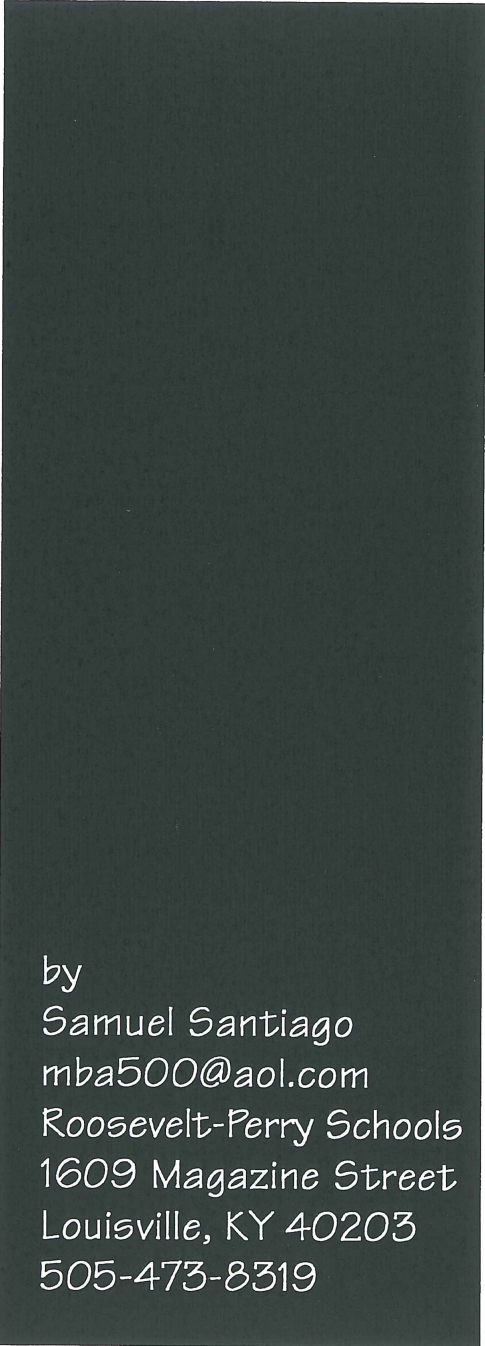




BUILDING COMMUNITIES / CONSTRUYENDO COMUNIDADES



Level: 4-12 grades
Course: Spanish: 3rd/4th level high school as well as 4th/5th and 6th grade levels

Background

Rebecca Kelly and I are Spanish teachers in the Jefferson County Public School System (JCPS) in Louisville Kentucky. We work in different schools and programs related to the teaching of foreign languages. This lesson and other related Spanish lessons were made possible by a grant and technical support from the JCPS and the University of Louisville Educational Consortium, with Dr. David Hersberg as its key coordinator. Also by the support and workshop training of the Latin American Data Base at the University of NM.

This is an interdisciplinary, multiage, multinational learning lesson for our students and for ourselves. The students involved includes level III and IV high school Spanish, and 4th, 5th and 6th grade Spanish students.

The lesson had to be in line with the Kentucky Reform Act and among other things included the following goals:

- * Applying core concepts learned
- * Becoming self-sufficient
- * Becoming responsible group members
- * Thinking and solving problems
- * Connecting and integrating knowledge

On an immediate level the goal is to make Spanish relevant and exciting to our students' lives.

by
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Development & Implementation of Spanish Lesson

Significant support was received from Berta Calvert and Maxine Elliot who are our Foreign Language curriculum developers for JCPS.

Our core concept when developing this lesson was one of individualized foreign language instruction within a technological instruction framework, as well as to teach Spanish in context to culture and people our students could relate to.

On the individualized foreign language instruction side we provided our students with clear instructions in terms of Spanish comprehension (vocabulary, listening, speaking), and proficiency in writing Spanish. Then, the students were divided into small groups to apply what they had learned into this and other Spanish related projects. Their overall theme remained "Construyendo Comunidades."

An environment of "Learning Peer Pressure" was created. The high school students didn't do any of this just to please their teachers, but they felt the responsibility of being mentors to Middle and Grade school students, whose knowledge of Spanish was more limited. For the younger students it was a matter of living up to the expectations their high school student mentors had of them. At the end of the semester all of their work will be put on the Internet on the World Wide Web. Not only was there a motivation to learn from the mentoring perspective, but also from the perspective that their learning accomplishments will be showcased globally through the Internet.

Prior to meeting their mentoring partners, all the students at all levels were suppose to have their writing composition of what they had defined as "Community," as well as scanned pictures of themselves involved in some community related activity on a computer floppy disk. A total of 100 students at all the levels met and will continue to meet each other at the JCPS Computer Support Center. Four teachers were present as well as seven other support personnel in the computer and educational fields.

The first meeting was at the center's auditorium in which the students were reminded about the mentoring and objectives, computer Internet training they were about to receive and the Spanish content application they were suppose to be working on. The High School students took the lead by teaching the other students a Spanish song they had composed earlier.

Then all the students were encouraged to mingle and choose their partners who had to be from a different grade level. The students felt awkward at first, but with a little encouragement they chose who they were going to be working for the rest of the semester. Then everyone was divided into two large Internet computer labs: One, to teach them how to navigate on the Internet and specifically immerse themselves in Spanish related Web sites. The other lab to teach the students how to create a World Wide Web page that they will ultimately put on the Internet. After instructions were provided students in both labs had time to work on their Spanish content creation alongside their mentoring partners.

It was exhilarating to see the collaborative and quality work that the students started creating and the genuine concern and focus they had for their mentoring partner, as well as their Spanish projects. The ongoing lessons were design to provide a simulated immersion Spanish environment as it was technically possible through computer mediated and group learning.

Teaching Approach

It was the main goal of this project to make Foreign Language and cultural learning meaningful and engaging. It was also intended that students learn how to work collaboratively with students from other ages and other cultures. The lessons were designed so that the students, not the teachers, controlled the learning flow. It placed the teacher as the organizer of learning and as the provider of context and meaning. In addition the lessons was designed to allow the students to take increasing responsibility in their own learning process.

Time Needed

An entire semester.

Lesson Content

The objective of the lesson was to allow students to take responsibility for their own learning of a foreign language through the theme exploration of what community meant for them. All groups developed their own core vocabulary of words associated with their concept of community. For the Grade and Middle School students the lessons were kept at a concrete-operation cognitive level. For High School students their theme remained the same, but their development were more on the abstract cognitive level. For instance, Grade and Middle School students naturally came up with vocabulary of concrete things they saw and felt about their community. Consequently, they developed Spanish sentences and images (pictures, drawings) elaborating on their core vocabulary. High School students were encouraged to think more globally and to also include community related issues such as human rights or personal responsibility. Simultaneously, students were ask to do research about:

- * Cause and effect relationship of the things that makes a community a good place to live in.
- * Examples of local, national and global communities.
- * Predictions about consequences for community solutions.

Lower grade levels came up with vocabulary such as: People, neighborhood, trust, peace, clean environment, world, cooperation, caring. High School students had a much more extensive vocabulary development out of which paragraph and short essays were written.

When all the groups got together at the Computer Support Center Labs, both cognitive processes came together at a surprisingly high cooperative level, despite slight differences of prior content development.

All students interacted with their new vocabulary, sentence building and multimedia production and background knowledge of what they already understood a community to be. Spanish was learned in context of text, pictures, and sounds. As teachers, we reinforced conventions and constraints so that meaning would not be lost in their transliteration process. The whole point was to network their own ideas, associate them in units of information / images and heighten their awareness of the socio-cultural factors when expressing something in Spanish.

Instead of the students learning Spanish in isolated words and sentences, they were learning Spanish in context of their lives and the people in the different communities they were exploring. Back at their own schools, while the students were working in small groups the teachers would try to give clues and advance organizers so that everyone could stay on task and in focus. Towards the end of the classroom period, each group would report to the rest of the class their progress and give each other ideas and constructive criticism. Simultaneously Spanish classroom sessions were dedicated to practicing what had been learned up to that point in an interdependent mode.

Multimedia Component

After the students met at the Computer Support Center they all went back to their original classroom and maintained collaboration through electronic mail. They continued constructing a World Wide Web bilingual kiosk that will allow local mentoring partners and learning partners from other countries to do peer review on each other's second language (Spanish and English).

The teachers in this project attended several conferences on technology and education as well as joined electronic mailing lists in order to contact educators across the U.S. and throughout Latin America. Therefore, before the students project is exhibited openly on the Internet, it will go through additional peer review from students in Spanish speaking classrooms.

Prior to allowing students to using the multimedia component for this lesson, they were required to know the basic Spanish vocabulary and the Spanish modes and conventions of writing and conversation. Although they had access to electronic dictionaries and translating software, it was still their responsibility to make their composition in a way that made sense in Spanish.

The psychological instructional dynamics of using multimedia was to involve the students learning of Spanish by associating, voice, picture, animation and manipulation of their presentation, so that a near immersion experience could result.

Much of their project is already constructed on an internal web page. The students will put this pages on-line as soon as they complete multiple peer reviews. Multimedia materials at their disposal were: An easy to interface HTML such as PageMill or Netscape Gold, electronic Spanish/English dictionaries and translation softwares, Photoshop, quicktime, Authorware, Director Studio.

Timeline

Timeline preparation prior to the students getting involved was rather extensive. One might imagine that getting the grant money was the most difficult part of this project. But, in fact getting the classroom wired and getting the technical support in place was a tremendous challenge. A greater challenge was coordination and synchronization among the teachers involved at different schools and in different countries. The students then applied such timeline in the following manner:

Choosing a topic and learning WWW navigation: 6 hours
Working in small groups to develop content: 12 hours
Building a storyboard: 3 hours
Working with their mentoring partners: 6 hours
Completing project: A Semester

The multimedia component was a tool used for their peer review and testing of their acquired Spanish language. Students learned, created, and presented. Teachers maintained their focus, facilitated and edited.

Expected Performance Outcomes

Right now Spanish language has already become more meaningful to the students' lives. Short of taking them to Mexico or Spain for a summer immersion program, this is as close to immersion as it gets in the classroom. By using the tools previously described, students with different learning styles find their own pattern for learning and comprehending the Spanish language.

At the end of the semester students are expected to increase their grade performance by 15%. Individual grade will be determined by the following factors:

- * Student's ability to search, analyze and present information in a way that would make sense to a Spanish speaking person.
- * Student's ability to work collaborative with small groups and be able to use Spanish in context.
- * Student's specific contribution to what is posted on the net.
- * Peer review assessment of the accuracy in terms of language and socio-cultural factors that the individual students has contributed to the overall project.
- * Teacher's assessment of the total individual effort made by the student.

Summary

Students themselves have determined that the URL will be available when their web presentation is almost complete and well polished. Its first publication will be relatively static with pictures, text, and graphics. Later updates will incorporate video and animation that has already been shot within individual and combined classrooms.

The tremendous effort to organize and coordinate teachers, educational curriculum support and the computer support personnel has paid off in terms of seeing the students motivated to take responsibility for their own learning.

Students apply the Spanish and cultural concepts immediately within their learning / mentoring circles. They become more self-sufficient when figuring out what a word or an expression means in Spanish. They have become more responsible for their learning groups and their mentoring partners. Finally, they are connecting their learning with engaging multidisciplinary knowledge that will stay with the students for the rest of their lives.

After this pilot learning project is completed the technological and curriculum infrastructure will remain in place. It is hoped that the program will be expanded and made even more exciting in years to come.

It is expected that the continued creation of learning circles, multimedia Internet connections and a highly motivated student force will deepen the student's commitment to life long learning and collaboration with fellow human beings across the globe.

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