

Project Report:  
ThunderRidge High School Foreign Language Department  
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## **Problem:**

Each year the foreign language students at ThunderRidge High School are required to take end of the year proficiency tests in five areas: reading, writing, speaking, listening and culture. The students are required to pass all tests with at least an 80% in order to advance to the next level of language. The only exam that they are allowed to score less than an 80% and still advance is culture. The other four tests must be passed at an 80% or else the student is required to repeat their current level of language class. Although the policy is very effective in terms of student placement, it had recently been brought to our attention that the procedures surrounding these tests vary from teacher to teacher. For example, some teachers were announcing the tests before they were taken; others were given them as an unannounced exam. A few teachers were allowing up to three retakes on all tests while others only offered two. Our students and parents were receiving mixed messages about the norms and procedures of the exam. In order to help solve the problem, my department recently reviewed and came to consensus on these norms. My department wanted them to be linked to our school site, so they requested that I create a Department site that would include these norms in order to increase communication with parents. We have also decided to post contact information for each teacher, the district standards, and a resource page for our students and parents. These were issues that the department felt needed to be included on the Web site because of their importance to our students and parents. The resource page will be especially helpful for two reasons. First it will give our parents suggestions on how to help their students study, which is one of the most common questions we receive from them. Second, it will allow our students to further explore the use of our new textbooks online resources since there will be links posted to those sites on our department site. The need for increased communication with our very busy parents and students was the main reason for the development of this site.

## **Background/Analysis:**

This website was created by Kiffany Lychock. The members of the foreign language department-Connie Navarro, Grace Mossman, Margaret Motz, Tim Brennan, Joann Russum, Amy Waters and Fred Stookesberry-were also involved in the development of the web site. Their input was required for their contact information as well as their desired contributions to the resource page. We recently revised our norms for proficiency tests as a group, and those were included as well. The clients/users of the site were our students and their parents. We anticipate increased use of the site at the both the beginning and end of the school year. Because the beginning of the year is the time when we have more contact with parents through syllabi and events such as "Back to School Night" we anticipate the use to increase at this time since that is when it will presented to our parents and students for the first time. We also anticipated

the use of the site to increase at the end of the year since that is the time when the proficiency tests are given. We plan to initiate the implementation of this site at the end of this year preceding proficiency tests as a tool for parents and students to use in preparation for the exams. We felt that by posting the norms for our tests at the end of this year, we will be able to encourage consistency between teachers. Because this is the first year that we have had a common set of rules to govern the exams, it will be important to communicate these changes to our students. Each year we have a few parents who complain about the results and attempt to push their children through to the next level even though they were not proficient according to our tests. Because these changes in policy will be posted on our department site, we hope to alleviate these battles that can often times result in unnecessary conversations and arguments. By making the guidelines and requirements clear to all of our students and parents, they will be aware ahead of time what is expected.

## Method:

The content that needs to be presented to our students was delivered through the Internet. We distributed flyers to our students during class to inform them of the new opportunities available to them throughout the use of the site. As a way to communicate with parents, we announced the implementation of the site in our monthly parent newsletter and made the flyers that were given to our students available to our parents during parent-teacher conferences in the spring. Next year the URL of the site will be included on all teachers' syllabi for the school year. We will also showcase the site to our parents during "Back to School Night" and fall conferences during the 2005-2006 school year. Evaluation of the sites effectiveness will be sent to parents at the end of this school year and the end of first semester next year in order to determine its effectiveness.

## Findings/Activities-Pre-Implementation:

Possible Questions that we hope to explore through the implementation of the web site:

- 1) Was contact information for each teacher provided and presented in a clear and concise manner?
- 2) Did parents and students use the site to find contact information?
- 3) Is having the contact information for staff posted really necessary, or do our users find that information in other ways? (Phone, for example)
- 4) Will students or parents use the District Standards information?
- 5) How many of our students/parents use the resources page in order to help our students succeed?
- 6) Will students and parents use the proficiency norms in order to become more aware of the requirements and procedures?
- 7) Will we have less resistance from parents since these procedures will now be officially posted and followed by all teachers?

- 8) Will having the proficiency test information on-line help to eliminate confusion among student and also help them to feel better prepared for the tests? (In terms of format and procedural expectations)
- 9) Will posting the procedures and norms on-line be the best way to communicate them with our parents and students?
- 10) How will we determine what the students know about the procedures and norms now in comparison to what they will know after we implement the site?

## Evaluation/Demonstration of Impact

In order to determine the effectiveness of this site, a pre-implementation survey will be given to the students. The focus of the survey will be to determine what students currently know about the proficiency tests and their norms/procedures. We would like to increase the awareness of the norms, especially those concerning level advancement and retake policies by 70%. We determined that we met that goal by assessing the students using the same survey given pre-implementation at the end of the school year. Our students scored poorly on the initial survey which consisted of the following questions: 1) What areas are you tested in during the end of the year proficiency test? 2) How many of those tests do you have to pass in order to advance to the next level? 3) How many retakes do you get per test on the end of the year proficiency tests? 4) What happens if you don't pass them? The students mostly (74%) responded in an incorrect manner for question number 1 as many of them left out culture. They fared slightly better on question number two with 81% answering correctly. Question number three was the most surprising to us. The majority of our students (86%) responded incorrectly. What also surprised us was the variety of answers we received for that question. The last question, number four, was answered correctly by most students (88%).

After sending the web URL home with our students and asking them to look over it with their parents (this was a homework assignment), the post survey scores were improved greatly. Question number one was answered correctly by 84% of the students (again, many forgot about culture as a test). Question number two was answered correctly by 95% of the students. There was a significant improvement on question number three in the posttest with only 10% of the students answering incorrectly. Question number four was answered correctly on the post-test by 98% of the students. As a part of the post-implementation survey, questions concerning the effectiveness of the contact page, resource page and district standards page will also be asked of our students. The contact page received positive feedback with 89% of the respondents saying they found it helpful, and that the information was presented in a clear and concise manner. The district standards page received positive feedback also with 78% saying they found it helpful, although 4 respondents said they liked the key learnings page better saying it was "more specific" and "what I need to know about my child's level". The most popular page according to our survey was the resources page.

Our parents and students overwhelmingly (99%) said they found it to be valuable.

Perhaps the most successful measure of the web site came at the end of the school year. One of goals we had in creating the site was to inform students and parents about the procedures and philosophy of the tests in order to alleviate confusion. Due to the clarification of the procedures and the posting of these on our department web site, we did not have any parent complaints about the placement of their student at the end of the year. We considered this to be a great improvement over the struggles we have had over the last five years at ThunderRidge. The web site informed both our parents and students of the expectations and procedures that govern the test, and therefore there were no surprises at the end of the year.

## Reflection:

When I first began teaching at ThunderRidge, I found the whole process of proficiency testing to be very useful and necessary but also very confusing. As a teacher, I received mixed messages from other members of my department about the procedures and expectations of the tests. Some told me to never announce them in that it provided a skewed view of what the students really know if they simply go home and cram for them the day before. Other teachers told me that test anxiety was such a problem for their students that they felt it unfair to **not** announce them before they were given. I was also confused about how many retakes the students got to pass. The answers were varied; some people said two, others said three, and some said two on each test and one test may be taken up to three times. It turns out the last group was correct. I was also confused my second year when some students who had not passed all four tests were advanced to the next level with permission from their teacher, which I thought to be unfair. As a result of our meeting to determine these norms and procedures, a non-proficient student will not move on unless a committee of at least three teachers from the department approve the advancement. Although most parents want their children to be placed in the correct level for their abilities, I have also become frustrated with the ability of parents to push their student through the system once they complained to administration. We were told that since the procedures and policies were not made available to parents and students before the test were given that they could not fight against the few parents who complained. This has caused problems for both the student and the teacher who receives that student the following year because they are not prepared for the class in which they are placed. I have been extremely excited and motivated to help eliminate these discrepancies and was very pleased with the results from the implementation of this site.

In terms of creating the actual site, I have learned quite a bit through this project. Although I had used Fireworks to help develop my portfolio site, I feel as though I have greatly increased my knowledge of the program through this site. I learned how to create a watermark effect as a background, which I thought was very effective. Fireworks also has a ton of great effects available to give your site

a little something extra and I have added a lot of embossing and drop-shadowing into this site. I have also learned to not use too many of the effects at once because it detracts from the clean look of the site. It is amazing how the use of Fireworks can make a site look so much more professional than using Dream Weaver alone. My previous sites had used the "hockey stick" menus, mainly because I didn't have any experience with the other Macromedia programs, and Dreamweaver does not supply the user with the same sort of effects that are available in Fireworks. I also added in drop-menus in Fireworks. I am so happy with the look that these provide. I think that they really added to the look of my site. Creating this site also provided me with my first experience with CSS. Using the style sheets made creating a consistent site so much easier. I plan on using them in all of my future web designs. Through using CSS and fireworks, this site is more professional looking than anything I have previously designed. I cannot wait to try it out on my students!

## ILT Competencies Met:

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#### I. Reflective Practice

##### A. *Take a systems view*

-Understand the context of your work

*I met this competency by understanding the need for the creation of posted norms for TRHS foreign language proficiency tests via the Internet in order to effectively communicate with a large group of people.*

-Be aware of values, barriers and leverage points, and anticipated changes

I am aware of the current problems surrounding our inconsistencies with our proficiency testing procedures and am aware that these anticipated changes to those procedures will give us a leverage point with both parents and administration.

##### B. *Use cycles of reasoning as tools for problem solving*

(with documentation for accountability and shared reasoning)

-Program/product evaluation and accountability

I have met this competency by performing both pre-implementation evaluation and a post-implementation evaluation in order to determine the effectiveness of the site.

**C. Promote collaboration, partnerships, and relationships for full inclusion:** with stakeholders, clients, subject matter experts, team members, etc.

*I met this competency by designing the site in collaboration with my department at ThunderRidge High School.*

**D. Be a lifelong learner and professional**

-Be active in the profession and contribute to the community of practice

*I have met this competency by following the ADDIE cycle of evaluation with my classmates from the ILT in order to improve both my project and the project report.*

## **II. Planning and Analysis**

**A. Conduct a needs assessment** for learning or performance interventions

*I met this competency by evaluating through a pre-test the knowledge my students had about their proficiency test procedures before implementing the site. Less than 30% of the students scored higher than a 70% on that test thus suggesting a need for increased communication of those procedures.*

**B. Conduct a learning or performance instructional analysis:**

1. Learners

2. Content, job, or task
3. Goals and objectives
4. Environment, culture, and history
5. External climate; emerging trends and issues
6. Ethical and legal implications
7. Appropriate media and technologies

**Note:** Analysis used in planning should include recommendations of possible solutions that add value, are feasible, and are likely to accomplish goals.

*I have met these competencies by analyzing the above in this project report. (See above)*

### **III. Design and Development**

#### **B. Design learning and performance products and resources that reflect an understanding of the diversity of learners and groups of learners**

-Accommodate different learning styles and needs

*I have met this competency by providing a resource page on our department site that will offer students many different suggestions for different students to improve their language acquisition skills. The site will also link to the PASO A PASO site where students can find both additional practice and enrichment activities.*

#### **C. Develop products and resources to support learning and performance** (with documentation)

1. Choose and use appropriate tools and resources for development and production, e.g., multimedia or Web tools, and print or people resources.
2. Apply message-design principles to development of interface and interaction
3. Visual communication and principles of perception
4. Learning via media
5. Principles of movement and interaction within traditional and virtual environments
6. Principles of motivation and attitude change

*I have met the above competencies by using the Internet as an appropriate communication tool since we will be attempting to communicate with all foreign language students (around 800 total). I have applied message-design principals to the site interface to encourage maximum interaction. I have provided visual communication via the choice of learning media I have chosen (Web site). I have applied the principles of movement and interaction within both traditional and virtual environments through the design and implementation of the site. My department and I designed these changes to our procedures in hopes to create an attitude change surrounding the confusion associated with the tests by all parties involved, namely teachers, students, parents and the administration.*

#### **IV. Evaluation and Assessment**

##### **A. Evaluate effectiveness of programs, products, or practices**

-Formative evaluation for improvement

*I have met this competency through the use of a survey at the end of the 2004-2005 school year to determine which areas of the site need improvement and which areas work well already.*

-Summative evaluation for accountability

*I have met this competency through the use of a pre and posttest to determine if the site accomplished its goals of providing students with a better understanding of proficiency test procedures and norms.*

#### **V. Implementation and Change**

**A. Applying theories of diffusion, adoption, and change to a local problem, develop a change strategy** that includes:

1. How the effort will be communicated and to whom
2. What implementation materials and messages will be required and how they will be produced
3. A schedule for the rollout, including milestones, timelines, etc.
4. How the new practices will be acknowledged and rewarded
5. How to manage resistance
6. Who will provide support and guide practice during adoption
7. Roles and responsibilities of management, the target audience, and other vested parties

*I have met this competency by designing and implementing a strategy to change the way in which our proficiency tests are given and communicated to our students and parents. I have decided to communicate the effort through flyers and parent communication at Back To School Night and parent teacher conferences in the spring of this school year and the fall of next year. I have also scheduled the distribution for the information in both this spring and fall, and have also designed surveys and pre- and posttests to be given in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the site. I will manage resistance to the changes with the help of my administration and department members. My department members and administration will also provide support and guide the adaptation of the new procedures. I have set very clear roles for my department, students and administration to help me communicate these changes to the vested parties.*

**VI. Management**

**A. Employing effective strategies (e.g., team leadership, collaboration, accountability), manage one or more of the following endeavors:**

-Other development projects (information, Web, etc.)

*I have met this competency by designing and managing the website for the foreign language department. This Web site will deliver information to both our students and parents.*

-Information resources

*I have met this competency by designing a Web site that is fundamentally informational resource.*