

Scarecrows Teach the Past Tense: “La leyenda del espantapájaros”



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Problem

A difficult hurdle for English speaking learners of Spanish is written and oral narration in the past tense. Spanish relies on two past tense verb forms, thus presenting a more complex task to the second language speaker. In order to develop proficiency with this skill, Spanish students must understand the cultural nuances these tenses communicate. SPA 201 students have been introduced to narrating in the past, but because of their novice level of language proficiency, they are unable to create with the language therefore use of the target language in the classroom often breaks down.

Objectives

The focus for this study was to:

- pinpoint when student use of Spanish language breaks down in the classroom
- and find a way to resolve this issue while deepening student understanding of this complex skill and using it correctly to narrate in the past.

Methods

- We used video that narrates a Spanish legend and its corresponding text to model narration and cultural perspectives.
- We sequenced activities to contextualize use of past tense, beginning with highly contextualized activities, working toward open ended questions that asked students to talk about the story using the the past tense.
- Students worked in small groups to provide many opportunities to participate.
- As a written homework activity, we asked students to narrate the story from the perspective of a character in the legend.



Conclusions

Students at lower levels of language acquisition need a supporting context and sequenced activities in order to practice using the past tense in the target language. When they have this support, they are more motivated, more engaged and more learning takes place.

Reference

Shrum, Judith L and Eileen W. Glisan. *Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2010

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