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#SemanasSociales: Using Authentic Materials to Improve Students' Spanish Writing

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#SemanasSociales: Using Authentic Materials to Improve Students' Spanish Writing

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Research Question

- How does the implementation of authentic materials in upper-level secondary Spanish courses impact student writing proficiency with regard to grammatical accuracy, voice, and structure choice?
- How does in-class writing support or hinder L2 learners of Spanish?

Literature Review

- Teachers can raise confidence in and decrease student inhibitions of speaking in a foreign language by utilizing authentic materials (Bacon & Finneman, 1990; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Ortuño, 1994).
- In-class writing has potential to help or hinder students (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004). Short, cooperative, metacognitive writing assignments aided students the most (AbdelWahab Mahmoud, 2014; Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2013; Vurdien, 2013).
- Few studies address both authentic materials and writing using classroom data.

Methodology

- Participants were 30 students in a Spanish IV class in a fringe district high school.
- The teacher exposed students to authentic materials daily and to writing weekly.
- The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) guided implementation of this study.
- Data analysis included analysis of lesson plans and pre-/post-assessment content analysis.

Holistic Ratings of Written Voice

	Pre-assessment	Post-assessment
Exceeds expectations	13%	40%
Meets expectations	63%	47%
Does not meet expectations	23%	13%

Figure 1: As a class, students written voice ratings – qualitatively assessed by the astuteness of their responses, appropriate vocabulary/structure choice, and overall creativity – rose between the pre- and post-assessment.

“Apollo 13 era de esperar *alunizar*.” [Era de esperar que Apollo 13 alunizara.]



“Sin la Selva Amazónica, el medio ambiente cambiará mucho. Habrá las sequías y más lluvia en otros sitios.”

Figure 2: Responses to pre- and post-assessment from the same student. In the pre-assessment, the student struggles to use the advanced past subjunctive structure to communicate her idea. In the post-assessment, she appropriately employs the future tense to speculate upon consequences of present actions.

Results and Data Analysis

- Pre-assessment: students struggled with advanced structure incorporation (e.g., subjunctive) and tense differentiation.
- Nearly 25% of students did not present pre-assessment narratives that met expectations.
- Students are less likely to perform well on writing assignments executed over long lengths of class time or with complex directions (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004).
- Post-assessment: students made more attempts to incorporate advanced language structures (e.g. *si* clauses, subjunctive) and did so with much higher accuracy.
- Subjunctive: Attempts doubled amongst students. Of those who attempted on the post-assessment, 76% were successful, as compared to 43% on the pre-assessment.
- Possible reasons for the improvement: low-stakes nature of the task, short required response length, prompt simplicity, and cooperation (AbdelWahab Mahmoud, 2014; Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2013; Vurdien, 2013).
- ZPD concept: teachers adjust and modify materials to most appropriately scaffold and aid students in language acquisition.

Conclusion

- Students demonstrated growth in grammatical accuracy, voice, and structure choice in their writing.
- Students were supported in their learning by incorporation of writing; teachers must effectively design activities according to student needs.
- Demonstrated growth in writing skills by students necessitates more research on use of authentic materials and in-class writing in Spanish.