

The Collins Writing Program in the World Language Classroom

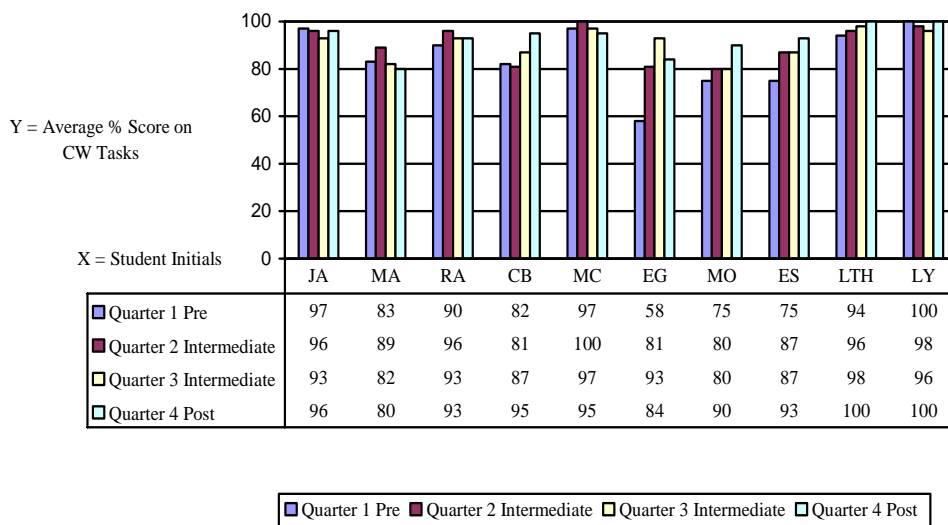
Executive Summary by Anne Marie Plante

The Collins Writing Program promotes authentic language use at all levels of World Language while reinforcing other modalities of language instruction. The two Action Research projects summarized here demonstrate that the program is viable in improving both student achievement and self-confidence in very different levels of Spanish-language instruction. By nature, Action Research is not rigorous in its sampling and statistical methodology, but it does offer important evidence regarding teaching practice beyond the merely anecdotal.

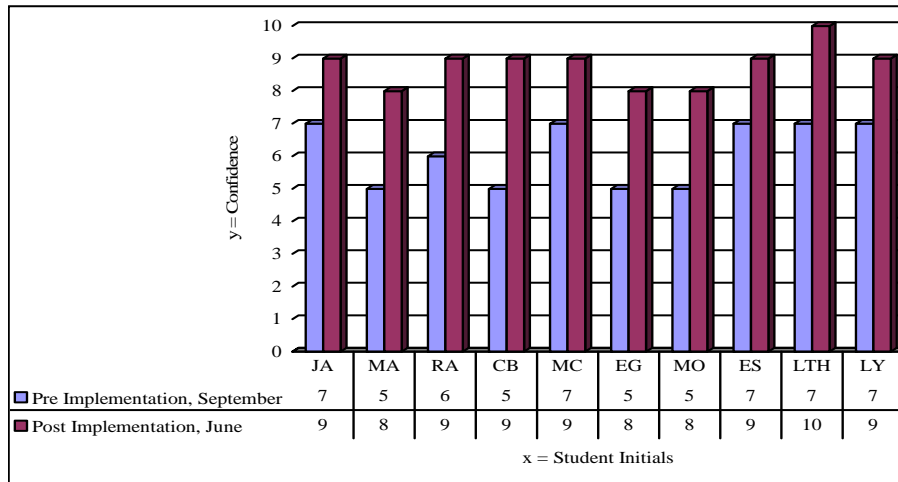
The research summarized here was conducted from 2005-06 in two year-long classes, Advanced Placement Spanish Language 5/6 and Intermediate Spanish 3 at South High School in Minneapolis, MN. South High is a large urban high school of 1900+ students. Those profiled in both studies were deliberately selected to show highly diverse achievement levels, learning styles and personal backgrounds. Both studies yielded the following results: higher overall achievement on a range of writing tasks, greater demonstrated knowledge on language comprehension assessments and significant growth in self-reported confidence in writing in Spanish.

In Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish 5/6, the explicit course goal was successful completion of the AP Spanish Language examination, including high achievement on complex, independent writing tasks. The guiding questions of the study were: (1) "Are Collins Writing Program techniques and assessments effective in preparing students to take an AP World Language examination?" and (2) "Will the use of the Collins Writing Program in the AP classroom lead to increased self-assessed writing confidence?"

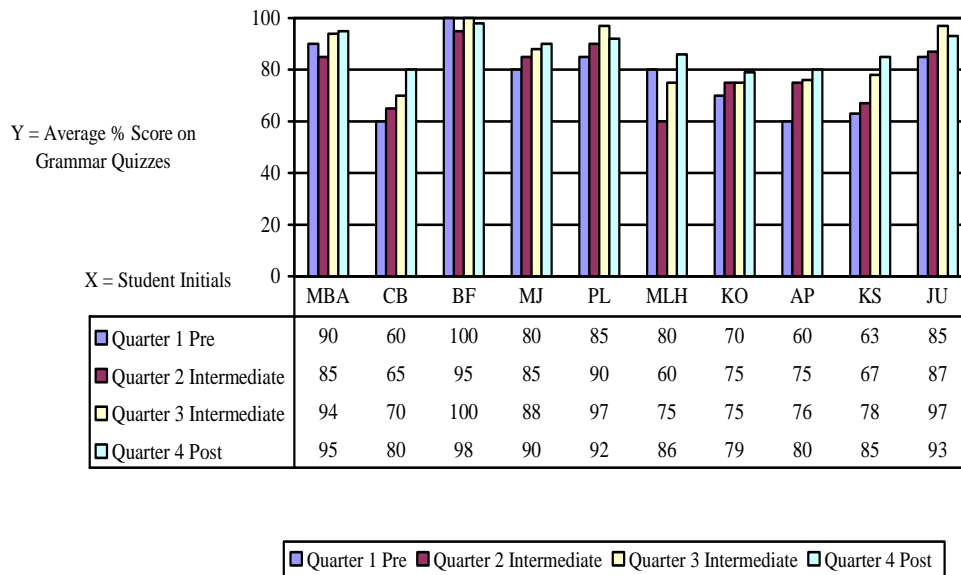
Students completed a year-long sequence of tasks designed to resemble AP examination writing assessments. The results in Figure 1 show a general pattern of positive growth for all types of students, as measured by writing scores:



An attitudinal survey measured self-confidence Spanish writing pre- and post-implementation of the program in AP Spanish. The results in Figure 2 also demonstrate consistently positive growth:



In Intermediate Spanish 3, the principal methodology was Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS). This relatively recent approach to language instruction places great importance on student understanding of all course material at all times (termed "comprehensible input"), regular "recycling" of previously-learned structures, and the use of free-writing activities as assessments of comprehension and growth. A central goal was to examine the potential compatibility of the Collins Writing Program and TPRS in their similarly focused, process-based orientation. The primary research question was: "Will the use of Types I and II writing in World Language help students to improve scores on grammar quizzes about different time frames (verb tenses) and their uses?" Figure 3 summarizes quiz averages by quarter for four quarters:



The results of these two studies demonstrate the positive impact of the Collins Writing Program on World Language student achievement and confidence. Additionally, they suggest the broad spectrum of potential future applications of the program in Advanced Placement and regular World Language classrooms.

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