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READING STRATEGIES IN A SECOND LANGUAGE SPANISH CLASSROOM

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Learning language in school is a process that involves many skills that students bring from other disciplines. Their ability to talk, to understand, to reason, to write, and to read all travel with them from their previous experiences. One of the most important and most often used is reading. Reading in a second language can be a challenge for anyone—but especially for middle school age students, who may not have confidence or reading skills that they are able to use with regularity. By seeking to answer the question “*What are the most effective reading strategies to use in a middle school comprehensible input Spanish classroom?*”, this project hopes to provide a set of tools and resources that is grounded in research, theory, and has a practical application in the middle school Spanish classroom.

This paper will explore the grounding of the eventual project, a website directed at Spanish teachers, through an explanation of why this topic matters to me personally, a literature review going over key research and studies related to this topic, an explanation of the project itself, and finally, a conclusion with reflections on the project, the experience of creating and researching the project, reflections on further questions that I am led to by the project, and how this will impact my own practice in the Spanish classroom as a practicing middle school Spanish teacher.

Personal Interest

My interest in this topic comes from my work as a middle school Spanish teacher. It did not take me long after stepping into my role as a full time classroom teacher before I noticed that my lesson plans weren't going exactly as I had envisioned they would, especially lesson plans that involved reading. I noticed that my students were struggling with reading texts, even if other areas of our class were going well for them. Students who had answered a question perfectly well out loud would struggle to answer the same question when presented with it in a written format. This sparked my interest in how to best serve those students. I am very interested in what the research and investigation into this topic has been for a practical, concrete reason: I want to use it in my own classroom. I have seen what it looks like in the classroom when the students are not subjected to best practices and solid implementation of research, and I want to change that. My goal is to improve my own practice in the classroom from a thorough theoretical perspective. My research and analysis will guide me not only through this project, but also into my professional career.

Early on in my first year of teaching, I came to two realizations.

1. My students struggled with reading in Spanish in a way that I was not prepared for by merely my knowledge of Spanish, and to some extent my knowledge of how to teach Spanish. Things that I felt were appropriately leveled, or that were leveled to their ability by the curriculum I used, which was targeted at beginning Spanish students, were flying over their heads. I knew that my students could do it, but we ran into a stumbling block with reading consistently.

2. My students had no idea that Profe was a title- which led to the creation of the term "Miss Profe" by so many of my wonderful students, and the eventual inspiration for the title of my project.

These two things combined were extremely intriguing to me. It may not seem like the espanGLISH "Miss Profe" could in any way be revelatory, but it was! My students had a knowledge of English that they were applying in Spanish contexts- I saw it with their use of the term "Miss Profe" and their ability to recognize cognates. However, this application was inconsistent. My students would take one look at anything written in Spanish longer than a word or two and just shut down.

I knew that my students were capable of learning Spanish (language acquisition is for everyone!), but I also knew that I needed to figure out different ways to teach my students. This launched my interest in reading, particularly reading in the Spanish classroom.

Towards those goals, the selection of my question was very practical and very personal. Throughout the course of choosing and refining my topic and question, the idea that I was going to be able to take what I learned and put it into practice was always very present. It is my hope that this will carry over into my project as something grounded and practical, as well as well researched and analyzed.

Rationale

The academic rationale for this project is to further the discussion on reading in a foreign language environment. My goal here is to contribute to the conversation by synthesizing information on teaching language, learning language, reading strategies, and middle school pedagogy. These areas are all well researched, and I believe that the

combination of these topics will provide a thorough understanding of how to best implement reading strategies into a Spanish classroom of middle school students. In doing so, I hope that my students will become more confident readers, who are able to use strategies and skills to help them read and understand what they read. What do you hope will change or happen as a result?

Overview

The following chapters will dive into this question of best reading strategies to use in a middle school Spanish classroom in several ways. Chapter 2 is a literature review. It will focus on presenting the research and framework that the rest of the project is based on. Chapter 3 is the Project Description- it will describe the project, and give more information on how best to use the research to implement into a website that Spanish teachers can use. Chapter 4 is my own reflection on both the process of writing this paper, and the process of creating the project that is the end result of my research and investigations.

Summary

This project seeks to answer the question: *“What are the most effective reading strategies to use in a middle school comprehensible input Spanish classroom?”* Through an exploration of the literature that already exists and the design of a new project, I will attempt to answer this question through focusing on four relevant themes, which are how languages are taught, how languages are learned, reading strategies, and middle school specific pedagogy. I will also design a project and how to implement it, so as to synthesize the information I have learned.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Reading is something required of students every day- to learn about history, to decipher a math text, etc. Second language acquisition is not different- reading in a second language; it is something that happens every day in the Spanish classroom. Students use their reading skills from their native language in the new language to try and piece together meaning from unfamiliar words and structures. How can this reading be supported when the skills are the same, but the content is so different? How can students unlock what they already know, which is to read, to an entirely different set of words and grammar? There has been a lot of research on second language acquisition and on reading strategies. The question of “What are the most effective reading strategies to use in a middle school comprehensible input Spanish classroom?” is the question that this literature review hopes to investigate. Second language acquisition, second language teaching, reading strategies, and middle school specific pedagogy will all be investigated over the course of this review.

The goal of this literature review is to look into these different areas and look at the commonalities between them, so that a targeted reading curriculum can be built that is grounded on the best practices in language learning and in reading strategies. Additionally, since age is a deciding factor for many strategies, in that what is appropriate for an 11 year old is not necessarily appropriate for an 18 year old, this literature review will also explore the world of middle school specific pedagogy. This grounding in how to

teach middle school students in particular will hopefully give this project a solid foundation and grounding in the best practices for this unique age group.

How Language is Taught

A useful resource that served as an overview of how language in general, not just second language, is taught, was the work of Ahmet Çakıroğlu (2018). This goes over different strategies that teachers have used to inculcate language skills such as literacy into students, and how those approaches work with students and developing reading and writing. Reading skills transfer from language to language- since people only learn to read once, this method of learning about how students learn to read in the first place is very valuable. Students at the middle school level come into a second language classroom with many skills that they have already learned- having background knowledge of what processes and literacy interventions may already have been attempted with these students is valuable to their current teacher.

One of the important premises of a study of French learners in Canada is that receptive language precedes production- students will read in a foreign language prior to speaking (Erlam, R., & Ellis, R). This study found that input was more important to their learning than output- students needed to be exposed to a language, not necessarily speaking it, in order to be successful learners. This is a skill students bring to foreign language classrooms with them. This data and research shows how students, especially early language learners, who are just beginning the process of acquiring an additional language, respond to input based tasks, such as reading.

Additionally, having practical ways to input language teaching can help decide which reading tasks are most appropriate for the classroom, and will help determine how

students can be supported by different reading strategies. In 1996, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages introduced the 5 Cs of language learning- Communication, Culture, Connection, Comprehension, and Community. (*World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*) A few years later, Gifford and Mulaney (1999) set out to publish a guide to practical ways to implement them in the foreign language classroom. This guide is full of very practical examples to help teachers, and is a grounding source that helps the project along greatly. The biggest point this article makes is about input and intake, and how that affects a student's learning. In this discussion, input means the language that a learner is exposed to, and intake means the language that the learner actually takes in and learns. Input and intake both precede output by the student- meaning speaking in the language. Input is always going to be greater than intake, but there are things that teachers can do to maximize how much language students are able to take in from the input provided. According to Gifford and Mulaney, structured input leads to richer intake. The students also need to be focused on what they are learning- which in this case, means it is not enough to merely

Not all of the five Cs are centered around reading, but reading can tie into every C that exists for language learning. The ACTFL standards continue to influence language teachers today- they are still a guiding principle for many language learning programs. Taking into account not only the standards, but also the guidelines for implementation of the standards set out here for a practical classroom application, will serve as a solid foundation for creating a reading curriculum for a second language Spanish classroom.

How Language is Learned

The book “How Languages Are Learned” by Lightbown and Spada (2017) is a core text for this area. This book talks about the process of learning language, and these authors cover a very thorough introduction to teaching language by helping teachers understand how language works, and what is happening in the mind of a student when they are met with a second (or third, etc) language to learn. This book serves as a basis for language acquisition for any language teacher. Much of the material contained in this book can serve as a springboard for further ideas on language instruction, since it goes over the entire process of learning language, both as a second language learner and the process of acquiring the first language as an infant. For example, Lightbown and Spada state that “Second language learners, like first language learners, pass through sequences of development: what is learned early by one is learned early by others.” (2017) This supports the idea that language instruction can happen in a group setting like a classroom, where many students will be learning together. They will acquire similar parts of language at similar times. Different chunks of language will have different sequences- Lightbown and Spada discuss the areas of grammatical morphemes, negation, and questions and the sequences that learners undergo when learning to produce these areas of language. For example, in negation, learners of English will often use “no” before using not, and will use no and not before using “don’t” when it comes to forming sentences in the negative, although their use may not be perfect (2017).

While the whole book contains interesting and useful information, the parts of the book entitled “Second Language Learning” and “Individual Differences in Second Language Learning” are the most useful to the creation of this project, since the focus of

this literature review is on a second language environment (a Spanish classroom) for the students. The discussion of modified input in this book is truly crucial- whether it is someone speaking slightly more slowly to someone who is clearly just learning a language, or a teacher carefully choosing vocabulary, modified input is common across language learning environments, and is part of the process of learning language (Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. 2017).

While “How Languages are Learned” is certainly a formational text, it is also an extremely academic one, which focuses largely on theory and linguistics associated with language learning, rather than a practical how-to guide. In looking for such guides, the previous section of “How Languages are Taught” was much more useful- many of the resources referenced in that section deal with that subject. It is for this reason that the splitting of these two topics is important, and the distinction should be recognized.

Students themselves make up a large portion of the ways language is learned, since they are the ones doing the learning of the language. Students may have many diverse reasons for choosing a language, and those reasons may impact the way they engage with the language (Bimpong, W. K. (2019). Some students may choose to spend a large amount of time engaging in activities outside of the language learning classroom- others may see their time in the classroom as the extent of their language learning. The differences between acquisition in these students can be large- and students who do not devote extra time to language learning often do not realize that they themselves are part of the language learning equation, rather than the teacher being responsible for teaching absolutely everything needed to master and fully acquire a language. (Bimpong, W. K. 2019).

Engagement is a key theme that runs throughout the idea of how language is both taught to students and learned by students. K.J. Suranna proposes that arts should be incorporated into second language learning environments as a way to further provide students with material that they like doing, and to further form connections that drive engagement (Suranna, K. J. 1998).

Reading Strategies

This is the most concrete part of literature- looking for things that can be implemented in a classroom. The goal here is to find literature that will help specifically in a second language classroom- reading strategies are numerous, and there are many different strategies to help readers of all levels. Strategies that will help students with the sorts of readings they are likely to find in a Spanish language classroom- readings are important. Those readings are likely to be shorter than readings in their other classes, with many cognates to English, as well as a large number of repeated words- meaning that the unique word count of these readings is likely to be quite low, since repetition of input is an important part of language acquisition. This is a form of the modified input that is referenced earlier from the book “How Language is Learned” by Lightbown and Spada. The readings are all in the target language- in this case, Spanish, but they are modified- vocabulary is limited, and sentences may be shorter. What is important here is that these readings are not breaking any rules of the language- improper grammar is not used. Students will receive modified, but correct sentences and paragraphs to help them acquire the language.

The first topic of this section of the review is if teaching reading strategies is effective. In a study done on two groups of 6th grade students, all of whom had lower

than average reading capabilities, where one group received direct instruction in reading strategies and literacy for a period of several weeks and the other group did not, the study found that the group that received the instruction scored better on standardized tests than the group that did not receive the direct instruction (Anderson, V., Others, A.). Reading strategies work, and they work for students in middle school-- it then becomes a matter of determining which strategies work best for the specific target of middle school students who are in a second language Spanish classroom.

When looking at what strategies can be used to enhance language acquisition, there is a wealth of technology available now that was not before. Technology and the internet play a huge role in the lives of students and their education-- it is a fact of life that students are around technology. When thinking of ways to use that technology, some interesting studies have been done on the topic of language learning, such as using hypertext to help with vocabulary (Chen, I., & Yen, J. 2013). This can supply students with very immediate feedback that can support their flow of comprehension without having to stop the process of reading.

However, although technology provides new and interesting ways to help support students in reading, one of the important pieces of teaching students an additional language is breadth of strategies. In a study by Erika Moore Johnson (2019), a group of exemplary teachers of emergent bilingual students was looked at with respect to how they taught reading. One of the things that these teachers all had in common was that they all used scaffolding of the material heavily, and that they all used a large breadth of types of scaffolding. Teachers would pull from many different types of scaffolding, both pre-planned and implemented in the moment, to help texts become more accessible to

students who were emerging as bilingual. While the sample size here was fairly small (only six teachers), they all shared this in common, and were all exemplary teachers of their subjects (Johnson, E. M, 2019).

These teachers were also united in employing certain scaffolds more often than others, in addition to using a variety of scaffolds. Activating prior knowledge for their students was central to the practice of all of the teachers in the study. The teachers were also informed in their choice of scaffolds by knowledge of research into second language acquisition and theory, showing that the theory of teaching second language acquisition is extremely important to being able to put together supports for students who are learning a second language- such as the theory discussed earlier from the Lightbown and Spada book. Some of the scaffolds used by these teachers were pre reading activities, activating prior knowledge, and finding ways to increase student engagement in class (Johnson, E. M. 2019).

When looking at what things can be effective to teach in the classroom, there is more to reading than just vocabulary acquisition. In a 1990 booklet which drew from a five year long study of 44 English classrooms across 25 schools and 4 states, several lists of effective things teachers could do to be more effective teachers of reading. The list is reproduced here:

- Offering separated and simulated activities to individuals, groups, or the entire class as needed
- Providing overt, targeted instruction and review as models for peer and self-evaluation

- Teaching skills, mechanics, or vocabulary that can be used during integrated activities such as literature discussions
- Using all three kinds of instruction to scaffold ways to think and discuss (e.g., summarizing, justifying answers, and making connections)

This list was followed immediately by a list of strategies that do not work, which is reproduced here:

- Reliance upon any one approach to the exclusion of the other two
- Focus on separated and/or simulated activities with no integration with the larger goals of the curriculum

These two lists show clearly that differing approaches not only are not detrimental to learning, but enhance it (Langer, J, 2000). This reinforces the ideas presented previously in this section that a variety of tools, techniques, and approaches are needed for a successful implementation of teaching reading to students, in this case middle school students in a second language Spanish classroom.

Middle School Specific Pedagogy

Middle schoolers have unique needs that have been studied extensively, and paying attention to their developmental level and what works best for their age group is an important part of designing curriculum for middle school age students. One of the biggest things that has been researched with respect to middle school students and their reading comprehension is the idea of middle school as a transitional period- not merely socially and emotionally and physically, which it of course is, but also academically. Middle school marks a shift- students begin to read more complex and high level texts, students are expected to take targeted, intensive subject courses, rather than having all

their subjects taught by the same person in charge of all their goals- including literacy and reading comprehension. This transitional time makes it important to ground this project in this specific age- students who are in middle school merit an approach that will best serve their unique status as transitional learners who are going through a sort of academic metamorphosis.

Reading comprehension is a highly discussed topic for the middle school age group. In a study of middle school teachers using the Secondary Explicit Comprehension Model of Instruction, the study looked at, among other things, whether this model was an effective way to teach reading to middle school students (Scott, 2018). When looking at this model, which consists of five steps: Plan, Identify, Model, Guided Practice, and Independent Practice, they found that it was an effective way to improve reading comprehension among middle school students. This guideline of Plan, Identify, Model, Guided Practice, and Independent Practice is one that was found to be effective across content areas, not just in an English classroom. This ability to be implemented across subjects is exactly the sort of instructional practice that can be used to enhance students' ability to read in a Spanish classroom. This plan can help serve as a basis for how to structure activities, or how to set things in up. The research from this study also found that the explicit nature of telling students when and how to use these strategies was also helpful in engaging students in higher reading comprehension. These are all skills that can translate to the middle school Spanish classroom. One of the concerns from this study was about the fidelity of implementation- that teachers with no training in teaching reading skills may not be able to implement it as well as teachers who had lots of training in teaching reading. Despite this concern, the study showed that overall, the

implementation of the Secondary Explicit Comprehension Model of Instruction was a success.

One of the benefits found in this study is that student engagement is a benefit of using the Secondary Explicit Comprehension Model of Instruction. Student engagement is a very important part of any classroom- and doubly so in reading. A study conducted by James McMillan (1995), on the effectiveness of strategies used by teachers to remediate for students who had failed their Virginia Literacy Passport test found that the strategies that were most successful were strategies that engaged students in applying the skills and strategies that were needed . To have students be engaged in the learning and application of skills is an extremely important piece of any classroom, and one to which the project that draws from this literature review will lean upon heavily. Keeping them engaged and interested in the material and implementation of skills needed will be a foundational piece of the final project.

Along with driving positive engagement from students, another piece of helping students understand and be better readers is creating an environment where they understand that mistakes are acceptable. Creating such an environment allows students to pay attention without the negative fear of making a mistake- the mistake is taken from a negative thing to something that is natural. After the student is assured that mistakes are acceptable in this space, then teachers can move on towards directing students towards the desired learning activity, such as looking for key words, or another task that the teacher has set (Roehler, L.R 1974).

Another useful strategy at the middle school level is self questioning. A study on middle school students with learning disabilities found that self questioning was an

effective strategy, especially at the middle school level where texts become more complex than in elementary school (Joseph & Ross, 2018). These students may have trouble generating questions to ask themselves, so explicit instruction is needed to not only teach them to ask themselves questions, but how to do so.

The methods used to teach students to generate these questions are extremely similar to the methods used in the Secondary Explicit Comprehension Model of Instruction. In the study, teachers would first check for understanding with the students, then provide modeling, in the form of what sorts of things are questions and what sorts are statements. The teacher will then ask students to generate their own statements and questions, along the lines of the model that the teacher just presented them. This is all done before the students are asked to read the text. The teacher then demonstrates an example of themselves reading the text and asking the sorts of questions that they would like to see from the students. This pre-work that is done before the text is read by students is shown to have students have greater understanding than they would without those pre-reading supports (Joseph & Ross, 2018). All of this pre-text work that is done with the students can absolutely be applied to another setting, which in this case, is the middle school Spanish classroom- there is nothing that is particularly language-specific about it. This emphasis on pre-text work could be very successful with students who are learning Spanish as a second language- it follows some of the earlier best practices discussed in this review, with teacher modeling and practice first, and the previously discussed modified input could very easily be merged with this practice.

An Australian study looked at implementing reading instruction across the whole curriculum, not merely in targeted reading or English classes. What they found that

caused them to start their study was that again, the middle school level is unique because of the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” The effects of this are that students struggle with the lack of direct reading instruction that they encounter in middle school, and have trouble accessing the material. Additionally, many teachers at the middle school level are not trained in literacy/reading instruction, so even if they make reading instruction a priority, it may not be something that they have the training and skills to implement in their own classrooms (Faulkner, Oakley, Rohl, Lopes, & Solosy, 2012).

One of the outcomes of this study was that embedding different reading strategies into a non-English language arts classroom actually improved the students’ abilities to acquire content in whatever subject they were taking at the time (Faulkner, V., Oakley, G., Rohl, M., Lopes, E., & Solosy, A. 2012). Their reading improved, but so did their mastery of content. Many of these strategies were pre-reading strategies, or had the ability to be taught as a pre-reading activity, which is absolutely a recurring theme as a strategy teachers use to teach reading comprehension. A complete list of the instructional strategies used by teachers in this Australian study is as follows:

1. Anticipatory and pre-reading activities
2. Graphic organisers
3. Note-taking and note-making
4. Reciprocal teaching
5. Spelling
6. Think alouds
7. Vocabulary Development

When these activities were ranked of differing importance based on what subject the teachers taught, all of these strategies were found to improve reading comprehension of the students, which in turn increased their mastery of the content. Pre-reading activities merit their own instructional strategy here, but could be combined with many of the others to create a multi-tiered instructional strategy that happens prior to the reading of a text. Application of direct reading strategies and instruction helped the students when it was applied across the board, not just in an English Language Arts classroom (Faulkner, Oakley, Rohl, Lopes, & Solosy, 2012).

This shows the importance of implementing reading strategies in every classroom- Spanish being no exception. While vocabulary development might seem like it ranks extremely high for a Spanish teacher, or any world language teacher, since the class is all about the acquisition of a new language, these other instructional strategies can impact the students in their abilities to acquire the new language, and give them skills to access material that is written in the new language, and still requires their literacy skills in order to understand what is being read. The other strategies listed- note taking, think alouds, etc, can also benefit the students of any content area classroom where they are required to read, and should not be neglected or forgotten simply because they do not seem immediately as applicable to the Spanish classroom as something like vocabulary acquisition.

While it is not directly related to a reading strategy, research also shows that direct instruction in reading can have beneficial effects on the writing ability of students learning a second language as well. In a study in Korea with middle school students who were learning English as a second language, the research revealed that direct instruction

in writing improved students' writing ability, but also that direct instruction in reading also improved their writing ability (Lee, J., & Schallert, D. L. 2016). The benefits of implementing reading strategies and providing direct instruction on it are not just limited to the sphere of reading comprehension, but to writing as well.

Summary

There are several key takeaways from the literature reviewed here that will inform the design and implementation of the culminating website project which is being designed with this literature in mind. The first of these is the importance of modified language input. This is a key concept taken from Lightbown and Spada, and it informs the sort of content that will be taught- in this case, Spanish itself, although one with a simpler vocabulary than a native speaker might implement in a normal conversation with another native speaker. This will be something that the website strives to keep in mind with all of the materials that it contains- readings, activities, the manner in which teacher talks will be scripted- etc. This will be applied to both the original content of the website itself, and any external resources that it links to- it all needs to be modified input so that students who are just beginning their language careers with find it comprehensible and accessible.

The next key point is student engagement. Over and over, studies show that students learn more and comprehend texts better when they are engaged with the class and with the material. This is something that will need to be built into the curriculum-- time for students to connect, to engage, and to make the material something that they are interested in and can relate to. This can take different forms, but from the research presented in this literature review, self questioning seems like an interesting strategy to

get students thinking about not only what the text is saying, but about how they themselves can interact with the text.

The third most important takeaway is the importance of pre-reading activities. Work must go into teaching, engaging, and explaining a reading prior to allowing students free reading time. This theme is expressed over and over again, through many studies that I read and looked at during the course of investigating this project.

Lastly, the research and studies show that input precedes output. The website project will focus on what teachers can do to allow students to comprehend and understand, and will not focus on student output, such as forcing students to speak or communicate in a specific, targeted way. Speech will develop as it develops, and the website will provide teachers with guides and outlines to present their students with the opportunity to be exposed to as much language as possible.

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

After having reviewed the literature on language acquisition, language teaching, reading strategies, and middle school specific development, I am eager to put it into a practical framework. This framework will seek to provide an answer to the question *“What are the most effective reading strategies to use in a middle school comprehensible input Spanish classroom?”* As a practicing classroom teacher, it makes the most sense to me that this be in the form of a website. Teacher websites and blogs have been hugely helpful and influential to me as I have begun my teaching career, especially recently, when everyone has been struggling with how to adapt to distance learning. I wanted to create something that could be of immediate use and interest, and I think a website is the best way to go about that. Additionally, I am the sort of person who loves collaborating and striving towards how things can be better, and a website that allows me to reflect on my own practice and knowledge while simultaneously outlining how others can work on their own practice is something that appeals very much to me personally, while also meeting my strengths as a communicator and as an educator of all stripes- not merely an educator of children!

This chapter will focus on the project description, the rationale behind the project, the audience and setting, and the timeline for the project.

Project Description

The project itself is going to take the form of a website. This website will be a series of posts and tools grounded in the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review, with an emphasis on reading strategies that can best assist middle school students with reading in a beginning Spanish classroom. I have also compiled a list of resources that I use in my own classroom and that I find helpful. In this project, I will be using information I have learned to best assist my students to inform the writing of different posts all based on what teachers can do to improve their students' reading in Spanish. For example, some of the things that I will carry forward into the implementation of the project are activating the students' prior knowledge, using familiar forms to them, and working to develop an understanding of where a piece may be missing from their initial language instruction in earlier levels of instruction.

I will be using Wordpress for my website design. Wordpress will host my domain name as well as give me tools to edit and polish a website. I chose them for their ease of use- I am a teacher, not a website builder, and I wanted something that would be easy to learn and aesthetically pleasing. Wordpress also allows me to access Pexels free images, which I used to add visual interest in my various posts and pages on my website. I chose the domain name missprofe.com because it reminds me of my initial interest of my students' use of Spanish and English, and how I could help them better achieve success through leaning on their knowledge of their first language.

This project will seek to synthesize the four areas of focus that I discussed in Chapter 2- How language is taught, how language is learned, reading strategies, and middle school specific pedagogy. How language is taught and how language is learned

may seem like very similar topics, and I do believe that they are very linked. To me, these themes are like two sides of the same coin- different, but inextricably linked. Much of the topic of how languages are learned comes into play in how languages are taught, but I wanted to cover a few more things to ensure that both teaching and learning of language receive the attention that they need, since there are some crucial differences that necessitate the formation of two separate categories. Reading strategies and middle school specific pedagogy are necessary due to the nature of the project, which is focused on reading, and on the intended age range- middle school students.

Rationale and Design Choices

I first became interested in this project through the course of my own teaching. I noticed that my students sometimes struggled with reading texts in another language, and I became interested in what the best practices and research said about reading in a second language.

Part of the rationale is my own interest in the subject, but also the need of the students to be competent readers in a second language class. the need to get students engaged due to their own interests, and not merely because the teacher says they must do the work for the class. Building engagement so that students want to do the outside learning, practice, and repetition that will increase their language acquisition is something that I wanted to include heavily in my project, in the form of a website.

Since the website is designed to be used by teachers of Spanish, I wanted to make sure to include those resources that I use in my classroom, and those who have inspired me and influenced my thinking as a teacher. In Appendix A, you can see a list of sources from the website that are things that I like and use in my own classroom.

Audience and Setting

The website is intended to be used by teachers of Spanish, particularly those who teach at the middle school level. Although the blog will speak largely of my own experiences and findings from my literature review, which focuses on middle school age students, it will have the possibility to be used by teachers who are teaching Spanish to all ages.

Project Outline and Timeline

My project will be a series of posts and resources on a website that is targeted at teachers who teach Spanish. I will include things both about my situation as a teacher, and strategies that are based on the research and studies that I covered in my literature review. Additionally, I will include resources that I find useful in my own personal classroom, which other teachers can access and understand as well. When the website launches, it will have five posts ready for teachers to view, as well as a list of resources, and a list of academic texts that have been inspirational to me over the course of my career as a language teacher.

Summary

This project is designed to help teachers of Spanish in the middle school classroom teach reading comprehension of comprehensible texts to their students. This project is grounded in research into reading strategies, middle school specific pedagogy, language acquisition, and language teaching. It will be implemented in the form of a website for Spanish teachers, and particularly targeted at those who teach middle school students in their first year of taking Spanish.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Throughout the course of writing this paper and creating my capstone project, my focus has been on the question, “*What are the most effective reading strategies to use in a middle school comprehensible input Spanish classroom?*” When I set out to begin this project, I had four separate categories in mind that I would base my project around. Those categories were How languages are learned, How language is taught, Reading Strategies, and Middle School Specific Pedagogy. While I still believe that these categories are important and have helped to direct my research in important ways, putting together my project has really allowed me to synthesize them in a way that is both accessible and interesting for other teachers of Spanish.

The sections of this chapter will be the different areas that I have reflected on over the course of my process, from researching to actually creating the project. I will focus on my reflections on the process, the benefits of the project that I chose, the limitations of the project that I chose, and how this project has impacted my own classroom practices.

Reflections on the Process

When I set out to research and design this project, I was interested in how to apply these things in my own classroom. Through the process of researching information, and compiling it into a source for others to use, I have had to really think about how to apply it not only in my own classroom, but how to have these strategies be applied in other classrooms as well. This process of really digging into it so I understood the ideas

and information well enough for someone else to implement them has been extremely helpful. I know that other teachers are busy, and so just having them read the same information that I did is not a good plan! Instead, I had to distill the information and research into something that can be easily understood and implemented.

Benefits of the Project

Although my project is not about distance learning, or the process of teaching during a pandemic, the fact remains that I, like so many of my colleagues across the United States, am teaching in the fall of the year 2020, and I have been doing distance learning with my students since last March. For this reason, the format of a website appealed to me immensely. It was something I could see myself using during this time, as we navigate through new types of learning, and it was also something that I could see myself continuing to contribute to as I grow in my career as a teacher. Therefore, the format of a website is extremely beneficial as a project.

I also think the project is beneficial because of the informal, approachable style that I am infusing into all of my posts. Speaking from personal experience, when I am in the midst of a school year, I do not always have the processing capacity to dive into the research on a specific problem I am experiencing in my class. I can only assume that this is true for other people as well! This means that my goal of making the content approachable and easy to understand is in the service of making the information that I have gleaned from reading and compiling the research on this topic into something a teacher could read during their prep in order to help a lesson go more smoothly, without having to do a deep dive into the research that has been done on the topic.

Limitations

That being said, what is a strength of the project can also be a limitation. The bite sized, approachable nature of the works means that I have to be selective about what things are going into each post. The entirety of the best practices and strategies cannot be crammed into a single blog post, so each post is not individually showing best practices- rather, it is the blog as a whole which attempts to incorporate the full spectrum of my findings from the research. However, I cannot assume that every educator who interacts with my blog is going to read every post- this is why I am listing it as a limitation of the project.

Reflection on My Own Classroom Practice

Throughout this project, I have been employed as a full time Spanish teacher. The process of creating and researching this project while teaching has caused me to think and reflect on my own practice as a teacher. Every time we read, I have been thinking about what this project has taught me. How can I engage students? What pre-reading activities can we do? Is this modified enough to be comprehensible to my beginning students? These questions have guided me during my teaching, and have acted as an anchor to me, especially during online learning, which is how my classroom has been conducted over the course of writing this paper. While many things have changed, these questions remain the same- engagement, pre-reading, and comprehensible material continue to be of key importance in my classroom.

Were I to do this project over again, I might wish to take into account several different pieces- the effect of the country of the students and teachers on the best reading strategies, for example, since the project in its current form draws from research and

studies done all over the world. A future project might investigate how reading strategies vary from country to country, and the effect they have on their students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the best strategies for reading in the middle school Spanish classroom are making sure that students are engaged, making sure that pre-reading activities are implemented at every level so that students can make connections with the text, and making the language comprehensible for students. These things are among the most important reading strategies that can be implemented in a middle school Spanish classroom, such as the one that inspired my project in the first place. It is my fervent hope that through the process of researching, creating, and implementing this project, my own students will be impacted for the better by what I have learned and taken away from this project.

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Appendix A: Supplemental Resources for the Project

The Comprehensible Classroom

Martina Bex's blog, the creator of Somos, with many useful articles and resources. Good for both general Comprehensible Input content and Somos specific content.

The Deskless Classroom

Elicia Cardenas, Director of Training for The Comprehensible Classroom, also has a blog which, on a variety of comprehensible input related topics, such as language acquisition, deskless classrooms, and more.

Digital Spanish Curriculum Bundle

Somos Flex units, designed to be used with distance learning, plus other useful digital resources. Produced by Martina Bex and the Comprehensible Classroom.

Fluency Matters

Publisher of levelled readers for language students. They publish both physical books and e-courses. I used one of their e-courses when my school first went online and it was very useful

Garbanzo

Digital leveled readings in the form of a yearly subscription service. Aligns with Somos and Somos Flex.

LyricsTraining

Website that automatically removes words from songs and has students play a game to put them back in. I use this as an individual practice and as a whole class activity.

Mundo Guyi

Youtube channel/personality with Spanish zumba songs and dances. I use these as rewards/movement breaks.

Magister Bracey's Comprehensible Latin

The blog of a comprehensible input focused Latin teacher, which focuses on the ways in which our classrooms can be made more equitable through comprehensible input.

A Natural Approach to the Year

A book by Tina Hargaden and Ben Slavic outlining how to approach teaching specifically in a world language classroom

Somos: Original

Comprehensible input-based curriculum by Martina Bex designed to be taught in person in a classroom.