</p>

*Summary*

The three forms of research and data collection gave different results that allowed a look at the differences between the traditional and differentiated classroom strategies in various ways. The quantitative pre- and post-test data show distinct differences in each of the classrooms. In the traditional classroom pre test, the bar graph begins higher than the differentiated classroom. In the post test, the bar graph drops off in the traditional classroom with the communicative

questions. The quantitative student learning survey demonstrates the students' feelings and understanding of their learning experiences. The survey was similar in both classes, however, the differentiated classroom showed slightly higher student comfort levels. The qualitative professional research journal gave data in which similarities as well as differences can be seen to the previous research done in this area. Using the various forms of data collection and analysis, the researcher saw that the students better acquired the language in the differentiated classroom.

Although the data showed more positive results from the differentiated classroom, the sample groups were small, so it is difficult to draw overall conclusions. The traditional methods of instruction have shown to have benefits to the students throughout the years as well.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions or Meanings

#### *Introduction*

There were several conclusions that could be drawn from the data collected in both the traditional and differentiated classrooms. Each of the three forms of data illustrated both similarities in some areas, and differences in others. Although there were only ten participants in each of the classes, the following results were drawn from the data collected.

#### *Discussion of Results and Conclusions*

The pre-test data from the traditional classroom showed that two of the students had some prior knowledge on how to conjugate a regular present tense verb. This was determined because two of the students consistently were correct on the grammatical questions. The post-test data from the traditional classroom showed a marked decline on the questions that made the students use the language in more of a communicative way. They were able to conjugate a verb mechanically but were not able to make up original sentences using the verbs.

The pre-test data from the differentiated classroom showed that none of the students had any significant knowledge on how to conjugate a regular present tense verb. This was determined because none of the students was consistently correct in the mechanical section of the pre test. The post-test data, however,

showed that the students could not only conjugate a verb in most cases but also use it correctly in original questions and statements.

Although the students in the traditional classroom had additional prior knowledge, the differentiated classroom data showed that the students could use the language correctly in a more communicative way. Furthermore, the students in the traditional classroom did not show that they had a better grasp on conjugating the verbs than the students in the differentiated classroom. Overall, the pre- and post-tests showed a benefit to learning with a differentiated curriculum, because the students were able to construct original questions and statements in a more meaningful way.

This finding differs from the studies of Lightbrown and Spada (1990) which suggested that learners in classrooms where grammar was taught as opposed to more differentiated communicative strategies were more accurate in the use of some forms of the language. This research is similar to that of Bourke (1992) which suggests that the traditional classroom provides minimal participation of the student and does not challenge the learner.

The participants in the differentiated classroom gave overall higher ratings on their learning experience than did the participants in the traditional classroom. The student learning survey did not show that the students in either classroom felt

significantly more comfortable with their ability to use the language. The traditional classroom did show that on two of the questions; only five of the participants marked strongly agree and on one other question and nine of the participants marked strongly agree. The differentiated classroom showed that in three questions, six of the participants marked strongly agree, and in two of the questions, nine of the participants marked strongly agree.

There were many similarities as well as differences between the previous research and the professional research journal kept by the instructor. The data from the professional research journal showed that the students in the traditional classroom did not demonstrate further knowledge of grammar than those in the differentiated classroom. The participants also became tired rather quickly of the mechanical exercises and became bored of the worksheets as the previous research did confirm.

The students' sighs and lack of participation in the traditional classroom showed boredom of the assignments. Two of the students stated that they wondered when they would actually be able to talk with someone in the language. Other students in the class simply struggled with the verb formation without using their notes.

The students in the differentiated classroom stated that they were very surprised at how much they could actually talk about with the pictures that they brought to class. Each student

was able to form sentences at his or her level of language acquisition. This proved to be more motivational for the students in the classroom.

The professional research journal illustrated that the participants in the differentiated classroom were more motivated than the participants in the traditional classroom. The participants in the differentiated classroom also were more excited and encouraged with what they had learned. They also were impressed that they could use the language so well.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

There are some recommendations for future research from this research project. The data collection could be administered to a larger group of participants to see if the data collected would coincide with the data that was collected with this research.

This research project was conducted with beginning level foreign language students but could also be done with any level or grammatical topic they were learning. Research could be done with any of the verb tenses or sentence constructions.

The research could also be conducted on a group of participants who have more in common with each other such as prior education, age, or occupation. This research could then be compared with the very random group of participants that were researched through this project.

Research could also be conducted by combining the traditional and differentiated instructional strategies. This

would allow mechanical practice of the verbs with the differentiated communicative activities that the students find very motivational.

### *Summary*

The traditional classroom showed no particular benefits to the students as compared to the differentiated classroom. The mechanical exercises were boring and frustrating to the students. Some of the students were ready to use the language rather than work with the simple conjugations. Although the students got tired of the worksheets, the simple practice of conjugating them allowed them to get more targeted practice into the mechanics of the verbs.

The differentiated classroom confirmed that students were actually able to use the language with grammatical understanding in a more communicative way. The differentiated classroom also motivated the students to get excited about learning the language, and the students were very impressed about what they did learn and how well they could use the language. Although the data showed that the students in the differentiated classroom were better able to acquire the language, the traditional classroom practice can also benefit students by allowing them to get practice at the same level.

Future research could be conducted to find out how much benefit combining both the traditional and differentiated instructional methods would be to the students.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

### Wichita State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB)

#### APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

*Double click gray boxes to enter information.*

Name of Principal Investigator(s): Dr. Peggy Jewell  
(For a student project, Principal Investigator **must** be a WSU faculty member; student is listed as Co-Investigator.)

Departmental/Program  
Affiliation: C&I Campus Box: 028 Phone 978-6933

Name(s) of Co-  
Investigator(s): Vendla Ulrich

Co-Investigator(s) is/are:  Faculty Member  Graduate Student  Undergraduate Student

Type of Project:  Class Project  Capstone Project  Thesis or Dissertation  
 Funded Research  Unfunded Research

If student project, address of student: 1120 Pembroke Court, Derby, Kansas 67037

Title of Project/Proposal: Are communicative and grammatical skills more effectively acquired in a traditional or differentiated beginning level foreign language classroom?

Expected Completion Date: May 2008 Funding Agency (if applicable): None

*Please attach additional sheets, if necessary, with numbers of responses corresponding to those listed below.*

1. Describe the research in non-technical language:

The research will be done on two beginning level Spanish classes. The first class will be taught using traditional communicative and grammatical teaching strategies. Students will have already learned the subject pronouns and some infinitives. The student will learn how to take off the verb ending and add correct endings. This will enable them to make up original questions and statements. The traditional methods will include structured class activities in which the students will practice with a neighbor. Other activities will include worksheets to practice the skills that are acquired, and a pre and post test.

The second class will be taught using a differentiated approach where the students will have some freedom in choosing their approach to using the language and demonstrating the skills that they have acquired. The teacher will demonstrate how to conjugate a verb in the present tense. The teacher will write a list of three to five infinitives on the board. The teacher will hold up a picture of a famous work of art by a Hispanic artist. The students will form questions and/or statements on their dry erase boards by conjugating the verbs on the board to describe the action in the work of art. The students will demonstrate their knowledge through a pre and post test and final project.

A survey will be given to both classes that will ask particular questions to each student on how they view their learning progress.

A research journal will also be used to record any questions, reaction, and progress that individual students are making.

*ORA –September 2001*

2. Describe the benefits of the research to the human subjects, if any, and of the benefits to human or scientific knowledge:

This research will be used to inform co-workers and other teachers as well as presenting and publishing the research findings. This research will help to prove whether or not our traditional ways of teaching certain concepts to beginning level foreign language students is more effective, or if a new approach may lend itself to better language acquisition. These findings will benefit others in the future who decide to further the research in this area. This research will also inform other teachers of other possible techniques that can be used in the foreign language classroom and the possible benefits to the students of differentiating curriculum and instruction to better meet their individual needs.

3. Describe the subjects, how the subjects are to be selected, how many are to be used, and indicate explicitly whether any are minors (under age 18 per Kansas law) or otherwise members of "vulnerable" populations, including, but not limited to, pregnant women, prisoners, psychiatric patients, etc.  
There will be ten adults in each of the classes. The students in each class are of various backgrounds and professions. Most of the students in the classes have at least a high school diploma with different amounts of college education. Most of the students in the classes are professionals who need to learn the language for work. However, some of the students are taking the classes just because they have always wanted to learn a foreign language.
4. Describe each procedure step-by-step, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure.  
A pre-test will be administered to each class. An entire unit will be taught to each class and then the post-quiz will be administered. I will keep a research journal that describes the process and reaction of the students as they learn the new material. A survey will be given to the classes after the entire process is completed. The entire presentation and testing time will not last for more than two weeks from beginning to end. The testing will be done at Spanish Horizons in Derby, Kansas.
5. Describe any risks or discomforts ( physical, psychological, or social) and how they will be minimized.  
There will be no risks or discomforts to the subjects because they will be taught a regular Spanish lesson using various teaching strategies. .
6. Describe how the subject's personal privacy is to be protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed (e.g. disposition of questionnaires, interview notes, recorded audio or videotapes, etc.).  
The action research project will not invade in any way the privacy of an individual. The quizzes that will be administered will not include names of the individuals taking the test. The names of each subject will be replaced with codes.
7. Describe the informed consent process and attach a copy of all consent and/or assent documents. These documents **must** be retained for three years beyond completion of the study. Any waiver of written informed consent must be justified.  
Each student will be asked to sign a consent form before I begin the unit. If the subject does not consent to the research, their information will not be used in the data collected.
8. Attach all supporting material, including, but not limited to, questionnaire or survey forms and letters of approval from cooperating institutions.

**The Principal Investigator agrees to abide by the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects and to retain consent forms for a minimum of three (3) years beyond the completion of the study. If the data collection or testing of subjects is to be performed by student assistants, the Principal Investigator will assume full responsibility for supervising the students to ensure that human subjects are adequately protected.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Co-investigator (for student project)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B



WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY  
*Department of Curriculum and Instruction*

### Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of how people learn a foreign language. I hope to learn how people best acquire a second language. If you decide to participate, you will have a lesson taught to you in Spanish through various teaching strategies. You will then take a short quiz to assess how much you were able to learn. The entire process should not last more than a couple of weeks.

Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and be disclosed only with your permission. Permission in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University or Spanish Horizons. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The subjects for the study are beginning level students. All students in two classes were selected to participate at random. There will be ten participants in each class. No discomforts from this study are expected. This study will help you to better grasp the concept of how to conjugate a verb in Spanish. It will also help you to acquire and use the language quicker. All of the names of the subjects in this study will be replaced with codes.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Peggy Jewell, WSU, Curriculum and Instruction Dept., 316-978-6933, [peggy.jewell@wichita.edu](mailto:peggy.jewell@wichita.edu) or at: Vendla Ulrich, 1855 S. Rock Road, Wichita, KS 67207, 932-2361, or [spanishhorizons@yahoo.com](mailto:spanishhorizons@yahoo.com). If you have any questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, 316-978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Translate the following simple sentences from English to Spanish.

1. I eat.

2. You all dance.

3. We write.

4. She lives.

5. You speak.

Write 3 original statements in Spanish using different subject pronouns.

1.

2.

3.

Write 3 original questions using regular present tense verbs in Spanish that you would ask a friend.

1.

2.

3.

Write one paragraph (minimum of 5 sentences) about yourself in Spanish. Be sure to use at least 5 regular present tense verbs.



Translate the following simple sentences from English to Spanish.

1. She eats.

2. I dance.

3. You all write.

4. You live.

5. We speak.

Write 3 original statements in Spanish using different subject pronouns.

1.

2.

3.

Write 3 original questions using regular present tense verbs in Spanish that you would ask a friend.

1.

2.

3.

Write one paragraph (minimum of 5 sentences) about yourself in Spanish. Be sure to use at least 5 regular present tense verbs.

Appendix E

Traditional and Differentiated Teaching Strategy  
Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate your opinion for each of the statements  
below from the following scale.

- 1- strongly agree
- 2- agree
- 3- do not agree or disagree
- 4- disagree
- 5- strongly disagree

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. I can correctly conjugate a present tense  
regular verb on paper.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I can correctly write a statement in  
Spanish using present tense regular verbs.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. I can write questions on paper using  
regular present tense verbs.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. I can understand someone else when they use regular present tense verbs.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. I can use regular present tense verbs while conversing in Spanish.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. I can ask questions using regular present tense verbs while conversing in Spanish.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. I can ask someone what language they speak.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. I can tell someone what I do in Spanish class.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. I ask someone what their family does on weekends.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. I tell someone what I do on weekends.

## Appendix F

### Professional Research Journal

#### *The Traditional Classroom*

During the first session, the students were very excited but leery about learning to conjugate verbs in Spanish. I believe the fear came from knowing that they had to work with verbs and some of the students were not even sure if they could pick out a verb. As I introduced the conjugation chart, they copied it down but did not yet know how to use it. We had worked previously on Subject Pronouns and some infinitives. The students were ready to learn how to take of the infinitive endings and add the other endings to produce original questions and sentences. After I explained and demonstrated on the board how to conjugate a regular verb in the present tense, the students tried to do mechanical exercises of conjugating verbs on their dry erase boards individually. As they progressed, I asked them to translate some simple sentences on their boards. In the traditional classroom, they got tired mentally of the conjugations, and they stated that they wondered how they were ever going to be able to use it verbally. Some of the students would sigh or just give up completely and lay down their pencil in the middle of the conjugations. I gave them some more simple sentences to conjugate as homework.

During the second session, the students reviewed how to conjugate a verb and we went over the verb chart of endings again. We went over the homework to see how they did. Most of the class did well, but needed to use their chart and all of their notes to do the activities. They did another worksheet that had them fill in the blank with conjugated verbs. In the traditional classroom, students got a little bored with all of the worksheets. One student asked when they were going to be able to talk to someone. This question suggested that the student was ready to move on sooner than the lesson plan allowed. I went over with the class how to form simple Spanish questions from simple Spanish statements. They then had to come up with at least five questions on their own to ask their neighbor. Their neighbor then had to answer the questions in complete sentences. Their homework to turn in next class period was to write one paragraph about things that they do, and one paragraph about things that a family member does.

#### *The Differentiated Classroom*

During the first session, I quickly reviewed the subject pronouns and infinitives that the class had previously reviewed. I then had the students copy the chart for the regular present tense verb endings. This class also felt very uneasy about working with the verbs

in the language. Many of the students hesitated before trying to translate very simple sentences. I had to show the class on the board a couple of translations before they were able to feel confident enough to do it themselves. After practicing how to conjugate a few verbs and translate a few sentences, the students moved on to making up sentences on their own. I had put some pictures of various famous Hispanic artists on the board. The students had to choose a picture and write on their papers at least five sentences about the pictures. They then had to write three questions to ask their neighbors about the pictures. They practiced in groups of two asking and answering questions about the pictures on the board. The students' homework was to find a picture of their own and bring it to the next class. The picture had to be by a Hispanic artist. I gave the students a short list of famous Hispanic artists to use while looking for their picture.

During the second session, I began by reviewing how to conjugate a regular present tense verb and how to make Spanish statements into Spanish questions. In the differentiated classroom, the students brought pictures and were very excited to work with them. As they entered the classroom, the students immediately started comparing pictures and asking questions to each other about where

they found their pictures. They also seemed as though they were very impressed about how much they had learned in the previous session. I told them that they were to form sentences about their pictures using the verbs that we had learned. One student even created a kind of poem using the vocabulary that he had learned about his picture. Many of the students chose to write a paragraph about their pictures. I came around to help the students individually with this activity. The biggest problem they faced was using vocabulary that they did not yet know. The students kept asking me for words, or using their dictionaries. When I told them that they had to say what they could rather than what they wanted to, they formed sentences much easier. They really learned to use their substitution skills for this activity. They got in groups of two, let the other members of the class read, and edit their paragraphs. I looked over all of the paragraphs as the students wrote them, and they then presented them to the class. After each student presented, the class as a whole came up with at least two questions in Spanish about the pictures. The students really said that they liked this activity. One student stated, "This was fun. I liked to hear other students' sentences". Another student stated, "It was fun to see that I can put my own sentences together". They liked learning about the culture as they

learned the language. Many said that they never thought they would be able to put together sentences for pictures like those that they did. One student specifically stated, "I would have never thought that I could put an entire paragraph together today". The picture differentiation really seemed to unite the students in their language learning and motivate them at the same time.

Appendix G

El camino

negro, duro, largo

Los coches manejan en el camino.

El camino no termina.

No hay fin.