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Introduction

Storytelling as Communication and Pedagogical Theory

Teaching can be described as a process of storytelling, as it is about us as professors and about the subjects we teach. On the one hand, we provide a narrative about our own lives in the hope that our interests and passions will reach out to our students and enable them to become engaged learners. On the other, we tell stories about the subject matter itself, the reasons for its importance, the ways in which it has developed, the questions it poses of reality and social relations, the problems it may help to resolve, and even our own struggles to learn and teach it. The purpose of both these aspects of storytelling is to "humanize" the process of learning by appealing to the students' imagination, so that they can consider themselves active participants in the pursuit of knowledge and feel empowered to tell stories about their own experience and deepen their understanding of the subject. Storytelling then becomes central to learning itself as students are emboldened to provide narratives showing how knowledge comes alive for them.

Storytelling in SLA Pedagogy

TPRS – Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling

TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) is a foreign language teaching method that was developed by Blaine Ray in the 1990s. It's based on the idea that students acquire language best through interactive and personalized comprehensible input.

The method uses storytelling to build a narrative in the target language, based on interaction teacher-student or student-student. This is usually through 3 main steps (and can take more than one class):

1. Introduce New Vocabulary

The teacher introduces a small set of new phrases that will be repeated often throughout the story.

2. Co-create a Story

The teacher guides the class in creating a story, asking questions from the questions to decide on the details. This may mean creating the main characters, the setting, the problem, and main events.

3. Write and Read the Story

When the story is complete, it can be turned into a text for class reading. The reading provides even more exposure in context to the new vocabulary.

This technique has been shown to be effective in language acquisition, as it allows students to engage with the target language in a fun and creative way. It's intended to create a low-stress and enjoyable language-learning environment.

It helps the student to accomplish a task in the target language.

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Standards for Learning Language from ACFTL

Storytelling Project in the Spanish Classroom meets the Standards of American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACFTL).

Guide for learners to develop competence to communicate effectively and interact with cultural understanding.

WORLD-READINESS STANDARDS FOR LEARNING LANGUAGES

Task-Based Approach for Storytelling

TBLT – Task-Based Language Teaching

A task involves a series of different problem-posing activities that require students to use various cognitive and communicative procedures (oral and written comprehension, production, manipulation, and interaction) in the target language in order to express meaning, as they would do in the real world. Thus, a task accomplished in the target language should include the following features:

-The primary focus should be on 'meaning' , learners are concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning and not forms or grammar.

-There should be some kind of 'gap', or a need to convey information.

-Learners should largely rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.

-There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language, or in other words, the language serves as the means to achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right.

As for the structure, the task-based approach is divided into the main sequential phases of:

1) Pre-Task: presenting the topic, the objectives, the expected results, the work methods, and the linguistic and non-linguistic processes required to complete the task.

2)Task: developing the task by working individually, in pairs, and in groups, and by presenting it to the classroom.

3) Post-Task: focusing on specific forms that emerged in the previous phases and need revision from student.

In accordance with this, task-based projects are generally structured into the consecutive stages:

1) Content development: collecting information/creating the story elements.

2) Written text: focusing on grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion.

3) Oral text: rehearsing the pronunciation.

4) In-class presentation: reading the story to the class

Project Methodology

My Storytelling Project in the Spanish Classroom

The task that students accomplish is creating a fiction story that could be used as an independent appendix to the text book.

The textbook already provides opportunities for practicing its contents from a TPRS viewpoint. For example, each chapter focuses on a country or region from the Spanish speaking world. In this way, there are sections to practice reading comprehension on cultural aspects.

Using a Task-Based approach, these texts already provided are the base from which starting to develop the different phases of the final outcome of the task. The outcome will be a fiction story that will be used as a complimentary material to practice the vocabulary, grammatical, and cultural contents from the chapter for students in following semesters. In other words, the students will become authors of materials for other students. They will be using language to create a linguistic artifact and they will become active members of the storytelling community that can be seen in the graphic in the Introduction section of this poster.

This project implements the ACTFL standards for learning languages.

Pre-task section:
- Setting groups to work together in this long-term project, which will become a graded assignment
- Creating a character
- Brainstorming to create the actual story on regards to the story as plot, theme, settings, conflicts and resolution about the character for every cultural aspect of each chapter
- Compiling the lexicon and grammar aspects to be used in each chapter

Task section:
- Each chapter will be developed in terms like where s/he travels, eats, wear, talks to, thinks, actions…
- Students type and send the professor, who will put all paragraphs together, and post in a module in Canvas for all to read.

Post-task section:
- As a follow up to each post, students will respond comparing themselves to the actions they can read from the others. For example, one student may read that the fictional character traveled from one place to another in the country selected in the chapter; so the student may say that s/he did the same, would like to the same, or did something similar in another country or state…

- Final outcome will be the whereabouts of the fictional character, her/his learning, and the comparisons that actual students make in the same regards. In a way, students did a journey with a Spanish speaker fictional companion, and learned language and cultural aspects along the way.

- A twist to the new fictional created material, students may add comprehension questions to their own story, for potential new students using this material for practice and learning.

Preliminary Results and Conclusions

My Storytelling Project in the Spanish Classroom

The project is ongoing; it is currently in its initial stages mostly.

It is considered an extra credit graded assignment since it was not included in the assignment load presented in the original syllabus.

Commitment of the students is not the same for each of them.

A creative activity of this caliber is thought as something out of their reach and knowledge; despite they only need to use the contents for the studied chapter.

More material design and templates should be necessary from the instructor for the student simply complete them.

Pre-task section was received enthusiastically in general. However, task section is proving very challenging for the students, and creation of the written story takes long with irregular short-term outcomes for each group.

Post-task section has not been initiated.

Challenges of this project have been overlooked in terms of instructor preparation of materials and time allotting for the students to work.

Planning to overcome current challenges:

Include storytelling task project as one graded assignment.

Prepare instructions guides and template materials for student to work on.

Give clear directions on achievable short-term objectives for each stage.

Work on time management to always leave some class session time for group work on the project.

Set goals to present mini-outcomes from each student group every two weeks.

Have the student involved and motivated, by making them aware of the audience engagement they may produce when having others reading their stories.

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