

# Effects of the ACTFL-OPI-Type Training on Student Performance, Instructional Methods, and Classroom Materials in the Secondary Foreign Language Classroom

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*ABSTRACT* The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of training foreign language teachers in the ACTFL-OPI-type training on student performance, instructional methods, and classroom materials in the secondary foreign language classroom. Proficiency-based instruction is one of ACTFL's most significant contributions to foreign language education; however, scarce research data are available on the effects of the ACTFL-OPI training at the secondary level. The hypothesis of this study was that teachers who had been trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training would become more aware of factors contributing to a proficiency-oriented curriculum. It was carried out in the secondary schools in Pinellas County, Florida, in which teachers who were trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training showed a 35 percent increase in personalized communication, more specifically when expressing feelings, opinions, and judgments in class. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was found to be statistically significant in this communicative category ( $F = (1, 4) = 13.07$ ) at the .05 alpha level. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The results of the teacher interviews and questionnaires also supported the hypothesis that trained teachers were more aware of a proficiency-oriented curriculum. No significant differences were found on student performance. Further studies are suggested due to the large effect sizes found in the teacher categories

## Introduction

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1996) identify the framework of communication as an integral link in preparing for the Twenty-first Century. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

(ACTFL) offers the principal means of Standard accountability, training, and assessment within foreign language education. The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL-OPI) was established in 1989 as a standard test for evaluating global speaking proficiency. With all of this in mind, the authors investigated the effects of the ACTFL-OPI-type training on student performance, instructional methods, and classroom materials in Spanish III and IV classes at the high school level in Pinellas County, Florida. The underlying assumption was that teachers who had been trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training would become more aware of factors contributing to

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a proficiency-oriented curriculum; therefore, they would: (1) plan more oral activities to promote communicative lessons; (2) implement alternative strategies for maximum student involvement in speaking; (3) create a classroom curriculum utilizing educational materials available to them in order to achieve proficiency-oriented goals; and (4) identify proficiency-oriented criteria involved in speaking as defined by ACTFL.

Proficiency is a measurable level of competence in the four communication skills within a target language. These communication skills are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Omaggio (1986) defined proficiency as an idealized level of competence and performance. She described proficiency, along with language-learning theories, as providing the organizing principle for language instruction. In sum, she claimed that classroom instruction is most effective when it is personalized, contextualized, and oriented toward a proficiency approach. A proficiency-oriented approach offers ample opportunities for the students to learn the language in context and apply their knowledge to real-life situations. The emphasis of instruction is on creative language use and not memorization of dialogues or pattern drills. The teacher encourages communicative activities such as paired or small group activities. Students are presented with a variety of functional tasks in order to learn how to survive in real-life communicative situations.

The *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* provide for a common measurement of performance, and in particular prove to be "an organizing principle" (Lowe 1986) in which the curriculum, class materials and language goals can be established. More specifically, the ACTFL-Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) provides a standard proficiency measurement of a learner's global ability in speaking. The individual's performance is compared with the criteria for the proficiency levels defined in the ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Guidelines. The ACTFL OPI is currently offered in 31 languages.

## Background

### *Secondary Level Studies*

Despite the significant impact of the proficiency movement and the ACTFL-OPI on foreign language education, a literature search revealed scarce data on the effects of the ACTFL-OPI training on student performance, instructional methods, and classroom materials at the secondary level (Brooks 1993; Huebner and Jensen 1992; Jackson 1993; Omaggio 1986; Whitley 1993; Wolf and Riordan 1991). Lack of training on proficiency-oriented instruction was defined by Whitley (1993, 143) as the "bottleneck" for the misunderstandings on communicative language teaching. Wolf and Riordan (1991) found that the majority of foreign language teachers have only a vague understanding of a proficiency-oriented curriculum. Jackson (1993, 3) noted that "teachers at the secondary level struggle to find common ground on which to base their instruction." Brooks (1993) described the secondary classroom as "lack(ing) a vision" about real-life communicative ability, in that textbook exercises and teacher emphasis on grammatical structures often replace opportunities to practice speaking in the foreign language.

Omaggio (1986, 175) indicated that "it is incumbent upon us as language teachers to identify some effective strategies for teaching oral skills in the classroom that will maximize opportunities for the development of useful levels of proficiency." Huebner and Jensen (1992, 105) collected data on the effects of the ACTFL-OPI at the secondary level that support the training to aid in providing a "common direction" within the profession, as well as to increase teacher self-confidence and professional interest. Twenty-five foreign language teachers of Spanish, French, or German were trained in the ACTFL-OPI by certified testers. Students outside of the teachers' respective classes were randomly selected to be interviewed on the ACTFL-OPI. No significant correlation was found between proficiency level and level of fifty-eight achievement scores as

measured by the Educational Testing Service College Board Achievement Test (1984) at the Novice-Mid to Novice-High Levels. However at the Intermediate and Advanced Levels, a highly significant correlation was reported as p value of one tail test to be less than .001. It was reported that:

Students who developed more advanced oral proficiency skills did not suffer, as a result, relative to their peers in the development of other foreign language skills...teachers reported feeling a need to modify their classroom practices to some extent to incorporate more oral proficiency activities. (Huebner and Jensen 1992, 113)

Whitley (1993) pointed out that foreign language supervisors and state associations have been adopting the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, yet there has been little impact of the proficiency movement in the secondary classroom. This could be attributed to the lack of focus on proficiency guidelines in teacher training programs. Whitley (1993, 149) indicated that:

Inevitably there is a lag in the introduction of a new idea and its application and acceptance in the classroom. Even so, the 'great ideas' from research in language learning seem to have been proposed at a much faster rate than the teaching profession at large is prepared to assimilate them...we should continue to press for improvements in teacher training, curricula, and testing.

Brooks (1993, 235) elaborated on the influences of the teachers' methods and materials on student learning in that social and linguistic interactions in the classroom allow the students to determine "what to do and how to do it with language." Grosse and Feyten (1991) informally surveyed seventy-seven foreign language educators (Kindergarten - University) in Florida, and identified six major areas that have been affected by the proficiency movement. These areas were listed as follows:

1. oral testing
2. curricular goals
3. instructional materials
4. teaching methods
5. state and county initiatives
6. standards of achievement for teachers and students

It was also reported by Grosse and Feyten (1991) that in public schools regular oral testing in the classroom is encouraged by supervisors through in-service workshops, sharing of resource materials, and testing techniques. More specifically, in several counties including Pinellas, an oral section is included on final exams and the foreign language supervisor encourages teachers to follow the county guidelines, which provide for the administration of speaking tests at least twice every six weeks. Pinellas County has adopted texts and materials that correlate with a proficiency-oriented curriculum. The majority of teachers were reported to define their teaching style as proficiency-oriented, however, as Grosse and Feyten (1991,208) have pointed out, "the question remains as to what extent and how teachers are working to develop the proficiency of their students."

#### *University Level Studies*

There is, however, readily available information on the effects of the ACTFL-OPI training at the university level (Dodds 1992; Freed 1987; Halleck 1992; Kaplan and Sinclair 1984; Ke and Reed 1995; Liskin-Gasparro 1984; Manley 1995; McMillen Villar and Mueser-Blinchow 1993; Meredith 1990; Wolf and Riordan 1991; Wing and Mayewski 1984). Dodds (1992) described the foreign language curriculum at the University of Colorado as having a stronger emphasis on oral proficiency after six faculty members participated in the ACTFL-OPI training and became certified testers. As a result of the training, goals for an advanced speaking course were adapted to fit the proficiency level descriptions. A wide variety of communicative tasks was planned for the students at the Advanced and Superior Levels, and the classroom setting was reported

(Dodds 1992, 498) to be rearranged to provide a student-centered atmosphere from which a "sense of community could emerge." Faculty members in the department were reported to have previously focused principally on the students' accuracy in the target language prior to the ACTFL-OPI training. After the training, the students reported a higher level of self-confidence in speaking, as well as a general consensus of satisfaction with the newly developed curriculum. Overall, the *ACTFL Guidelines* and proficiency level descriptions were described by Dodds (1992, 503) as the "organizing principle for course goals." The interrelated criteria of function, context, and accuracy were noted as the "most distinguished" addition to the classroom design.

Freed (1987) concluded that the ACTFL-OPI training had an overall positive impact on faculty, graduate assistants, and the curriculum at the University of Pennsylvania. The study provided preliminary data on the effects of proficiency-based foreign language programs, and were reported as follows:

1. a change in texts
2. incorporation of diversified teaching methods
3. revision of testing technique
4. integration of sequential courses
5. improved articulation between elementary and intermediate courses

After the training, Freed (1987) reported that the faculty initiated more communicative activities, and became more involved in making decisions about elementary and intermediate language instruction, and in testing students' oral abilities. Graduate teaching assistants focused class instruction on more real-life communicative activities, and helped develop teaching and testing materials beyond sentence-level production to more comprehensive language skills. Data on student performance on the College Entrance Exam Board (CEEB) and on the ACTFL-OPI were collected; however no correlation was found to be of significance.

Halleck (1992) supported the ACTFL-OPI as

a means of identifying communicative performance at the university level. Graduate assistants were trained to rate students on the ACTFL-OPI, and then asked to complete a questionnaire regarding factors which influenced their holistic proficiency level ratings. The data show the ACTFL-OPI as an oral testing procedure of communicative competence in the foreign language, and do not indicate discrete-point grammar to be a major factor in rating students' proficiency level.

Kaplan and Sinclair (1984, 492) concluded that the ACTFL-OPI workshop "cast a new light" on the participants at the University of Illinois. After the training, the participants indicated that the curriculum would be reevaluated and oral proficiency testing and teaching strategies would be integrated in the university foreign language program.

Ke and Reed (1995) reported that proficiency-oriented instruction is an effective means to increase student proficiency in Chinese. Also, McMillen Villar and Mueser-Blin-cow (1993) reported that a proficiency-based requirement at the University of Minnesota provided the following:

1. "real-world" functional skills for the students
2. opportunities to improve communicative competence
3. consistency in planning, teaching, practicing, and testing in foreign languages

In their study, data were collected on student scores in reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency. The students were completing their second year of Spanish at the university level, and had maintained at least a 70 percent final class grade. The speaking test simulated the ACTFL-OPI, and the interviewers were trained in the procedures, but were not ACTFL certified testers. Overall, students enrolled in a proficiency-based program were shown to perform better than those participating in a nonproficiency-based program: "of all the variables considered, consistency is the factor that repeatedly emerges. Students who regularly and systematically practice as well

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as are tested on any one of the four modalities achieve higher test scores for that modality..." (McMillen Villar and Mueser-Blinchow 1993, 61).

In sum, there are scarce data on the effects of the ACTFL-OPI training on student performance, instructional methods, and classroom materials at the secondary level, despite the significant impact of the proficiency movement on foreign language education and literature. The hypothesis of this study was that teachers who had been trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training would become more aware of factors contributing to a proficiency-oriented curriculum.

**Research Questions**

In this study the researcher was investigating the effects of training foreign language teachers in the ACTFL-OPI-type training on student performance, instructional methods and classroom materials in the secondary foreign language classroom, thus the following research questions were addressed:

1. How does the ACTFL-OPI-type training affect teacher performance in the secondary classroom?
2. Do teachers who participate in the ACTFL-OPI-type training plan more student-centered activities than teachers not trained?
3. Do teachers who participate in the ACTFL-OPI-type training implement more student-directed oral activities than teachers not trained?
4. How does the ACTFL-OPI-type training affect student performance in the secondary classroom?
5. Do students taught by teachers in the ACTFL-OPI-type training perform better on the ACTFL-OPI than students not taught by teachers trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training?
6. Do students taught by teachers who participated in the ACTFL-OPI-type training perform better on textbook-prepared tests than students not taught by trained teachers?

**Methodology**

*Population/Sample*

The population on which this study was based consisted of state certified teachers of Spanish, who taught levels III and/or IV at a high school in Pinellas County, Florida, and their respective students. The Pinellas County School System is the seventh largest district of 67 in Florida, and all high schools and post-secondary centers are members of and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In Pinellas County, the curriculum incorporates the State Frameworks through adopted textbooks and the correlation of performance standards. The Pinellas County Foreign Language Guidelines call for the administration of speaking tests at least twice every six weeks. An oral section is included in final examinations, as well as oral sections on the Advanced Placement exams. The Pinellas County Supervisor of Foreign Languages encourages principals to verify the teachers' grade books for oral test scores. In the spring of each academic year, the Foreign Language Office offers a Cultural Day in which student declamations, impromptu speeches, and other activities are presented to further develop student oral proficiency. The State Department of Education has also offered summer institutes for study abroad to further develop teachers' oral proficiency skills and cultural knowledge, as well as to aid in the establishment of a proficiency-oriented curriculum. During the fall semester, there were 88 teachers of Spanish from kindergarten through 12th grade in Pinellas County, of which 25 were teaching Spanish III and/or IV at the high school level. During the last week in August, the 25 teachers of Spanish III and /or IV at the high school level were contacted by the researcher. They were assured that the results of the observations, questionnaires, and interviews would not affect their professional standing. They were also assured anonymity. Eight teachers were willing to participate in the study, however one teacher was not able to attend the training and one teacher was absent for an extended period of

time. A sample of six teachers was selected, along with their respective students in grades 9 - 12.

#### *Instrumentation*

The instruments used in this study documented teacher and student performance as follows. Teacher performance was reported through:

1. Pre-Study Questionnaire
2. Pre/Post Self-Evaluation Questionnaire
3. Pre/Post Interviews
4. Omaggio's Observation Schedule

Student performance was reported through:

1. Pre/Post Questionnaire
2. Pre/Post textbook exams for Spanish levels III/IV
3. Omaggio's Observation Schedule
4. ACTFL-OPI scores on a random sample of students

Additionally the teachers wrote lesson plans to describe the objectives, materials, and activities for each class. Omaggio (1986, 416) reported that for a proficiency-oriented curriculum "lessons should be planned to include contextualized and personalized practice, small-group interaction, creative language use, culturally authentic listening and reading practice, and functional tasks similar to those that might be encountered in the target culture."

The Teacher Pre-Study Questionnaire had a twofold purpose: (1) to collect qualitative data on the population of teachers in Pinellas County who were teaching Spanish III and/or IV; and (2) to determine if these teachers were willing to participate in the ACTFL-OPI-type training. The researcher developed this questionnaire with items such as present teaching assignment, teaching experiences, previous training, if any, in the ACTFL-OPI, previous language studies, travels, and knowledge of other languages.

The Teacher Self-Evaluation Questionnaire was developed based on Omaggio's (1986)

Hypothesis for Proficiency-Oriented Instruction. The sample of teachers ( $n = 6$ ) completed this questionnaire prior to and after observations and training. In order to administer a reliable instrument, the Teacher Self-Evaluation Questionnaire was distributed to a separate group of teachers on two occasions prior to this study. Data on the consistency of the responses to the questionnaire items were collected. Overall, the consistency in responding to each question item was tentatively established, and reinforced the validity of the questions as a reasonable reflection of teaching practices.

The Teacher Interviews allowed the researcher to gain some measure of reliability of the results obtained from the Teacher Self-Evaluation Questionnaire as the items correlated with a proficiency-oriented approach. The interviews were tape-recorded to further document the results. The sample of teachers was interviewed by the researcher prior to classroom observations, and then again before post-observations. The researcher collected qualitative data in the following areas:

1. The teachers' goals for their respective students
2. The role of the textbook in reaching these goals
3. Daily class activities to promote student oral communication in class
4. The functions (tasks) of oral communication activities in class
5. The content areas to be covered in class
6. The implementation of culture in planning

Omaggio's Observation Schedule (1982) was used as the global rating scores from classroom observations were found to be consistent with teacher effectiveness ratings;  $r = .86$  to  $r = .93$ . The instrument differentiates teacher and student talk into personalized categories and impersonal or neutral communication categories. The personalized categories validate creative, contextualized language activities which are provided for in a proficiency-oriented approach. Overall, the

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data can be used for evaluation of instructional strategies in the classroom. See Appendix A for Observation Schedule.

Based on Omaggio's Hypothesis for Proficiency-Oriented Instruction, the researchers designed a Student Questionnaire (see Appendix B). The students completed this questionnaire prior to and after observations. In order to administer a reliable instrument, the Student Questionnaire was distributed to a separate group of high school students on two occasions prior to this study. Data on the consistency of the responses to the questionnaire items were collected.

Overall, the consistency in responding to each question item was tentatively established, and reinforced the validity of the questions as a reasonable reflection of teaching practices. The teachers who participated in the study administered to their students a Textbook Exam prior to observations, and again after all observations were made. The test provided for creative language use as promoted in a proficiency-oriented curriculum.

The researchers designated this instrument to measure student performance due to its broad scope in measuring the students' mastery of the elements of the Spanish language.

Omaggio's Observation Schedule (1982) differentiates teacher and student talk into personalized categories, and impersonal, or neutral communication categories.

Personalized communication is defined by Omaggio (1982, 257) as verbal exchange:

- (1)...requesting, or sharing facts about oneself or one's acquaintance; (2) requesting or expressing personal concerns; (3) sharing or eliciting private knowledge, opinions, judgments, or feelings; or (4) remembering or restating the personalized content contributed by other class members.

A proficiency-oriented approach is evidenced in that verbal interaction is based on an individual's unique responses in actively communicating in the target language. The personalized categories on the observation instrument validate creative, contextualized

language activities provided for in a proficiency-oriented approach. Impersonal or neutral communication is described by Omaggio (1982) as requiring "...one correct answer or a narrow range of answers." Mechanical drills, repetition, restatement, predictable response patterns, lecturing about grammar rules, and discussing cultural facts are examples of impersonal communication. Omaggio (1986) claimed that this category focuses on activities that are predominantly out of context with little attention as to how the language can function in order to accomplish real-world tasks. This instrument was used for all classroom observations. The instrument was reported to be reliable in that the global rating scores from classroom observations were found to be consistent with teacher effectiveness ratings;  $r = .86$  to  $r = .93$ .

#### Data Collection

During the last week in August, the 25 teachers of Spanish III and/or IV at the high school level were contacted by the researcher. A sample of six teachers was selected to participate in the study. During the second week of September, the researcher began observing the teachers and students of the study. Initially the students completed a textbook exam for the purpose of data collection in the study. They were told that the test would not be used toward an academic grade in the class. The respective teachers administered the exam during the first week of observations. The scheduled class for observations remained the same, thus each teacher was observed on the same day of the week during a specified class period for six consecutive weeks. In total, there were 48 pre-observations and 45 post-observations conducted. Omaggio's Observation Schedule was used to record observation data for both the teachers and the students. After the six-week observation period, three randomly assigned teachers participated in the ACTFL-OPI-type training. A certified ACTFL-OPI tester volunteered to train a sample of teachers on administering, rating, and scoring students' performance in the ACTFL-OPI.

To avoid possible bias in observing class performance, the researcher was blind to the random assignment of teachers to the training. In order to maintain a control group, three teachers were not randomly assigned to the training. Approximately four weeks after the experimental group of teachers participated in the ACTFL-OPI-type training, the researcher returned to the classroom to observe the three trained teachers as well as the three nontrained teachers for a period of six consecutive weeks. The researcher learned of the teachers who were randomly assigned to the training after all data were collected and the training was offered to the control group after all data were collected. The students were asked to complete the same textbook exam after post-observations. The teachers were interviewed by the researcher again. All interviews were tape-recorded.

Again, the teachers were asked to complete the Self-Evaluation Questionnaire, and the students were asked to complete the Student Questionnaire. The trained teachers interviewed a sample of randomly assigned students on the ACTFL-OPI. One of the trained teachers was not able to interview students; therefore, four students were randomly assigned to be interviewed by the two trained teachers in the ACTFL-OPI.

Two students were enrolled in the respective teachers' classes, and two students were not enrolled in a class taught by a trained teacher. The interviews were recorded to allow for interrater reliability by the ACTFL certified tester. Also, two students from a non-trained teacher's Spanish III class, and two students from a trained teacher's Spanish IV class were randomly assigned to be interviewed on the ACTFL-OPI instrument by two trained teachers. For each trained teacher's group a Quota Sampling was done in that one student scoring high on the textbook exam, and one student scoring average on the textbook exam represented the random assignment of students. In this way a matched assignment of students represented the sample of study. The ACTFL-OPI interview was tape-recorded to allow the certified ACTFL tester to verify the

ratings.

### Data Analysis

Overall, the data obtained in this study from different methodological processes were compared and contrasted using the triangulation technique. The data relating to proficiency-oriented instruction were compared, and construct-related validity was monitored by examination of the data relating to a proficiency-oriented methodology gathered through each of the techniques. Each independent approach to collect data corrected observer bias and enhanced the reliability of the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. In looking at teacher performance in the classroom, the unit of analysis was the individual teacher. Analyses for the teachers and students were completed separately, since data collection instruments were specific to each group. The pre- and post-means for each category on the Classroom Observation Schedule were subjected to a one-between, one-within analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure. The effect size metric was also determined to provide an estimate of the magnitude of difference between means. Univariate descriptive statistics such as the means and standard deviations were also reported. Data on the pre- and post-textbook test means for students enrolled in the trained teachers' classes as well as the nontrained teachers' classes were subjected to a one-between, one-within analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure. A descriptive analysis from the pre- and post-teacher interviews was also reported, as well as univariate descriptive statistics such as the means and standard deviations.

### Results

In addressing the six research questions, the results are as follows:

1. *How does the ACTFL-OPI-type training affect teacher performance in the secondary classroom?*

Based on the instrument for classroom ob-

servations, trained teachers showed a 35 percent increase in Category 1 for personalized communication by expressing their feelings, opinions, and judgments in class. These results support a proficiency-oriented approach as the teachers responded on a personalized and unique basis in the target language. Non-trained teachers showed a 6 percent increase. Data are given in Table 1 (see page 202). The ANOVA procedure was found to be statistically significant in this communicative category ( $F = (1,4) 13.07$ ). See Table 2 on page 202.

In looking at Category 3 of the Observation Instrument (Table 1), trained teachers showed a 3 percent increase in personalized communication by prompting, encouraging, and facilitating student responses. Non-trained teachers showed a 3 percent decrease. The effect size was found to be .44. Data for effect size metric on Observation Schedule are given in Table 3 (see page 202). The effect size metric is an estimate of the magnitude of the difference between means. It is a useful descriptive statistic when a small sample size is used, and even when the difference is not statistically significant. An effect size of .40 or larger is considered to be high and further studies are suggested.

In examining Category 5 of the observation instrument (Table 1), trained teachers showed a 23 percent decrease in lecturing and explaining in class. Nontrained teachers showed a 10 percent decrease. These results support a proficiency-oriented approach as the teachers provided more creative practice activities than lecturing techniques. The effect size was found to be .56 (Table 3). An effect size of .40 or larger is considered to be high and further studies are suggested. Trained teachers showed a 12 percent decrease in requesting information about the lesson content, such as grammar points or vocabulary items in Category 6, Table 1. Nontrained teachers showed a less than 1 percent (.13) decrease. A proficiency-oriented approach provides for culturally authentic practice without emphasizing specific grammar points or vocabulary. The effect size was found to be

high, that of .59 (Table 3).

Overall, the trained teachers reported an increase in: (a) testing the speaking proficiency of their students; (b) soliciting personal or opinion questions based on vocabulary and structures taught in class; and (c) using authentic sources for class presentations.

2. *Do teachers who participate in the ACTFL-OPI-type training plan more student-centered activities than teachers not trained?*

Yes. Based on a post-interview conducted privately with each teacher, it was concluded that the teachers who participated in the training clearly expressed their plans for student oral activities. Their activities were reported using the three criteria which underlie a proficiency-oriented approach: the functions expressed, the content discussed and the accuracy in communication.

3. *Do teachers who participate in the ACTFL-OPI-type training implement more student-directed oral activities than teachers not trained?*

Yes. Through the post-Teacher and Student Questionnaires, it was concluded that trained teachers implemented more student-directed oral activities through role plays, interviews, and the development of new endings to a story in Spanish. The post-Teacher Interviews revealed that the trained teachers made more use of the text in providing paired-group work and oral activities. The trained teachers described student oral activities using the three criteria that underlie a proficiency-oriented approach.

4. *How does the ACTFL-OPI-type training affect student performance in the secondary classroom?*

In examining the data in Table 4 (see page 203), students taught by trained teachers showed a 14 percent decrease in class dictation and drill exercises as defined by Category 5. Nontrained instructors "classes showed a 3 percent increase. These results support a proficiency-oriented approach as more creative language activities were evidenced in the trained teachers' classrooms rather than drill-

like techniques. The effect size was found to be average, that of .39. An effect size of .40 or larger is considered to be high and further studies are suggested.

The students taught by trained teachers also reported: (1) an increase in responding to personalized questions in class; and (2) a decrease in memorizing dialogues in Spanish. A proficiency-oriented approach does not promote memorization activities.

5. *Do students taught by teachers trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training perform better on the ACTFL-OPI than students not taught by teachers trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type training?*

No. Students taught by trained teachers did not perform better on the OPI than students taught by nontrained teachers. The sample of students scored at the Novice level. The ratings were verified by the ACTFL certified tester. Due to the small sample size, caution should be taken in making generalizations, as well as an awareness that the ACTFL-OPI might not be sensitive enough to pick up on the sample size performance at the high school level.

6. *Do students taught by teachers who participated in the ACTFL-OPI-type training perform better on textbook prepared tests than students not taught by trained teachers?*

No. After testing 84 students, it was concluded that students taught by trained teachers did not score higher on the textbook exam than the students taught by nontrained teachers. Data are given in Table 5 (see page 203). The ANOVA procedure was performed, yet no statistical interaction effect was found.

**Interpretations**

The descriptive correlation between the Teacher Questionnaire and the Student Questionnaire responses were interpreted as follows: (a) the trained teachers increased their usage of personalized questions more than the nontrained teachers; (b) role plays, student interviews and small group work were in-

corporated into the curriculum by trained and nontrained teachers; (c) both teacher groups required students to memorize dialogues in Spanish, however a decline in usage was reported for the trained group; and (d) both trained and nontrained teacher groups were asked to create new endings to a story in Spanish.

An examination of the teacher interviews revealed that the trained teachers were more open to discuss student oral activities and to offer specific examples of oral tasks such as paired activities, soliciting personal or opinionated questions, role plays, creating new endings to stories, using authentic sources to stimulate class discussions, and increasing frequency of testing speaking proficiency of students.

Overall, the trained teachers incorporated more proficiency-oriented activities in that they provided for functional tasks similar to those encountered in a Spanish-speaking area, content that provided creative language-use, and culturally authentic practice. However, caution should be exercised in making generalizations due to the small sample size. Also, the large effect sizes found in personalized Teacher Categories 1 and 3 and in impersonalized Teacher Categories 5 and 6 indicate a large enough difference between the means of the two teacher groups during the pre- and post-observations to warrant further investigation. Bailey et al. (1991) reported that further studies on teacher training programs and the role of the teacher are prominent research priorities of the 1990s.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study are very encouraging as teachers at the secondary level who were trained in the ACTFL-OPI-type procedures increased their awareness of proficiency-based instruction. One of ACTFL's most significant contributions to foreign language education is that of proficiency-based instruction; however secondary teachers have a more difficult time in clearly providing such instruction. In this study, the trained teachers provided more personalized, meaningful, oral

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communicative activities, along with a student-centered classroom approach. Meaningful communication is the core of the learning process as one attempts to directly converse as well as understand the cultural aspects of the target language. Communication is one of the five major goals of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. Based on this study, it is evident that as we prepare for the Twenty-first Century, further training for teachers at the secondary level is truly warranted.

#### Further Research

Further research studies are needed to replicate these findings and investigate the large effect sizes found in both the personalized and impersonalized teacher categories on the Observation Schedule. Further investigation on the effects of training teachers in the ACTFL-OPI-type training would include the following:

1. Replicate this study with a larger sample size of teachers and students;
2. Replicate this study with teachers from the same school setting in order to look at any collaborative efforts by the teachers;
3. Examine the possibility of financial support for training of teachers on the ACTFL-OPI;
4. Study the effects of proficiency-oriented instruction on student performance over an extended period of time;
5. Increase testing of students in the ACTFL-OPI at the secondary level or with an instrument able to discriminate more precisely between small increments of progress rather than from Novice to Intermediate.

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## APPENDIX A

Observation Schedule  
Tallies every 15 seconds  
Omaggio (1982)

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Week: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

TEACHER CATEGORIES	Total	% Time
1. Expresses feelings, opinions, judgments, or gives factual information (private knowledge)		
2. Requests feelings, opinions, judgments, factual information (private knowledge)		
3. Prompts, encourages, facilitates responses		
4. Pattern drilling, manipulative language practice, dictation: focus on language forms		
5. Lecturing, explaining		
6. Requests information about lesson content — not private knowledge		
7. Repetition, restatement of response, or correction		
8. Classroom management		

STUDENT CATEGORIES	Total	% Time
1. Expresses personal feelings, opinions, judgments, shares or remembers private knowledge (individual response)		
2. Requests personal or private knowledge Information (individual response)		
3. Paired or group activity communicative focus		
4. Requests clarification, explanation drilling, manipulative practice, dictation, focus on form, individual or choral response		
5. Drilling, manipulative practice, dictation, focus on form, individual or choral response		
6. Paired or group activity —linguistic forms are focus		
7. Demonstrates knowledge of factual information about lesson content		
8. Silence, confusion		

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANNALS—SUMMER 1999****TABLE 1****Mean Difference Between Pre-Post Observation Percentage of Talk/Category**

Class	Teacher Categories							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Personalized Communication				Impersonalized communication			
Trained	34.91	4.43	2.59	-1.44	-23.42	-12.28	-2.98	-1.80
Nontrained	5.7	4.43	-2.88	3.18	-9.69	.13	-.89	.03

**TABLE 2****Repeated Measures ANOVA on Teacher Talk Observations  
by Teacher Talk Category 1**

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F
<b>BETWEEN SUBJECTS</b>				
Teacher Group (T)	1	57.60	57.60	.55
Error (S/T)	4	420.68	105.17	
<b>WITHIN SUBJECTS</b>				
Occasion (B)	1	1236.88	1236.88	25.26*
T x B	1	639.92	639.92	13.07*
SB/T (Res)	4	195.85	48.96	
Total	11	2550.93		

\*p &lt; .05

**TABLE 3****Effect Size Metric on Observation Schedule**

Category	Teacher	Student
1	1.09	.01
2	.00	.08
3	.44	.20
4	.20	.24
5	.56	.39
6	.59	.11
7	.16	.12
8	.03	.05

TABLE 4

## Mean Difference Between Pre-Post Observation Percentage of Talk/Category

Class	Student Categories							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Personalized Communication				Impersonalized Communication			
Trained	4.79	4.28	23.17	4.11	-14.52	-3.08	-12.48	-6.28
Nontrained	2.71	.45	2.57	.70	2.73	1.28	-6.95	-3.50

TABLE 5

## Student Test Scores

Group	n	Pre-observation		Post-observation		
		Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
Trained						
A	18	73.83	15.57	18	76.28	14.15
B	20	78.90	10.48	20	71.30	11.04
C	16	73.94	12.22	16	77.31	10.67
Nontrained						
D	11	73.91	5.86	11	74.27	6.00
E	7	73.86	17.19	7	67.57	18.05
F	12	73.67	13.36	12	78.58	11.80

TABLE 6

Repeated Measures ANOVA on Student Scores  
Textbook Scores by Student Groups

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F
BETWEEN SUBJECTS				
Student Group (G)	1	7.84	7.84	1.04
Error (S/G)	4	30.27	7.57	
WITHIN SUBJECTS				
Textbook Tests (T)	1	.65	.65	.04
GxT	1	.05	.05	.00
ST/G (Res)	4	68.76	17.19	
Total	11	107.57		

p &gt; .05

APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire

I. Personal Data

1. Full Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle

2. Grade Level: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

3. What is your native language? \_\_\_\_\_

4. At what level of Spanish are you studying now? III IV

5. What was your grade in Spanish last quarter? A B C D F

6. Have you studied any other language(s)? \_\_\_\_\_  
If Yes, what language(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

II. Please answer the following questions based on your experiences in Spanish class this semester.

7. How often does your teacher ask questions in Spanish requiring you to answer with information about yourself (i.e., personal questions, give your opinion, etc.)?

0 1 2 3 4 5 or more time(s) daily.

8. How often do you role-play or interview other students in Spanish?

0 1 2 3 4 5 or more time(s) daily.

9. How often do you work with other students in small groups to complete an oral activity?

0 1 2 3 4 5 or more time(s) daily.

10. Are you ever required to memorize a dialogue in Spanish and then repeat it orally to the entire class?

YES NO

11. Are you ever required to create a new ending to a story in Spanish?

YES NO

12. Approximately what percentage of the time does your teacher speak in Spanish in class?

0% 1-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-100%

13. Approximately what percentage of the time do you speak Spanish in class?

0% 1-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-100%

III. Why are you presently studying Spanish? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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