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**USING ART AS A STIMULUS FOR WRITING
IN A SPANISH 3 CLASSROOM**

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by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined the effects of using art to stimulate student writing in a Spanish 3 class. The participants were 29 high school students from grades ten through twelve in a large high school in eastern Pennsylvania that contains a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural students. Students listened to Spanish music, watched Spanish dancing, and viewed paintings of various Hispanic painters and then wrote about their experiences. Methods of gathering data included surveys, interviews, student work, observations and field notes, and class discussions. Students were given a pre study writing assignment and then a post study test in order to compare their writing. Student motivation was increased due to the use of art as a stimulus for writing. There was also evidence of increased student engagement, critical thinking skills, and improved grammar in the target language.

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both before and after my illness and was a big support for me. I am happy to consider her my friend. If it wasn't for Drs. Shosh and Zales I am not sure I would have continued my studies.

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RESEARCHER STORY

Art has never been my favorite subject. As a matter of fact, for most of my life, I went out of my way to avoid going to art museums. I never enjoyed art class and always considered myself to be artistically untalented. After all, my father raised me to love sports, spending countless days attending Baltimore Orioles and Baltimore Colts games. What did I know about art? Art was a subject for my sister, the stereotypical middle child, who liked everything my younger brother and I didn't. She wanted to go to the orchestra concert; I wanted to sit frozen to the bone in Memorial Stadium watching my beloved Colts beat the Bears.

Then my husband and several friends started dragging me to art museums, and I discovered that I really enjoyed the paintings of Monet. I would search out those paintings whenever I went into a museum and, as long as there were some there, I was happy.

In the summer of 2002, I had the opportunity of a lifetime to do not one but two things I had always dreamed of - going on a cruise and spending a week in Spain. As a Spanish teacher, it was a life long dream for me to get to Spain. The trip I was able to take with my youngest son started with a week in Spain, followed by a Mediterranean cruise. The trip was organized through my college alumni association and, for the educational component of the trip, we were accompanied by an art history professor, Dr. Bonnie Hayes, from my alma mater,

Arcadia University. Having the paintings of artists like Picasso, Dali, Miro, and Goya explained to me by an expert really opened my eyes, and I started to appreciate what I was looking at. I even found some Spanish artists whose work I liked whom I had known very little about before the trip.

I returned to school in the fall with a newfound appreciation for Spanish art and decorated my classroom walls with posters I had bought while on my trip. That same year, the Spanish teachers at my school selected a new textbook series. As I used the text for the first time, I was very excited to see so many of the works of art that I had seen in person in Spain actually in my text. The art appeared throughout the textbooks, and there was even a chapter in the Spanish 3 text centered specifically on art, including several of the artists whose work I had just seen in person. As I taught that year, I was able to use my personal newfound knowledge of the artists and their work to bring a whole new dimension to the lessons. The textbook also provided a book of transparencies of all of the art shown in the text so I could show a larger version of the artwork to my students, enabling us to have deeper discussions about the artists and their work.

It was during these discussions that I remembered that as much as I now liked some paintings, there was other art I did not like at all, most particularly modern art, and that just happened to be a lot of what was depicted in the text. It was quite easy to provoke a discussion because I found almost every student had strong opinions one way or the other about modern art. Sometimes the comments

were “I hate it” or “I have no idea what this is supposed to be” and even “They call this art?” Since I could agree with a lot of these comments, our discussions were quite lively and animated and participated in by some students who very rarely participated in anything. I started out having these discussions in English because I was really trying to get the students to use critical thinking and encourage them to express their opinions.

At the end of the school year, the Spanish teachers in my department had a meeting to discuss what our students had learned during the year and to figure out what knowledge and skills were needed to begin each new level of Spanish. The two teachers of the upper level Spanish classes both agreed that they were finding that students entering their classes were deficient in their written Spanish. If students were to be successful in Advanced Placement tests, the writing skills needed to improve considerably in every lower level Spanish class.

As I began to prepare a question to pursue for my thesis research study, I read an assigned chapter in a course text that dealt with using art in the curriculum. I eagerly contributed to our class discussion, describing how I used art in my classroom. What could be more interesting for me than to take my newfound interest in art, the art in my students’ texts, and the definite opinions of my students concerning the art to motivate my students to write in Spanish?

Many students do not like to write at all, even in English. Even more have no confidence in their ability to write in Spanish or any other foreign language.

Perhaps if I used something interesting as motivation, I could get more of my students to write and maybe even help more of them to enjoy writing in Spanish. Maybe I could even see an improvement in their writing skills from the beginning of the semester to the end.

As I started planning for my research study, I decided that I would try including other forms of art, such as dance and music, so that I would have a better chance of finding at least one thing that each student could feel some passion about.

One of the other outcomes I hoped to see from my study was an increase in the critical thinking skills of my students. I hoped that as we spent more time talking and writing about their opinions, the complexity of those thoughts and opinions would increase and this would be evident in their writing. We could start out just writing simple sentences such as “I like this painting” or “I don’t like this painting” and as the study progressed so would the writing so that the students could start explaining their reasons for their opinions.

There were so many positives to get excited about with this study. I could, hopefully, encourage some students to develop an interest in art. I could help some students be more successful in advanced level Spanish classes. And on a larger scale, I would help my students with two skills – writing and critical thinking, both of which are necessary for success with the PSSA and SAT tests.

There was one other aspect of the study that I found especially appealing. For almost all of the twenty years I have been teaching Spanish, I have taught Spanish 1 and have spent most of my time and effort helping students succeed in a beginning level Spanish class. This study gave me the opportunity to take students who already have a fundamental knowledge of the Spanish language to a higher level of success and, hopefully, love of the language.

QUESTION

Once I figured out what my study was to be about, it was time to come up with the actual question that I was going to investigate. This question would direct the study itself from a review of the literature to the actual methodological procedures. After much deliberation, I arrived at the following question:

What will be the observed and reported experiences when I use art as a stimulus for students to write in Spanish?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Once I decided on my research question, I needed to decide on exactly how I wanted to proceed. There were several outcomes I hoped to find by the end of the study. I used a variety of methods to answer my research question. In particular, I exposed my students to a variety of art including music, dance, and painting. I had my students write in Spanish about their feelings about the art that they experienced. I expected to find that the students' interest in art would encourage them to express themselves more in writing in Spanish and that this increase in writing would result in improved writing. I thought that using art would provide the students with something they could all have an opinion about whether that opinion was positive or negative. I was not expecting all students to develop a love of art. I hoped that as students looked at, thought about, and discussed the art in class, their comments about the art would become more complex and their writing would exhibit evidence of increased higher order thinking skills.

Setting

My study took place in my third period Spanish 3 class. The high school in which I teach is located in the northeastern United States and has approximately 3,200 students. A public school that contains grades 9 through 12, it includes students from all socio-economic levels, from the very poor inner city

student to the very rich suburban student. There are students who live in apartments, foster homes, single houses, and farms. The demographics of my school are approximately 59.5% White students, 14.5% Hispanic, 23.5% Black (non Hispanic), 2.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and .2% American Indian.

My particular Spanish 3 class had 29 students. The classroom itself was in the original part of a school building that has undergone several renovations and additions. There were small windows all along one side of the classroom, which made it a very bright room except that the windows did not fit properly and let both cold in winter and heat in warm weather into the room. The heat/air conditioning did not function well so the room was generally uncomfortable. The room had three white boards along the front, back, and side walls. There were 30 student desks as well as a small table in the room along with two teacher desks, which made the classroom very crowded and difficult to move around in.

Participants

The participants in my study were all 29 students enrolled in the class who opted to serve as research study participants: seven were Black, one was Asian, four were Hispanic, and the rest were White. There were students who received free lunch as well as a couple students from very wealthy families. Academically, the class was a mixed group ranging from on grade level to college preparatory. Two students had IEPs, which allowed them more time to take tests and required special adaptations of those tests. Approximately one third of the students in the

class intended to continue their Spanish studies the following year. The majority of the class was in tenth grade. Two students were seniors and seven students were in eleventh grade. There were no ninth graders in the class. None of the 18 girls or 11 boys in the class required the presence of an aide or any other special conditions.

Procedures

There were several preliminary steps that had to be completed before I could actually begin my study. First I had to obtain approval from the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) of Moravian College (see Appendix A). Then I had to obtain the consent of my building principal (see Appendix B). The final step was to obtain the consent of my students and a parent or guardian (see Appendix C).

My study was divided into three sections. Before we began actually working with the art, I had the students do two things. Each student filled out a pre-study survey (see Appendix D) and each student completed a pre-study writing assignment (see Appendix E), which would serve as a baseline for the Spanish writing ability.

The first unit of the study dealt with music. Students listened to three different types of Spanish music on CD. After an oral discussion of the music, the students wrote answers to questions concerning the music (see Appendix F). The

students were instructed to answer the questions in Spanish in complete sentences if possible.

The second unit was about dance. Students watched videotape of traditional Spanish dancing. Once again, the students answered questions, after an oral discussion, concerning the dance performances (see Appendix G).

The final unit of the study centered on famous Spanish paintings and artists. Students were exposed to this art in a variety of ways. Students looked at examples of the paintings in their textbook and on overhead transparencies. I showed students photographs I had taken of some of the paintings as well as prints and books I had purchased on a trip to Spain. Students were also treated to a large visual display of Salvador Dali paintings on silk panels that I was able to rent and display in the classroom. Students wrote about each painter (see Appendix H).

At the end of the study, students were given a written test where they were required to write in Spanish about each of the types of art we studied (see Appendix I). They also filled out a post-study survey to see if their thoughts and feelings had changed since the beginning of the study (see Appendix J).

Data Sources and Analysis

Field Log

My first and largest data source was my field log, as recommended by Hendricks (2006), which consisted of daily observations I made as a participant observer during each class period during which the study took place. After each class session, I typed up my thoughts and observations on what I had observed in a memorandum. I did this either later in the school day or at home that evening. Occasionally it would take several days to get these memoranda typed up due to my schedule but I found my memory was more reliable when I put my thoughts down in writing as soon as possible. My field log also included some memoranda that dealt with my own feelings as I was going through the study as well as some information on students that I thought was important to my study. I was careful to keep my feelings separate from my observations by putting brackets around my feelings as suggested by Ely, et al (1997).

Student Work

The next source of data I collected was student work. This consisted of the written papers completed by each student following each unit of the study as well as the final test I administered at the conclusion of the study. The pre-study writing samples completed by students before the study started were also part of the work that I collected and analyzed. According to Hendricks (2006), student work is invaluable as data in action research.

Surveys and Interviews

Most important in this research study process was the voice of the students. The primary source here were the pre and post study written surveys the students completed. These surveys were developed according to suggestions from Hendricks (2006). Due to the large size of the class and the configuration of the classroom, it was not easy to do many student interviews. I did conduct a whole class interview during the study and another one after the study ended. I also was able to randomly discuss the study with students when the opportunity arose throughout the semester. These were not actual interviews but casual questions and answers that occurred occasionally and that I was able to record in my field log. There were a couple other instances when I had a conversation with individual students that involved something that was part of the study. I also recorded these in my field log.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was an important component in my study and I took it very seriously. The first step in the process of conducting my research was to explain to my students what I intended to do and why I picked their particular class to help me learn more about my teaching and their learning. I gave each student consent forms to be signed by them and a parent or guardian. I explained in the consent form that I would be using pseudonyms when I write up my results

so that all students will remain anonymous. I also obtained written consent from my building principal and the college's Human Subjects Internal Review Board. These consent forms conform to the suggestions made by Hendricks (2006).

Once I had the majority of consent forms back, I began to keep a daily field log as advised by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2000). The field log included observations as well as my analysis. I made as many observations as I could and reflected on them to find common threads and themes. I coded my observations and placed them into thematic bins. Besides my own observations, I used student work and interviews, surveys, and questionnaires in order to have different sources of data, which enabled me to validate my findings by comparing all of the data from the various sources instead of relying on just one type of data. This process of triangulation was recommended by Hendricks (2006) among others.

It was important to involve my students, the participants, in the study. I explained the whole process to them and informed them that my thesis, the write up of the study, would be published and available to the public in the Moravian College Library. Along the way I encouraged students to express their opinions about what we were doing both orally to me and in writing through the use of questionnaires and surveys.

My students knew that the first rule in my classroom was that everyone was to treat everyone else with respect. This mutual respect enabled students to be certain that anything, other than what I was legally obligated to report, would

remain confidential. I also explained to my students that even though they would remain anonymous and anything they said in private to me would remain private, I was also under legal obligation to report any information such as abuse, neglect, or illegal activities. All student work collected during the study was kept in a locked file cabinet and was destroyed after I wrote my thesis.

Students, and their parents and guardians, were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time through written notice by their parent or guardian. I explained to the students that all students would participate in the classwork regardless of whether or not they were research study participants. I also explained that their grades would not be affected in any way if they chose to withdraw from the study.

I kept a journal to help me analyze the data I collect along the way. By reflecting on the journal entries and field log, I was able to see what results were occurring. At times I found unexpected results and I made adjustments to my practice accordingly. Because teaching is an ever changing process, what I opted to do in the classroom also changed according to the needs and abilities of the students. As the students and I got to know each other better, other changes were made since the study was initially designed before I met most of these students, so I could not take things like their personalities and likes and dislikes into account when doing the original planning.

I did not rely solely on my own opinions to examine my data. As Hendricks (2006) suggested, I discussed my thoughts with my students and encouraged them to tell me their thoughts as we went through the study process. I had already looked at published research to guide me and confirm that what I wanted to do was appropriate. I discussed my findings and thoughts with my colleagues, my professors, and my teacher support group.

When writing up my findings, I described the setting, participants, and research methods used in as much detail as possible so readers would be able to determine if my information was able to be generalized or useful to them in their particular situations (Hendricks, 2006). I also analyzed data that was not supported by other sources of data. This was negative case analysis. I also reflected on my own biases to determine what, if any, preconceived ideas I had before beginning my study. These biases and how I dealt with them were included in the final research report. Finally I kept a field log which Hendricks called an audit trail. This included my analyzed data, an explanation of the methods I used to analyze the data, a timeline of my study, and my journal. All of this ensured the accuracy of my results and interpretations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad.”

- *Standards for Foreign Language Learning (p. 1)*

Writing is clearly a central component of the foreign language curriculum. The national standards as developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the American Association of the Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese include writing as one of the integral components of the five basic standards of foreign language education. The first standard is communication, which clearly involves writing. The other four standards: cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities include writing as a way of demonstrating knowledge and understanding.

ACTFL also has Proficiency Guidelines, which were first published in 1986 and revised in 2001. These guidelines include four language skills that are required for proficiency in a foreign language. These skills are speaking, writing, reading, and listening.

Conley (2007) states that writing is the skill most lacking in students heading to college and that improving this skill is the key to increasing college

readiness for today's students. A study by Thomas C. Cooper (1987) comparing SAT-Verbal scores with foreign language study shows that the verbal scores were higher in students who studied a foreign language for several years in high school. He also found that this improvement in scores was found in students from all socio-economic backgrounds. This would indicate that even students who would be considered "at risk" could benefit from studying a foreign language and improve their chances for success in college.

Castro, Sercu, and Mendez Garcia (2004) found that teachers feel that acquiring proficiency in communicating in the target language is an important goal of foreign language instruction. If teachers are going to emphasize the ability to communicate in a foreign language, then clearly writing is a necessary component of this communication.

To determine how to best improve writing skills in the foreign language classroom using art as a stimulus, several areas need to be examined, including writing instruction itself, foreign language methodology, the importance of critical thinking skills, and the role art may play as a writing stimulus.

Best Practices

There are several difficulties students face when attempting to write in a foreign language. As Taylor, Lazarus, and Cole (2005) stated, writing requires more accuracy than spoken language and is more formal than spoken language. Another major obstacle to writing in a foreign language according to these authors

is that, as Vygotsky (1978) stated, students use what they already know when they construct new knowledge. This becomes a problem when moving from one language to another because English writing is not the same as writing in Spanish or any other languages because of semantic and syntactic differences. Words are not placed in the same order all of the time and there are differences in the use of plurals and gender as examples that make it more complicated. This is why, as Taylor, Lazarus, and Cole (2005) mention, the use of electronic translators can cause problems to foreign language students because translators treat words individually and do not put them into the proper order which would make the translation correct in the second language. Sellami (2000) warns of the danger of expecting foreign language learners to achieve the norm of the native speaker. Teachers should aim towards proficiency, but not expect complete mastery of the communication skills. The North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction (1998) states that writing instruction in a foreign language should be similar to writing instruction in English, except that the levels of language competency will necessarily be much lower in the foreign language.

One approach to teaching writing is the whole language approach. As defined by Schwarzer & Luke (2001), “Whole language is an educational philosophy that advocates and espouses student-centered, activity-based learning.” Schwarzer and Luke believe that risk taking is an important quality in a successful writer. They state that students learn best from their mistakes. This is

an integral component to the whole language approach of teaching writing.

Schwarzer and Luke say that language learning is a developmental process. First, the students need to write without worrying about mistakes and then they can go back and edit their work and learn from their errors.

Mayher, Lester, & Pradl (1983) tell us, “research indicates that the only way one learns to write is by writing.” They agree with Schwarzer & Luke (2001) that writing is a developmental process and that the first step in this process is fluency, followed by clarity, and the final step is correctness. Mayher, Lester, & Pradl also agree with the importance of risk taking and believe that composing first before editing writing reduces anxiety and increases risk taking.

In a study of Egyptian students learning English, Abdelhamid Mohamed Abdelhamid Ahmed (2006) agrees with the standards and proficiencies discussed previously for students learning a foreign language and feels that traditionally, foreign language study focused largely on speaking and listening, while largely ignoring the writing component. Ahmed’s study showed that the students who were taught using the whole language approach showed definite improvement in their composition writing skills.

Niblack (1995) explains that one of the goals of the whole language approach is for all children to acquire the skills needed to be successful language learners. She goes on to state that it is in the process of using language that these skills will be acquired not through isolating each individual component.

The North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction (1998) has found that writing skills will be increased through the use of writing exercises that are both genuine and relevant to the students. It is not enough to provide students with pages of verbs to conjugate into various tenses or sentences to punctuate or words to make plural and expect students to enjoy writing in a foreign language (Niblack, 1995).

A very important aspect to consider when designing instruction in writing skills is how to develop writing in students who are considered at risk. Bryson and Scardamalia (1991) found that much of writing instruction actually works to continue to keep underachieving students at a low level of proficiency in writing skills because remediation for these students frequently focuses on improving basic skills as opposed to higher order thinking skills. Because standardized tests often require students to use more higher order thinking skills, the students who are considered at risk continue to score poorly. Instead of only concentrating on basic skills like grammar and spelling, Bryson & Scardamalia (1991) suggest that all students be encouraged to develop higher order thinking skills when writing through methods such as free writing. Bryson & Scardamalia warn, however, that it would be a mistake to simply tell students to ignore the basic skills without providing instruction in the higher order thinking skills that are being sought. They suggest that the teacher model the types of strategies that are used to create effective writing. The teacher must also provide much support and

encouragement. It is obviously not enough to simply tell students to write and expect that they will all know what to do. By explaining exactly what is required and by modeling the thought process involved in the writing, the teacher can help the students improve their writing skills. Scaffolding is an important part of this process. Actually talking through a thought process out loud can help a teacher model that process for students. Pointing out processes such as making connections can help students develop these thought processes themselves.

Hinterer (2002) reminds us that in real life it is necessary to use more than one skill at a time so teachers are well advised not to teach reading, writing, and mathematics as isolated skills, but rather as parts of integrated units. In some school districts, such as the one in which I previously taught, writing was a mandatory component of the curriculum of each subject taught, including physical education. Sinatra (2000) found that language art skills used to teach topics in depth contextually result in students learning more than they do when just being fed a large number of facts. Richard C. Sinatra is the director of the St. John's University Reading Clinic and project director of the Inner City Games CAMP-US programs and bases his findings on work he has done with middle and high school students in New York City. The North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction (1998) through a collaboration of English language arts teachers and foreign language teachers found that student learning improves across the curriculum as writing skills also improve. The North Carolina teachers

also found that foreign language learning is increased through increased mastery of English writing skills.

Art and Critical Thinking

Niblack (1995) agrees that it is important to integrate writing into other subjects and states that a multidisciplinary approach combining language and writing is easily done through art criticism in which students talk and write about art. Castro, Sercu, and Mendez Garcia (2004) stated that foreign language instruction is increasingly integrating language and culture, but that teachers complain there is not enough time to include culture in their curriculum. My study combining art (culture) with writing is one way to fit more culture into the curriculum.

Ethan Yazzie-Mintz (2007) in a report on the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement found that the vast majority of students surveyed indicated that boredom was a significant problem to them in high school every day. 75% of the students said that the main reason they were bored was that the material being taught in class wasn't interesting. It follows then that trying to use something that might be more interesting to students such as art might result in students feeling less bored and, thus, lead to greater student engagement in the classroom.

Harrington and Hertel (2002) have also found that there is a direct relationship between student motivation to study a language and actual success in learning the language. They believe that one way to increase the student

motivation is to include cultural material into the instruction. Casey, et al (1995) also concluded in their study of secondary parochial school students in a heterogeneous classroom and the problem of underachievement that teachers felt their students were not self motivated to learn and needed to be provided with constant stimulation. Using material that students find interesting and relevant will help motivate students to write in the foreign language.

Another reason to include art in the curriculum is to try to improve critical thinking skills. Lisa Mendelman (2007) states that this is a skill that is lacking in the majority of Americans today, particularly because it is not being taught in our schools. Ivey & Fisher (2006) believe that teachers are aware that students need to learn to think critically even while they learn to read and write. The authors go on to state that linking reading and writing to students' cultural knowledge will both increase writing ability and critical thinking skills.

Hinterer (2002) argues that it is important that our students learn to be good problem solvers, which will only happen if we teach our students to think critically. This critical thinking involves the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, and Zohar and Dori (2003) found that this critical thinking can be taught to all academic levels of students, including those placed at the lowest levels in tracked secondary schools. Marzano (1998) states that almost every list of standards includes thinking and reasoning as important skills that need to be included in the various content areas and not as a separate topic. Teachers err when they believe

that low academic performers can only be taught basic skills, and frequently, as a result, these students are not instructed in the methods of critical thinking. Zohar & Dori state that there is so much information today that the focus of education is shifting to the necessity of knowing how to find the information and how to use it. They believe that these thinking skills are needed in every subject at every level of schooling. Bryson and Scardamalia (1991) agree that it is a mistake to provide low achievers with only basic skills instruction and omit the higher order thinking skills that are so necessary for academic success. They suggest students will develop such skills only if given opportunities to see them modeled as well as to practice higher level thinking skills for themselves. Bryson & Scardamalia also found that the achievement gap between achieving students and at risk students increases as students get older because of the constant emphasis placed on remediation of the basic skills of the under achievers while the on level or advanced students continue to develop their higher order thinking skills. Casey, et al (1995) found that brainstorming was the only critical thinking skill students reported using frequently. They felt that decision making, personal problem solving, and academic problem solving skills also need to be addressed in schools.

The role of the teacher in developing creative thinking is very important and requires a re-thinking of the traditional image of teacher as lecturer. McBride & Knight (1993) found that the teacher needs to serve as a facilitator and encourage the students to be willing to take risks and feel comfortable engaging in

critical thinking. They also stated that teachers need to be patient and allow students the time to come up with and test solutions to problems and not just provide students with answers. Stratton (1992) felt that developing critical thinking skills is a collaborative process in which each student is an integral partner. Stratton also stated that students will learn higher order thinking skills when teachers provide them with issues that are important enough to the students that they want to think about those issues and figure them out. Bryson & Scardamalia (1991) also concur that it is important to provide students with purposeful writing assignments. If the writing has no purpose other than to complete an assignment, the students will likely not be engaged in the assignment and will not display the sought after thinking skills. Additionally, Stratton felt that higher order thinking skills should be related to real life problems so that students learn to transfer what they learn from one lesson to other situations. McBride and Knight went on to remind teachers that even though encouraging critical thinking may seem obvious, it is important to carefully plan lessons so that this goal is successfully accomplished. The typical homework assignment of completing a worksheet often does nothing to encourage critical thinking. This requires a lot of work on the part of the teacher, which is probably why there are so many classes in which very little, if any, critical thinking takes place. According to McBride and Knight the teacher must remember to use the probing questions like *why*,

how, what do you think, and what if? Asking questions becomes a very important part of the curriculum in every subject and is an integral part of my study.

As discussed above, one of the important goals of education today is to help students become critical thinkers and more effective writers. Art has the potential to combine and accomplish both of these goals, especially through the use of art criticism. Art criticism goes beyond asking for opinions about works of art to include the reasons for these opinions. Stout (1999) studied this very subject with 50 undergraduate students at Texas Tech University who were taking a course on teaching art criticism at the secondary school level. She used her method of teaching them as a way to demonstrate to her students how they, in turn, should teach their own secondary students once they were teachers. In her study, Stout found that an important critical thinking skill is taking into account the opinions and feelings of others, which was accomplished through writing about and discussing art by her students. What becomes important in art criticism is that students learn how to make meaning of what they are observing as opposed to finding answers. She agrees that collaboration is a valuable aspect of this process. Criticism is not necessarily an easy process, and Stout found that students were better able to grapple with their thoughts and feelings about the art they were observing through discussion with her and others in the class. Niblack (1995) states, “To me, an obvious meeting place of the two disciplines of art and

language is the field of art criticism. Art criticism is talking and writing about art (p. 1).

Art provides students with something very real to write about. Taylor, Lazarus, and Cole (2005) found that using images and graphics was very important when teaching writing skills. Students liked having something to look at. Niblack (1995) points out that writing developed originally from pictures so using pictures to encourage writing makes a lot of sense. Niblack (1995) provides a model for art criticism that is similar to the whole language model. The most important part of art criticism according to Niblack is interpretation of the art. It is important to understand that there is more than one way to interpret a work of art and that students need to be encouraged to share their interpretations and not fear being told they are wrong. The interpretation of the art deals with students' thoughts and feelings. Niblack states that the second level of art criticism is learning the context of the work. This could possibly include information about the artist's life or what was taking place in history at the time the art was created. The next part is looking at how the parts of the artwork relate to one another. The final step is examining the elements of the artwork being studied, including such things as color, shape, and form. After going through this sequential process, the student is ready to explain why he or she likes or dislikes the work of art. Niblack also feels that it is important to evaluate the students' work on both the writing skills and the content of the art criticism itself. She believes students need this

feedback in order to develop the skills of art criticism. Niblack also states that art is a whole language and that art criticism uses the same methods as the whole language approach.

There is one final benefit of using art as a stimulus for writing in a foreign language and that is that using art in the foreign language class provides a place in school for art to be taught and discussed when art is being cut out of so many schools today as the standardized testing places emphasis on basic skills. Meyer (2005) writes of the importance of keeping art in the curriculum. She provides research which shows that being engaged in the arts increases the academic achievement of students. She also states that parents support the inclusion of art in the curriculum. Meyer reports that the Study Group on the Lost Curriculum found that both art and foreign languages cannot be lost and should continue to remain part of the curriculum despite cries to cut these subjects and spend more time on English and mathematics. The Study Group on the Lost Curriculum was a group charged by the National Association of State Boards of Education in 2003 to study the current status of the curriculum, particularly related to foreign languages and the arts, in American schools. The study group found that research supports claims of the benefits of including the arts in the curriculum.

THIS YEAR'S STORY

This year's story actually starts last spring when I prepared everything I would need to start my research study this school year. I was excited at the prospect of conducting my study. I had lost a year and a half during my coursework due to illness so just getting this far was something to celebrate. Thanks to a transformative moment during one of my graduate classes, I had come up with a question to research that I was looking forward to despite my initial doubts that I would be able to find something about which I could be excited. I had decided I would work with one of my Spanish 3 classes, which also had me feeling optimistic because they are generally more motivated about studying Spanish and more mature than my typical Spanish 1 classes. In my proposal that I prepared for review by Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board, I had glowingly described the wonderful classroom I called home. This classroom was large and was ideal for a thesis study. It would provide me with lots of room to walk around and amongst the students carefully recording my observations as they worked.

As the school year ended, I received both good news and bad news. The good news was that I was scheduled to teach three Spanish 3 classes, which would give me a good selection to choose from when I picked the class I wanted to work with. I was also scheduled to teach three Spanish 2 classes which meant I only had two levels to prepare for which would give me a little more time to work

on my study. Also, I was being given a year off from Spanish 1 which are the classes that always took up most of my planning time. The bad news was that I had to change classrooms. While I was not moving far, the “new” classroom was in the older part of the building, lacked any storage space, and was considerably smaller. I also would have to share my room with two other teachers, which meant I would have to give up some of the space to them.

Still, I was feeling optimistic and looked forward to the school year starting. Throughout the summer I kept a check on my proposed class lists and noted that one of my Spanish 3 classes only had 21 students in it. That might be the perfect one in which to conduct my study. And then it happened. Right before I went back to school in August, I checked my class lists again and discovered that my schedule had been changed. I had lost the nice, small Spanish 3 class and, it had been replaced by a Spanish 1 class! Now I would have three different levels to prepare for. To make matters worse, the two remaining Spanish classes had enrollments of 28 and 30 students. How was I supposed to conduct a thesis study with a class that large? Suddenly everything didn't seem quite so rosy.

The school year began. I knew I needed to decide rather quickly which class I wanted to ask to be part of my study. I realized that size was no longer a consideration for me because both classes were large. I did not know most of the students in either class. As a matter of fact, in the smaller of the two classes, I didn't know a single student. In the class with 30 students, I did know two of the

students well and one of them had been involved in a mini study I had conducted two years earlier. I tentatively decided that I would choose that class since I could count on at least those two students to serve as research participants. The final decision would be based on my gut reaction after meeting both classes. I was hoping that I would sense which class would be the best to work with on this type of project. After only a couple days, I knew my original feeling to go with the class of 30 students was the right decision. The class might be a bit larger but I just had the sense that they would make excellent partners for this inquiry.

The next step in the process was to introduce my study to my class. I did this on September 7th, approximately one week after school started. I explained to the class exactly what I was doing. I told them I was working on my Master's degree from Moravian and I needed volunteers to help me complete a large project. I explained that I needed to do a study with one of my classes and I had chosen them because they would be cooperative and willing to give me their opinions. I explained that I needed to get a consent form from each volunteer signed by them and a parent in order for them to be a part of the study. I went over the other specifics of the study that they needed to know.

Everyone seemed eager to help me, and no one made any negative comments. The students were very excited when I told them that my study would be printed and placed in the Moravian College Library. One student was

particularly thrilled because her brother is a student at Moravian and he would be able to go to the library and read about her class.

There were also several questions the students asked me. “Why are you getting your degree now?” “Why didn’t you get your degree earlier?” “Why would you want to do so much work when you aren’t going to be teaching for that many more years?” “Do you plan to become a principal?” I was pleased they were so interested although maybe not so thrilled they considered my age to be a consideration. Since I, too, consider my age to be a significant issue in this process, I can’t really be upset that the students would pick that as important.

Now for my first significant challenge, how would I ever get 30 consent forms back? I sat in my class at Moravian one night and listened as we went around the table giving the number of students we each had in our classes and realized I had the largest number of students in my class. I was determined not to be the one with the largest number of unreturned consents. I told my class of my determination and hoped that they would be participants. Little by little the forms started to come back, and within ten days I had actually received 28 out of 30. I thought this would be my final total. I was thrilled.

Ultimately I wound up with 29 out of 30 slips returned giving consent. The 29th was from a student who was absent for over a week when her brother was shot to death, so I didn’t really expect that bringing in her consent form

would be a priority for her. I was quite astounded when she asked for a new consent form and did bring it back in for me.

The final step before actually starting the study was to give the students a survey to see how they felt about their writing skills and about art.

Table 1

<i>Student Survey</i>		
Question	Yes	No
Do you like to write in Spanish?	12	15
Would you like to improve Spanish writing?	27	0
Do you like art?	18	9
Do you like Spanish music?	21	6
Do you like Spanish dancing?	18	9

Twenty seven out of twenty nine students completed the survey. Of those students, everyone indicated the desire to improve writing in Spanish. Twenty of them felt confident or somewhat confident writing in Spanish, while seven did not feel confident. Clearly the students agreed with my thinking that writing was something to be worked on in our Spanish class. The majority also had an interest in various types of art, so I had chosen something that would hopefully spark some enthusiasm. We were ready to begin.

The Participants

In order to get a picture of the class itself, I will introduce several students here since it would be impossible to talk about all 29 in this space. I have chosen

students whom I think represent different aspects of the group as a whole and who play a significant role in this story.

The first student is Latoya, one of the seniors in the class. She was also one of the two students I already knew. Latoya came from a large family, and I had taught her and several of her siblings in previous years. Latoya's story overshadowed my entire study because it was her brother who was murdered as my study began. I did not know this particular young man, a college student shot after a party. Latoya was present when I explained the study but then was out for over a week as I collected consent forms and conducted the first survey. The fact that Latoya asked me for a new consent form when she returned to school stunned me. I was touched that she was concerned enough about me and my coursework that she would even think about the consent. I could not imagine how I would be able to concentrate on schoolwork at all if it had been my brother who had died. Latoya became an active participant in the study. She was not what I would consider one of my top students in my previous class with her, but throughout this study she put forth a sincere effort and worked very hard to complete every assignment she was given.

Another student in the class was Alberto, one of several Hispanics in the class but the only one who was an active participant and showed a sincere interest in trying to improve his Spanish. He spoke Spanish at home but generally lacked the grammar background. We frequently had conversations about the words his

family used as opposed to the vocabulary that was found in the text. He sat right in the front of the class and was always ready to offer his opinion on any art we were discussing. Alberto was very friendly and seemed to get along with everyone in the class, although did not have any close friends in the class. He was always willing to help the other students with their Spanish and frequently was asked for help when the students were completing assignments. Alberto loved to dance and even told me one day, "Dancing is my life." He was thrilled any time we did anything with music in class. His enthusiasm was definitely contagious.

Mark was the opposite of Alberto. He was as quiet in class as Alberto was expressive. He sat near the rear of the class and only occasionally offered opinions. It turned out that even though he was not directly related to Latoya, they did have a connection. Latoya's deceased brother had been like a brother to Mark. One day in class, Mark abruptly stood up and asked to go to the lavatory. He was clearly upset when he returned. It turned out he had received the phone call that told him Latoya's brother had died. He was visibly shaken at the end of class and did not leave right away. Several of his friends immediately gathered around him and attempted to help him deal with his grief. A teacher walked by and offered to take him to a counselor. Mark had several close friends in class, which was evidenced by their reactions to his grief.

Another student who sat in the back of the classroom was Susan, the other student I had taught previously. I taught Susan Spanish 2. Last year she had taken

Spanish 3 with a different teacher and had really struggled so she had decided to take it again with me. She was thrilled to be in the class. She also had several good friends in the class and got along with everyone. She was a very active participant in class discussions and always willing to offer her opinion when asked.

A good friend of Mark and Susan was Mitchell. He was another student who got along with everyone and participated regularly in class. Like Latoya, he too had a brother who had died. Mitchell's brother was a former student of mine and had died along with another student a couple years earlier in a case of drunk driving. Mitchell was the first person to help Mark when he received the news of his friend's death.

Sam was another one of the students in class who seemed to have very few friends. He sat midway back in the class. One of the best words to describe Sam would have to be serious. Sam also was known for asking questions during class. Unfortunately these questions were not always on topic but they all did involve studying Spanish. Sam was an example of a person who always wants to know "why" but, unfortunately, in a language class, there are frequently no answers to those questions. This became frustrating to him at times. He also wondered why we should concentrate on writing in class when we should worry more about speaking Spanish. There was always something on Sam's mind and he was always willing to let me know what it was.

These are just a few of the students that made up our diverse community. Everyone had their own history to bring to the group and, despite the fact that a lot of that history was filled with sadness, we became a cohesive, usually cheerful family embarking on this adventure together.

It was now time to find out how well my students could already write in Spanish. I asked them to answer six questions in English so I knew that they understood what they were being asked to write about. I instructed the students to answer the questions in Spanish, using complete sentences. Because I sensed some panic at this by the looks I got and the groans I heard, I reminded the students that I did not expect these papers to be perfect nor would this assignment be graded. I told the class that the purpose of this assignment was to have a starting point for their writing, which I could then compare to their writing later in the semester.

The students worked hard on this assignment and everyone handed one in. Two students even asked if they could take their papers home to finish. There was much discussion as students asked each other how to say things in Spanish and a few students even asked me for help. Most often they relied on each other for assistance, which was a pleasant surprise to me. Three students were absent. Seventeen out of the twenty-six papers handed in had answers written in Spanish sentences. The rest consisted of single word responses. There was clearly room for some improvement.

In answer to the question “Do you like art?” ten students replied that they did not. Those answers ranged from a one word response “no” to complete, grammatically correct sentences such as “No me gusta el arte.” The majority of students who answered that they did like art were also able to say so in complete, grammatically correct sentences. Only two people responded with a one word answer. Expressing like and dislike was a skill most students had previously acquired.

Significant differences showed up when students were asked to explain why they liked or disliked art. The answers here ranged from just a couple words such as “muy aburrido” (very boring). Some wrote a sentence that had grammatical errors such as “Porque todos de a diferente opinion.” (Because everyone has a different opinion.) That sentence has no verb in it. Several answers were grammatically correct such as “Porque la musica es muy simpatica.” (Because the music is very nice.) Many students started their answers with “because” since they were continuing on from their statement that they liked or disliked art. While starting a sentence with because is not actually correct, I realized why the students responded in that manner and I was not overly concerned.

The other questions the students answered dealt with what type of art they liked and what type they disliked. I was surprised here that only a few students answered that they liked music the best. When the students had filled out their

surveys, most of them listed singers when asked to name Spanish artists they had heard of. In the writing sample, more students talked about paintings than music. Several students only gave single word answers here. There were also some significant grammar problems that I will have to address at some point later in the semester. Most disturbing to me was the improper use of the word *lo* which means *it*. Several students used the word as a subject pronoun but it is an object pronoun. By Spanish 3, students should know that there is no Spanish word for the subject pronoun *it*.

Overall, I was pleased with the writing samples. Far more students attempted to answer in sentences than I had expected. While the grammar was not perfect, I was able to understand what almost every student was trying to say. Art seemed to be a subject students were eager to express opinions about in writing. Now it was time to see if individual works of art would encourage even more writing.

To introduce the incorporation of art into our lessons, I selected three Hispanic musicians to play for the class. The first music cd I played for the class was by Ruben Blades, a musician I admired for his creativity and his singing in English and Spanish, but who was unknown to my students. Student response to this selection was mixed, but not many students admitted liking this music. The second artist was Carlos Santana. Most of the students knew Santana and were shocked to learn that I had actually seen him perform in concert when I was in

college. The third artist was Shakira whom I had specifically chosen because she was currently popular and many of the students had requested her music as one of the selections we would listen to.

Once we finished listening to the music, we had a discussion about the students' feelings about the music. As I suspected, Shakira provoked the most discussion. Many students were willing to offer opinions orally about her music. Then I asked the students to write responses to four questions concerning the music they had just listened to. The questions were in English and the instructions were to answer in Spanish in complete sentences. This would be the same procedure we would follow each time we had a lesson using art. I made sure there were questions requiring a simple yes or no as well as questions asking why students felt the way they did so that everyone would be able to respond to something regardless of their ability to write in Spanish. Once again, everyone completed my questions in Spanish even though there were quite a few who used single word responses instead of sentences. The students continued to rely on each other for help in coming up with words in Spanish. I continued to see the misuse of the word *lo* as a subject pronoun. An example of that was "porque lo es fantastico." There were, however, some wonderful answers to the question "What do you think about when you hear this music?" A couple examples are "Pienso en mis tios de Puerto Rico y Cuba." (I think about my aunts and uncles from Puerto Rico and Cuba.) and "Yo pienso sobre mi casa vieja en Nueva York. Hay muy

bodegas alli.” (I think about my old house in New York. There are many shops there.) The second example has two minor mistakes in it, both being the choice of an incorrect word, but both examples clearly showed that the students listened to the music and thought about their written responses.

Unfortunately, our next arts lesson, one on Spanish dance, turned out to be the first big disappointment in my study for several reasons. Due to some issues with scheduling, I wound up setting this lesson for a day when the students were being released early so the teachers could attend an in service meeting in the afternoon. This meant that the class period was only 22 minutes long instead of the usual 42 minutes.

I had decided that for the dance lesson, I would use a dvd I had purchased at a performance a couple weeks earlier by the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico that I had attended at Lehigh University. The performance was wonderful and I was thrilled I could use a dvd from this group to share with my class. Unfortunately, over the summer, the remote control for the television and dvd/vcr player had disappeared from my classroom and I was unable to fast forward through the beginning of the dvd. It turned out the first part of the dvd was a commercial for Mexico, which would have been interesting for a different lesson, but with the limited amount of time I had, it took almost the entire period to get to the dance itself.

The students were also more talkative than usual due to their impending early dismissal. There were several comments complaining about the fact that I was asking them to do work on an early dismissal day. “You’re not making us do anything today are you?” “We can’t work; the period is too short.” “Can’t we just have a free period today like in our other classes?” By the time I was able to reach the dance part of the video, the period was almost over and all of us were feeling frustrated.

This lesson taught me a lot about planning. My feelings of frustration could have partially been avoided if I had done several things ahead of time. First, I should have watched the entire dvd and realized how long the introduction was. It seemed short when I watched at home and could fast forward past it. Second, I should have realized there was no remote for the television and done something about that before I tried to use it. Third, I knew what students were like on days when the schedule was changed, and I should not have tried to squeeze in this lesson on one of those days.

Armed with my newly purchased remote control, I was able to actually show the dance portions of the video I wanted the students to see. We had a discussion on this type of dance and why the group had the word “Ballet” in their name even though the type of dancing performed was not what most students would consider to be ballet. When I asked the students how to say “to dance” in

Spanish, they were able to make the connection between that word *bailar* and the word *ballet*.

During our discussion and viewing of the video, I realized that the students were most interested in the dances that I could talk about because I had actually seen them being performed. The personal connection seemed important to the students and this was a theme I would see repeated throughout the study.

As with the music lesson, I asked students to answer written questions in Spanish at the conclusion of the lesson. This time, I handed out the questions prior to watching the video so the students could take notes or write down ideas while they watched instead of having to remember everything on their own. This seemed to work well as the students could write down the names of the dances they wanted to write about as the names came up on the screen. The student answers were similar to their responses to the music questions. Most students attempted to answer in sentences but the sentences were short and didn't say too much. I was accomplishing what I had set out to do: the students were writing more in Spanish than students in previous classes. Since I was not grading student writing nor was I correcting grammar, I did not expect to see significant improvements in the quality of the writing. There were still some problems with the word *it* as a subject pronoun with one student using *lo* and another using *el*, neither of which is correct. There were also some well-written sentences. One

example was, “No me gusta este baile porque no es hermoso.” (I don’t like this dance because it’s not beautiful.)

At this point in my study, I took some time to reflect on my feelings about the project. I had not put in as much time nor did I feel as knowledgeable about the music and dance portions of the study as I did about the painters we’d go on to study. Luckily for me, though, the students did not seem to share my feelings of apprehension and were still very enthusiastic about moving on to study Spanish visual artists. This part of our work would last several weeks and become the major portion of my study.

The painting portion of the study involved looking at the works of six artists: Salvador Dali, Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso, Francisco de Goya, Fernando Botero, and Diego Rivera. I specifically chose these artists because they were displayed and discussed in the students’ text, they represented a variety of artistic styles, and their art would likely provoke a lot of comments and opinions. Generally, the procedure was the same for each artist. We looked at several works by the artist in a variety of ways, including pictures in the textbook, overhead transparencies, and prints. Then we had an oral discussion about the artist and the paintings. The students then went on to share their written thoughts and opinions on the artist and the paintings.

I chose to present Salvador Dali first because I had arranged for a special exhibition of Dali art and this exhibition had just arrived. I knew the students

would be surprised when they walked into the classroom and saw the very large hanging artwork, which would spark their curiosity. It was also a good choice because modern art always evokes a lot of comment and I wanted to get the students talking. I also had personally seen much of Dali's work when I was in Spain and at an exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art so I had a lot of prints and posters and books to share with the class. I thought that my enthusiasm for Dali's work would affect my students and it did. I have included the following dramatization of the Dali classroom art experience because it was unique and I wanted to portray the feelings and excitement of the students.

THE TRAVELING ART SHOW

(The scene opens on a Tuesday in our classroom, where three silk panels of Salvador Dali art hang from the drop ceiling.)

Susan: "Oooh, pretty!"

Mitchell: "Yo." *(loudly for all to hear.)*

Jake: "Wow!"

Alberto: "Oh my God!"

Jennifer: "Oooh, stuff. I like stuff. Yay stuff."

Mark: "This guy's scary."

(Several students noticed that I was standing in the doorway as they entered writing on my notepad.)

Latoya: "Oh, you're writing down what they say about it."

(Other students thought I was writing something else down.)

Jackie: "Are you checking the homework, Mrs. Miles?"

David: "I have three of them. Does that count?" *(referring to the homework)*

(The students then had to spend twenty minutes taking a quiz. I could see them turning around and looking at the art panels as they worked. I told the class to read the information on Dali that was written on the rear panel as well as look at the picture of Dali on that panel when they finished the quiz.)

Alberto: "That makes no sense."

Mark: "He had that mustache."

Jake: "He's weird."

(The students were most interested in the panel that depicted Dali's The Persistence of Memory and they had a lot to say about it.)

Mark: "What is that large thing in the middle of the picture?"

Alberto: "I think it's a duck."

Marie: "I think it's a horse. Can't you see that?"

Mrs. Miles: "I was told that it is a profile of Dali's face."

Susan: "I can see that."

Mitchell: "Yeah, I see that too."

Mrs. Miles: "Do you see the bugs? The one clock has ants all over it but the other clock has a giant fly on it. What do you think Dali was trying to tell us?"

Alberto: “I think Dali must have been telling us that time flies.”

Sam: “I talked about this painting with an artist in my art class and the artist said that Dali was trying to say that time drags and sags which is why the clocks are droopy.”

(The bell rang before any of us were ready to stop talking about Salvador Dali. We were all excited and ready to continue our discussion the next day.)

The figure that follows below is a page from the Teacher’s Discovery catalog for Spanish and French teachers. The art that was displayed as part of the dramatization above was rented from this company. For a fee, a teacher can rent displays of several different artists for a week. Once the artist is chosen and the dates reserved, Teacher’s Discovery ships the three silk panels of art to the teacher. The panels are made to be able to be hung from the metal strips of drop ceilings in the classroom. The teacher has them for an entire week and then rolls the art back up into the tube it arrived in and ships it back to Teacher’s Discovery. In this way, the students were able to experience the art up close and personal in their own classroom. I thought this would be a unique opportunity for the students and one in which everyone would be able to participate including those who might not have been able to afford to pay for a field trip to an art museum.



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 Even the titles crack reality:
 • Telephone in a Dish with Three Grilled Sardines at the End of September
 • Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War
 • Fried Egg on the Plate without the Plate
 His lifestyle matched his work. A furniture display included a bathtub lined in Persian lamb and a lobster telephone. He once showed up for a date in a suit smeared with goat excrement mixed in fish glue. He gave a lecture dressed in a diving suit accompanied by two walruses. No one heard a word he said and he was nearly asphyxiated.
 Was his art like his life, a gimmick, a publicity stunt? Or was his life and his art expressions of a truly original mind?



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6

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Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
 He heke images in his mind, analyzed them, and reconstructed them in paint to suit his whim. They called it Cubism and he was its inventor. Some say his dramatic, sometimes disturbing images took deep emotional chords. Some say he was a gifted traditional painter who inspired Cubism to create a boze and make a lot of money.
 He said of himself, "I am celebrated, I am rich, but I am not a painter the way Goya and Rembrandt were great painters... I am only a public clown, a mountebank."
 He sold over 13,000 paintings. One was recently valued at \$139 million.
 Was Picasso a great artist or a great impostor? Was his Cubism merely a fad? Perhaps more importantly, do his paintings touch you?



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This is a sample of the art rented from Teacher's Discovery catalog that was displayed in the classroom.

Besides the hanging artwork, we looked at Dali work in the student text and overhead transparencies of the art that were included with the textbook. I shared two prints of Dali artwork I had purchased in Spain as well as a poster I had purchased in Philadelphia. The students really liked being able to actually handle the art. I was able to use the overhead transparencies with each artist we discussed. This turned out to be very useful because the students were able to look at the art in greater detail than they could when looking at the small photographs in their text.

The discussions on Dali and his art were possibly the best discussions we had throughout our examination of Spanish art and artists. There was so much information that students found interesting that I could have spent weeks just on Dali. The students were fascinated by Dali's work as well as his personal life. They were surprised at the great variety of Dali's paintings.

This time there was only one student who had problems with the subject pronoun *it*.

"La es bonita." (It is pretty.) You would not use *la* as a subject.

I had talked to the students about the word *it* after their last writing assignment. Apparently most of the students now understood the concept.

When asked why the students liked or disliked Dali's art, the majority of the students did answer in a sentence but the sentences tended to be very simple and did not show evidence of much thought.

“Es interesante.” (It's interesting.)

“Porque es loco y muy interesante.” (Because it's crazy and very interesting.)

Several responses demonstrated more thinking.

“Hay un realidad virtual.” (There is a virtual reality.)

“Porque se parece de verdad, algo que puede pasar.” (Because it seems true, something that can happen.)

There were very few grammatical errors in the writing that I needed to address with the class. I did tell the students that I would like more of them to make an effort to write sentences for their answers instead of just one or two words. I wanted the students to take risks with their writing and go beyond their comfort zone of one or two simple Spanish words. The examples above show that some students were starting to do that. I reiterated to the students that they were not being graded on their grammar. I wanted to see them express their thoughts and feelings in Spanish as best they could.

The next artist was Joan Miro, whose art was possibly the most abstract that we examined. After looking at several paintings in the textbook, we looked at three on overhead transparencies. The students had plenty to say about Miro's

work and most of their comments were negative. Their comments were clear examples of critical thinking.

“I think it’s like an inside joke. The artist knows what he means but he’s not telling us.”

“It looks like he started and stopped.”

“I don’t find anything important in this painting.”

“It looks like Bambi died and the red is blood.”

I think the idea of using modern art really worked well because it provided a lot of opportunity for discussion. The stranger the paintings were, the more students were engaged in talking about what they saw. I appreciated their effort to write in Spanish.

While the oral discussion was animated and lively with participation by many students, the written comments of the students were generally short and simple. This was the first time, however, that every single student wrote completely in Spanish. There were several very short responses like “No” or “No me gusta” (I don’t like it.) I still needed to encourage students to expand upon their answers.

Even though most of the responses were fairly short, there were a few that definitely reflected some thought on the part of the students instead of just saying that the art was interesting or boring. This was a good sign.

“Yo no comprendo el arte.” (I don’t understand the art.)

“Una fiesta de la imaginacion y los colores.” (A party of the imagination and the colors.) Although not a complete sentence, this was definitely a creative response.

We finished our look at abstract art by looking at the works of Pablo Picasso, but the students were much less enthusiastic about Picasso’s art with the class pretty evenly divided between students who liked Picasso and students who didn’t. We looked again at examples of Picasso’s paintings in the textbook and on overhead transparencies. I also shared a couple books of Picasso art that I had purchased at the Picasso Museum in Paris.

This time the written responses to my questions were not very impressive. The comments were mostly one-word responses or short sentence fragments. Some students still had trouble knowing what to do when they wanted to use *it* as a subject pronoun.

Most of the students who wrote they didn’t like Picasso’s art said the reason was that they didn’t understand it.

One student wrote, “No me gusta.” (I don’t like it.)

Another student said, “No comprendo.” (I don’t understand.)

For the students who liked the art, the comments remained very simple.

“Muy interesante y bonita.” (Very interesting and pretty.)

The students seemed to have problems expressing their feelings in Spanish this time. Several students combined English and Spanish in their responses, as in the following example:

“Porque el es diferente y unique.” (Because it is different and unique.)

It was obvious to me that the students were not in the mood to spend enough time thinking about what they wanted to write. While I was not specifically working on improving the students' grammar within these written exercises, I was teaching grammar in other class sessions so I expected not to see a decline in standard grammar usage. I attributed this to lack of engagement with Picasso.

We switched gears next and looked at the art of Francisco de Goya. His style was more realistic than the previous three artists, but there were still several paintings the students considered weird. We looked at a lot of Goya's paintings both in the textbook and on overhead transparencies. The paintings included Goya's portraits of the royal family as well as a painting that dealt with war and others that dealt with monsters. The students were beginning to see how the lives of the artists affected their painting and were reflected in their painting. We tried to interpret the meaning in some of the paintings. In the painting *El 3 de mayo de 1808*, which dealt with war, the students were able to come up with explanations for why the local soldiers wore white and not uniforms and why those soldiers were holding farm tools instead of guns or swords for weapons.

This time only seven students wrote that they disliked Goya's art. One student thought the paintings were scary. One felt the art was horrible. One student said he preferred photography.

The students who wrote that they liked Goya had a variety of reasons.

One student wrote, "Me gusta porque es romantico." (I like it because it's romantic.)

Natalie wrote, "Es bien bonito y parece algo que puede pasar o ya paso." (It's pretty and seems like something that could happen or already happened.)

And Natalie, in response to why she picked *El quitasol* (The Parasol) as her favorite painting wrote, "La chica es linda, la escena se parece verdad y precioso, como no me va gustar? (The girl is lovely, the scene seems real and precious, how am I not going to like it?) There were several spelling and grammar errors in both answers above, but the meaning was very clear and demonstrated exactly what I was hoping for. Natalie tried to express her thoughts about the painting as best she could. She took risks and wrote more than just a two or three word answer.

After Goya, we moved on to the one artist who is currently alive, Fernando Botero. The students had the most fun with Botero's art because of his style. The students quickly realized that every person or animal in each painting we looked at in the textbook or overhead transparencies was fat. The people were fat, the cat was fat, even the musical instruments were fat. Everyone also

recognized that every person in Botero's paintings had the same face regardless of whether they were male or female. The children in the paintings were miniature adults. The students also realized that the proportions of the body parts were wrong. Several students wondered if Botero himself was fat since he painted everyone else fat. I informed them that when we had looked at Botero's art in a previous year, those students had wondered the same thing so we looked him up on the computer and discovered that he was not at all heavy. All of this led to a very lively discussion in which almost everyone participated.

This time I changed the writing assignment. Several students had informed me that they were tired of answering the same questions, so this time instead of asking questions, I gave the students a piece of paper with instructions to write four sentences in Spanish about Botero's art. This turned out to be very successful. There were only a few students who numbered their sentences and wrote one under the other. The vast majority of students wrote their sentences in paragraph form without being instructed to do so. I was very pleased to see this. The sentences were more complete than in previous written assignments. The students used more extensive vocabulary and said more than just "It was interesting" or something similar. There were some problems with students choosing the wrong word from the dictionary but I was able to understand almost everything that was written.

Our last artist was actually a couple, Diego Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo, the only Mexican artists we examined. We looked at many examples of Rivera's art from the textbook and overhead transparencies. The class also watched a video on the life of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Many of the examples we looked at were sections of murals Rivera had painted. The transparencies included the metric measurements of the murals, so I had two students with calculators convert the measurements into inches so the students would have an idea of how massive the murals were. Students also were impressed with how detailed the murals were and were amused by the one mural we looked at in which Rivera had painted himself in the middle painting a mural. We also looked at and discussed a couple paintings that were not murals.

The students were more intrigued by the work of Frida Kahlo. They found it strange that she was known mostly for her self-portraits. They could not understand why someone would paint so many pictures of herself. I explained the difficulties Kahlo had to live with and how she dealt with her pain and unhappiness through her painting. The self-portraits made more sense to the students once they knew more about her life.

Because we were getting close to the end of the semester when I would administer a summative evaluation, I decided not to give a separate writing assignment on Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

The following are some good examples of student work from three of the students introduced earlier.

Figure 2: Latoya Writing Sample

The following writing is Latoya's responses to the first painter we studied:

1. What is the name of the artist? Salvador Dali

2. What type of art is this? surrealismo

3. Do you like this art? ASI ASI

4. Why or why not? Porque es muy diferente y único

5. Which painting did you like the most? Chica

6. Why? Porque yo enlata relato.

Even though the instructions required Latoya to respond using complete sentences, she provided only single word answers for three of the questions and incomplete sentences for two of the others. In her response to the fourth question, Latoya left the *e* off of the end of the word *diferente*, which suggests that she wrote it in English instead of turning it into Spanish. In the fifth, the title of the painting was *La Chica en la Ventana*, but Latoya shortened this to *Chica*. In the

next response, Latoya looked up the word *can* in an attempt to write *Because I can relate*, but *enlatar* is a verb meaning *to can something*—clearly not equivalent to the English helping verb *can*. The word *relato* means *I relate* when the infinitive *relatar* should have been used. Because we had studied infinitive form since Spanish 1, I would have hoped that this construction would have transferred to her writing by this point in the school year. Latoya made the effort to write in Spanish, however, and succeeded in communicating her intended meaning, despite several grammatical errors.

Figure 3: Mitchell Writing Sample

The following was Mitchell's Pre Study Writing Sample:

1. Do you like art? No
2. Why or why not? es aburida
3. What type of art do you like the most? ~~es~~ Nada
4. Why do you like that art? ~~es~~
5. What type of art do you dislike? todos
6. Why? es aburida

Mitchell did not follow instructions. All of his answers were one or two word responses instead of complete sentences. Clearly, he seemed to lack interest in the assignment and made very little effort to complete it, failing to answer two of the six questions at all.

In response to why he didn't like art, Mitchell wrote *es aburida*, which means *it's boring*. There were three problems with this response. First, if it was meant to be a sentence, it should have started with a capital letter and ended with a period. That is basic elementary school English grammar.

The second error is that *aburida* is misspelled. There should be two r's in the word. The third error is the *a* on the end of the word. Since this word is an adjective describing art, the word should end in an *o* since *el arte* is a masculine noun. In Spanish, adjectives must agree with nouns in both gender and number. The word *aburrido* is a Spanish 1 vocabulary word, which is used frequently in the textbook in all three levels. Noun/adjective agreement is also studied starting in Spanish 1, so both of these errors are ones that should not still be made in Spanish 3. Yet, Mitchell made these errors twice on this paper.

The writing sample was also sloppy, with two cross outs. I knew that Mitchell was a better Spanish student than this paper indicated because of his oral responses and tests. He needed to take more time and care with his writing.

Figure 4: Alberto Writing Sample

Alberto's first writing sample is shown here:

Answer the following questions.

1. Do you like art? Si, me gusta arte
2. Why or why not? Porque es muy interesante y es facil para mi.
3. What type of art do you like the most? Me gusta a dibujo los angeles y algo que yo quiero.
4. Why do you like that art? Porque los angeles era muy bonita y los fofos de angeles tambien.
5. What type of art do you dislike? no me guste arte de "shadow"
6. Why? porque es muy stupido.

Alberto did quite well on this writing sample, with every response in the form of a complete sentence. His answers revealed that he spent time thinking about what he wrote instead of simply answering *yes* or *no*. If Mitchell's writing was an example of the average amount of time most students spent on this writing sample, then Alberto's was an example of the few students who took their time and really tried to express their thoughts in writing. In this first assignment, many more students' papers looked like Mitchell's than Alberto's. It would be easy to assume that this was because Alberto was Hispanic and Mitchell wasn't, but of

the four other students who had long written responses like Alberto's, only one was Hispanic.

Unlike the previous sample, Alberto used capital letters and punctuation in his writing. Alberto's response to why he liked art, because it's very interesting and it's easy for him, was grammatically correct and demonstrated an advanced knowledge of Spanish grammar that most beginning Spanish 3 students don't yet exhibit in their writing. Very few students wrote compound sentences at this point in the year. The next response contained a grammatical error as well as a spelling error. When Alberto wrote that he likes to draw angels and it's something that he loves, he should have used the infinitive *dibujar* instead of *dibujo*, which means *I write*. As mentioned before, this is a basic lesson first studied in Spanish 1 so this was surprising here. In the last word of his response, Alberto misspelled the word *queiro*. He should have reversed the *e* and *i*. Once again, this was a word first learned in Spanish 1 and a word that is used repeatedly in class so this was just a careless error.

Alberto's third response, explaining why Alberto liked this particular type of art, contained the most grammatical errors. His answer translates to: *Because the angels were very pretty and the photos of angels too*. Alberto misspelled the word for *were* and also used the singular form of the verb instead of the plural. Instead of *ere*, the word should have been *eran*. Because Alberto wrote about angels in the plural and the word angel is a masculine noun, he should have

written the word *bonitos*. He knew the word angel was a masculine noun because he used *los* in front of *angeles* but he did not follow through when he wrote the adjective. The second part of Alberto's answer had no verb so the reader could not tell what he was trying to say about the photos of angels.

Alberto's response to what type of art he disliked was, *I don't like shadow art*. There were two very basic errors here. First, there should be an *a* at the end of the word *gusta* instead of an *e*. Second, there should be *el* in front of the word *arte*. Alberto already learned both of these in Spanish 1. These were careless errors. I had instructed the students to put quotation marks around English words if the students couldn't figure out how to say the word in Spanish and Alberto did do this. His response to why he didn't like shadow art was *because it's very stupid*. There should be an *e* on the front of the Spanish word for stupid.

Alberto's work showed that his Hispanic background has given him a richer vocabulary than most of my students but he still needed to work on his writing. This is not unusual. Many of my Hispanic students have grown up speaking Spanish to their families, but frequently have never written in Spanish or done much reading in Spanish. Because many native speakers speak rapidly in their native language, they frequently misspell the endings of words or leave them off altogether. This makes writing difficult for them sometimes and it forces them to have to take their time and be very careful.

We were done with the art and I gave the students a final written test. On the test the students were asked to write about one of the music selections we listened to, the dances we watched, and three painters we had studied. Since it took some students a long time to write their responses, I told them it was okay if they wrote about the music, dance, and one artist. The students were given general, written instructions for the questions about music and dance, and a written list of questions to answer about the artists. I did this so they would have some idea about what to write and also to try to get them to write more than whether they just liked or disliked the art.

I was quite pleased with the students' response. Everyone wrote on all three subjects and all the answers were in Spanish. There were no single word responses and each student wrote more than they did in their pre-writing assignment. The answers showed the students spent time and effort on their work. I think the responses also demonstrated the pride students took in their work.

The following are some examples of the students' work.

Figure 5: Latoya's Final Writing Sample

The following is Latoya's written responses to the post study test:

I. Nosotros escuchar música de Ruben Blades, Carlos Santana y Shakira. Shakira es mi favorita pero no al canción. El músicos tocar diferente amable música. Carlos Santana tocar la guitarra.

II. Nosotros ver la Ballet Folklórico de México. No me gusta el programa. Es muy burrido y extraño yo dormir mirar el espectáculo.

III. Tres artistas me gusta es Salvador Dali, Joan Miró, y Pablo Picasso. Todos artistas es español. Ellos el cuadro fue temprano. Me gusta persistencia de memoria, Interior holandés II, y Reading the Letter.

Latoya made significant improvement in her writing between her first sample and this one. She now wrote in complete sentences and wrote more than one sentence for each response. There were many grammatical errors but Latoya was willing to take the risk and write in Spanish anyway which was one of my goals for the semester. The difference in her effort between the first year that I taught Latoya and this sample was impressive and I was quite proud of her efforts.

Latoya's writing about the music we studied translates as: *We listened to music of Ruben Blades, Carlos Santana, and Shakira. Shakira is my favorite but not the song. The musicians played different nice music. Carlos Santana plays the*

guitar. Three times in this response infinitive verbs were used instead of conjugations but they were the correct verbs. The adjectives describing the music should have been placed after the noun instead of in front. Both of these errors were basic and should not have occurred if Latoya had taken her time. I know that if I had told Latoya at the time that she needed to go back and conjugate the verbs, she would have but she probably would have had some difficulty because that is something that has shown up in other work throughout the semester.

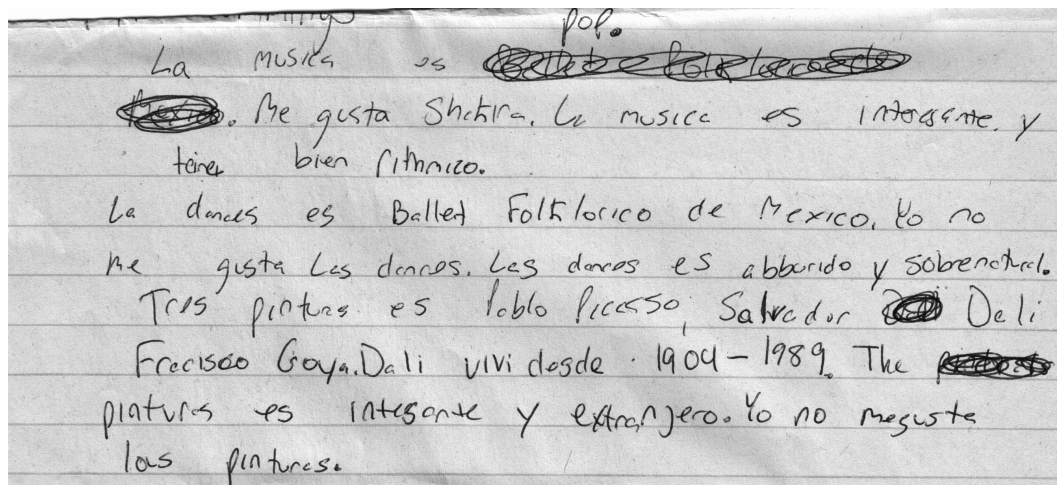
The second answer translates as: *We saw the Ballet Folklorico of Mexico. I don't like the program. It's very boring and strange. I slept watching the show.* Once again, there were verbs that should have been conjugated. The word for boring should have had an *a* in front of it *aburrido*. The choice of vocabulary was correct and Latoya knew that the word for *program* is a masculine noun despite the fact that it ends in an *a*. Many students would not have written it correctly.

The last response is difficult to translate because part of it makes no sense. The first sentence listed the three artists Latoya liked best. The second sentence says that they are all Spanish. I have no idea what the third sentence was supposed to say because a literal translation is *They the picture was early*. Latoya then went on to list the three paintings she liked the best. The first two sentences and the last sentence all had verbs that didn't agree in number with the subjects of those sentences. *Me gusta* should be *me gustan* both times it is used. This is a topic that is studied starting in Spanish 1, but it is something that students frequently have

trouble with throughout their study of Spanish because it is so different from English. When a sentence tells what someone likes, in Spanish the subject of the sentence is actually what is liked, not who likes it, so if what is liked is plural the word for like needs to be plural too. If Latoya had gotten that correct, she would have known to leave out the word *es* in the first sentence. This is also a very common error when writing in Spanish for many of my students. In the second sentence, Latoya should have said that the artists are Spanish instead of is Spanish and she should have made the word Spanish plural. These are both errors that should not be made at this point in Spanish 3.

Figure 6: Mitchell's Final Writing Sample

This is Mitchell's final writing assignment:



In Mitchell's first writing assignment, there was very little evidence of effort and the answers were all very short or not answered at all. This time Mitchell answered all three questions and used sentences. He used correct capitalization and punctuation. This is a dramatic improvement from his first effort. Mitchell clearly took some time and attempted to express his thoughts in writing. The paper was rather sloppy with several big cross outs. There were several errors in this writing.

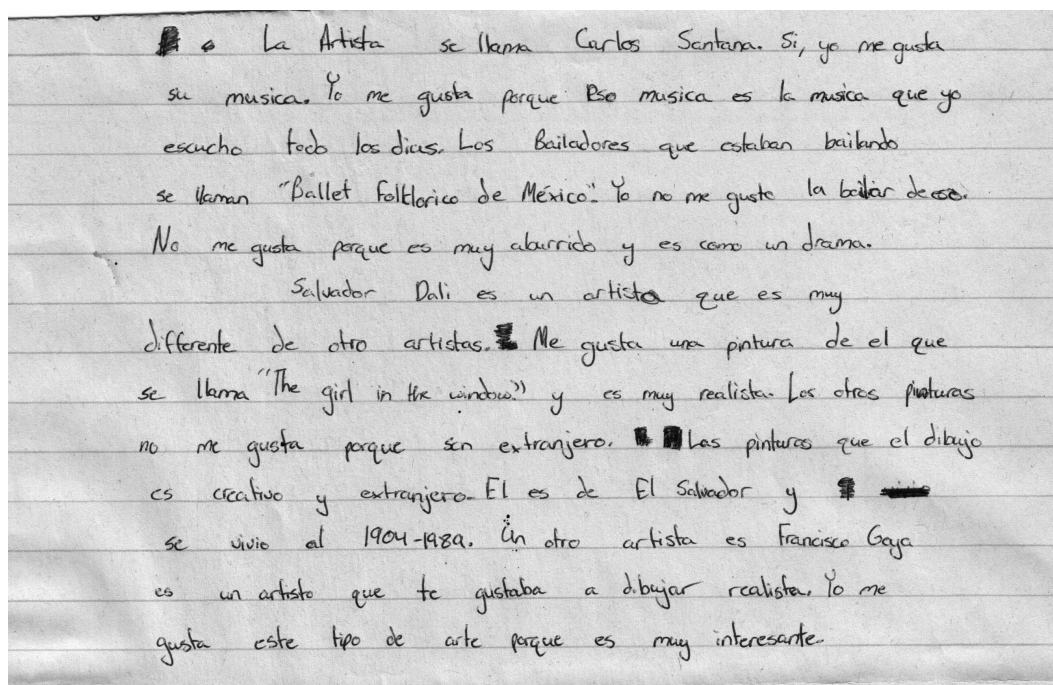
Once again, as seen in Latoya's paper, there were problems with the use of *me gusta*. This time Mitchell used the subject word *yo* in front of *no me gusta* in his comments about the dancing and again when discussing the painters. As stated before, when discussing likes and dislikes in Spanish the subject is actually what is liked or disliked, not the person doing the liking, so it is inappropriate to use a subject pronoun in those sentences. This is a concept that I continue to emphasize every year but students still have problems with it. I will have to review it again before the end of the year. Students should not be moving on to Spanish 4 without a better grasp of this concept.

In the paragraphs about the dance and the painters, Mitchell repeatedly used the word *is* instead of *are* in his sentences. Along with that, he did not make his adjectives plural. These are both the types of careless errors that should not be made at this point in the year. When Mitchell wrote when Dali lived, he did attempt to put the verb into the past tense but he used the first person singular

ending instead of the third person singular. He did use the word *desde* (from) correctly but then he should have used *hasta* (until) instead of a hyphen. This is not something we spent a lot of time studying so this type of error is not so surprising.

Figure 7: Alberto's Final Writing Sample

Alberto's final writing assignment follows:



Alberto's writing sample showed a continued effort to express himself in his writing. His work is well thought out and he demonstrated knowledge he had

gained through our study of art as well as a willingness to express his opinions in writing.

A translation of Alberto's writing is as follows:

The artist is named Carlos Santana. Yes, I like his music. I like it because that music is the music that I listen to everyday. The dancers that were dancing were called The Ballet Folklorico of Mexico. I don't like that dancing. I don't like it because it's very boring and it's like a drama.

Salvador Dali is an artist that is very different from other artists. I like a painting of his called "The girl in the window" and it is very realistic. The other paintings I don't like because they are strange. The paintings that he drew are creative and strange. He is from El Salvador and he lived from 1904 to 1989. Another artist is Francisco Goya. He is an artist that liked to draw realistic. I like this type of art because it is very interesting.

Alberto wrote more than any other student. There was some evidence of more advanced writing than found in other students' responses. In the first paragraph, Alberto used the past progressive tense in his fourth sentence. While the present participle has been studied in class in Spanish 2, we very rarely have used the past progressive tense. Alberto also used the little words that many students leave out, such as *que* (that). The last sentence in the first paragraph where Alberto writes, *como un drama* (like a drama) was more sophisticated writing than most students used at this point.

Despite the length and the amount of information contained in Alberto's writing, he made some of the same mistakes the other students made. He also incorrectly used the subject pronoun *yo* in front of *me gusta* and neglected to make the verb plural in the second paragraph. While Alberto placed his adjectives correctly in relation to the nouns they described, he made several errors when the adjectives did not agree in number with the nouns they described. Just like Mitchell, Alberto had trouble when he tried to write when Dali lived. Alberto also had one factual error when he wrote the Salvador Dali was from El Salvador.

Even though their work is not included here, Susan, Sam, and Mark also wrote significantly more in their final writing samples than they did in their first attempts. Their grammatical errors were similar to the ones found in Latoya's, Mitchell's, and Alberto's samples.

To conclude the semester, the students completed a written survey about their thoughts about the study.

Table 2

Student Survey

Question	Yes	No
Do you like to write in Spanish?	12	15

Do you feel confident writing in Spanish?	19	8
Did your Spanish writing improve?	15	12
Do you like art more now?	12	15
Did you learn about Spanish music?	17	10
Did you learn about Spanish dancing?	14	13
Do you think studying art helped your Spanish writing improve?	7	20
Did you like this project?	14	13

As with the pre-study survey, twenty seven out of twenty nine students completed the survey. This time the results were mixed. One more than half of the students indicated they liked the art unit. While fifteen students thought their writing improved, only seven students thought the art had anything to do with it. This proved most unexpected to me and led me to conduct a class interview to learn more.

My study did not have an impact on students' desire to write in Spanish. Of course, I was pleased that more than half of the students felt they had learned something about both Spanish music and dance. While not a goal of the study, this was gratifying nonetheless.

The survey also asked the students to list any Spanish artists they knew. In the first survey, almost everyone mentioned was a singer. This time a lot of the

painters and singers we had discussed throughout the semester were included on the students' lists. About half of the students even listed one of the painters as their favorite Spanish artist. This showed that even the students who indicated on the survey that they had learned nothing actually did learn something since they could now identify some painters.

In our class interview, when I asked the students if having art to write about made it easier to write, twenty two students indicated that it had.. Students were more positive in this discussion than they were on their written surveys. I think that the oral responses were more indicative of students' actual feelings from what I observed throughout the semester.

In conversation, the vast majority of students mentioned that their writing had improved in some way. Only six students stated that they felt their writing had not gotten better. The majority also felt that they had become just a little bit more critical when looking at art.

Several students stated that they thought the artists we looked at were too weird and I should use different ones. A couple stated that they really didn't like art so they didn't think that was the best subject to use.

There were a couple things the students would change in the unit. First, they did not like always answering the same questions. The other suggestion concerned the amount of time for the unit. Sixteen students thought that we should spread out the art. Eight students thought the length of time for the unit

should stay the same and five students thought the unit should be shorter. At times during the semester, it felt like all we were talking about was art and I could sense the students growing weary.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Analysis began almost as soon as I started collecting the data when I took my observation notes from class and wrote them into my researcher field log as memos. As Ely, et al. (1997) stated, it is important for the researcher to reflect frequently on the collected data and I found new insights each time I reviewed my data. Hendricks (2006) wrote of the importance of reflection in the process of action research. While I did not keep a separate reflective journal, I did frequently write reflective memos so I could capture my thoughts and feelings about what was going on throughout the semester. I was able to use these memos when I analyzed the data I collected.

I also wrote reflective memos on the works I studied of John Dewey (1997), Paulo Freire (2003), and Lev Vygotsky (1978). These memos enabled me

to make links from what these authors had to say and my own study. I was able to look through the lenses of those experts to help me examine my data.

Reading the work of Delpit and Dowdy (2002) and Vivian Paley (1997) helped me understand my students linguistically and socio-culturally. Since I was dealing with several minority students, being able to look at them and their work through the lenses of Delpit and Dowdy and Paley was particularly valuable in my analysis.

A figurative language analysis (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) was also helpful in analyzing student work and comments. It helped me look at and analyze my own writing too and gain insight into what I had written and why I had written those words.

One of the most beneficial methods of analysis for me turned out to be the mid-study methodological memo (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2001). This memo enabled me to organize both what I had already done in the study, including the data I had collected, and what my future plans would be for the remainder of the study. It provided a useful and important structure to my study. I was able to focus on what was important to my study and make necessary adaptations to my plans.

Once I started writing my field log entries, I started to go through my data and identify meaning units with key codes. This process of coding, as described by Ely, et al. (1997), enabled me to organize my data and discover recurrent

themes. I wrote these codes in the margins of my field notes. I kept a separate table listing each code and what page it appeared on in my field log. I also coded my analytic memos about the student work and the surveys and questionnaires the students completed before, during, and after the study. As I started to see codes that related to each other, I placed the similar codes into thematic bins. I then wrote a theme statement that related to each bin.

FINDINGS

Figure 8: Bins and Theme Statements

1. Teacher Reflection and Action	2. Peer Interaction	3. Student Work
Plans	Peer Help	Interest
Procedure	Student Cooperation	Student Reaction
Purpose	Involvement	Student Observation
Topic Definition	On Task	
Reflection		
4. Critical Thinking Skills	5. Student Engagement	6. Writing
Critical Thinking	Interest	Writing – Ease
Oral Critical Thinking	Opinion	Writing – Improvement
Written Critical Thinking	Effort	Complete Sentence
	Off Task	Writing in Spanish

7. Grammar	8. Classroom Community
Grammar Errors	Encouragement
Willingness to Write	Optimism
	Personal Lives

1. Teacher reflection and subsequent action led to greater student engagement and achievement.
2. Peer interaction led to increased learning by students.
3. When students were interested in the content of the lesson, they were more engaged and demonstrated greater effort.
4. When students responded to instructor prompts, they often demonstrated their critical thinking more clearly in spoken response before they were able to do so in writing.
5. Providing students with art as a stimulus increased students' willingness to write in Spanish.
6. Many students use L1 syntactic structures when they compose L2 sentences.
7. Students wrote more when not being graded on grammar.

8. Students were more active participants in the learning process when there was a sense of classroom community.

Teacher reflection and subsequent action led to greater student engagement and achievement. Throughout this study, I continually reflected on what happened in class and on the students' work and comments to me. Each class is different from year to year and what may have worked in the past will not necessarily work in the future.

Student personalities make up a significant component of the classroom dynamic. Since this unit was developed prior to me knowing these students, I needed to adapt my plans to take into account what my students knew, what their interests were, and how they interacted with each other and with me. I also needed to adapt my plans to deal with the unexpectedly large class size. My original ideas to include individual student interviews had to be altered.

As Freire (1970) stated, "The teacher is no longer the-one-who-teachers, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow," (p. 80). Freire saw the classroom as a place where everyone learns together. Teachers learn from their students as the students are learning from the teachers. Education is a cyclical process with everyone participating and everyone learning as well as teaching.

I learned from my students that they disliked always having to answer the same questions about each artist we discussed. That led me to change the written assignment for the last two artists we examined. This not only made the students more interested in providing written responses, it also led to increased writing by them.

Students told me they felt the unit was too concentrated. There was too much art in a relatively short span of time. While the art was clearly a good stimulus for the writing, in the future I would spread out the art lessons throughout the year. Some students tired of the art by the end, making it more difficult to keep them motivated. These were the same students who indicated they didn't like art.

By spreading out the art lessons through the year, there would also be time to integrate the grammar lessons that arose from examination of the student writing into the art lessons themselves instead of having to wait until the unit was finished. There were too many other things that had to be accomplished during class to be able to fit all of the art as well as the resulting grammar lessons into a couple months.

My original plan was to use the same written questions for each artist we studied. Students indicated to me during a class discussion that they were bored by this. I agreed and I did change the format before the end of the unit. In future units, I would provide a variety of ways for students to respond in writing. I

thought originally that I could better analyze the data if all the questions were the same. This was not necessary. It was easy enough to tell how the writing compared from one paper to the next without having the questions being the same. Using the same questions actually hindered student writing because they could just write basically the same thing each time. Once the questions were changed and were more open ended, the students actually wrote more.

Peer interaction led to increased learning by students. Students relied on each other for assistance with word translations more than they relied on me, or the dictionary. This was not something I expected. Previous experience had shown me that students were most likely to ask the teacher how to say something in Spanish than to ask each other. This class was different. Student writing in Spanish improved as a result of having the opportunity to talk to each other about what they were writing. In retrospect, it is clear to me that some students would have written only in English if they had not been allowed to ask others for assistance. By encouraging them to ask their peers for assistance, these students learned more than they would have if left on their own. Students were frequently heard turning to other students and asking, “How do you say ____ in Spanish?” Vygotsky (1978) stated, “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers,” (p. 90). Students in this study did learn more when allowed to interact with their peers.

When students were interested in the content of the lesson, they were more engaged and demonstrate greater effort. As a result, off task behaviors were limited when students were actively engaged in a lesson. There was less off task behavior during the lessons in this unit than there was in class sessions devoted to traditional topics. The choice of art for the unit seemed to work for a number of reasons. First, the art provided visual stimulation to prompt meaningful discussion among all learners. It didn't matter how well a student was able to read and understand Spanish in order to participate in a discussion about a painting they were viewing.

Second, the art was something that easily provoked comments. Choosing a lot of modern, abstract art definitely resulted in more comments from the students. The modern art provided the students with a lot to think about. It wasn't the type of paintings where students could just list what they saw. This type of art required the students to interpret what they looked at as well as what they listened to or watched with the music and dance portions of the unit.

Third, the art in the unit was real. This brought the study of Spanish into the students' everyday lives and out of the textbook. Students were excited that they could actually go and see these works of art. Some of them had already seen some of the paintings or had heard of the painters. The students could listen to this music on their Ipods and could go to clubs and dance to this music. All of these connections helped to keep the students interested and on task throughout the unit.

When students responded to instructor prompts, they often demonstrated their critical thinking more clearly in spoken response before they were able to do so in writing. While writing was in many ways the main focus of the unit, getting students to think about what they wanted to say was a crucial component.

Freire (1970) said, “Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thoughts on them,” (p. 77). Freire believed that teaching is a two way process between teachers and students. It is not enough for teachers to provide all of the information and all of the answers. It is also not the job of the teacher to tell the students what to believe.

Communication was at the heart of my study. The end result of each lesson is written communication in which the students told me in writing their thoughts about what they saw or heard. Even before the written communication, though, was oral communication when we had discussions about the art and feelings about that art. I found several times that I needed to make a negative comment about the art, if I had one, before my students felt free to offer their negative opinions. Students are too often conditioned to agree with what teachers say, so many students believed that if I showed them a painting, it must be because I thought it was good. As the study progressed, students expressed their opinions orally much more readily than they had at the beginning. Students felt

safe and secure enough to tell me when they did not like something, which turned out to be the majority of the time. This resulted in some very lively discussions, even though the students often did not yet possess the Spanish vocabulary to turn those discussions into written statements.

Providing students with art as a stimulus increased students' willingness to write in Spanish. Every student in this unit wrote responses in Spanish when asked to answer questions. There were many written assignments in previous years when some students would answer questions by writing in English or other students would leave their paper blank. A frequent comment students make is, "I don't know how to write in Spanish." The students all had opinions about the art we examined. Since they already had something to say about the subject, they were more willing to attempt to write their responses in Spanish. Certainly not every student answered every question, but there were never more than one or two responses left out. By giving the students something they found interesting, they were eager to write to me about how they felt. Throughout the study, the questions did not usually require more than a one sentence response. For the final test, though, the students were asked to write paragraphs and they willingly complied to the best of their ability. No one responded using single word answers on the final test. Even though they didn't know if they were going to receive a grade for their work, the students were quite eager to complete the assignment and were frequently heard asking other students how to say different words in

Spanish. Harrington and Hertel (2002) also found that there was a direct relationship between student motivation to study a language and actual success in learning the language and including culture was one way to increase student motivation.

Many students use L1 syntactic structures when they compose L2 sentences. As long as students think in English, they will use English word order and word choice that may result in errors when they write in Spanish. To be successful writers, they must be helped to think in Spanish, rather than translating from English to Spanish. Both the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction (1998) and Taylor, Lazarus, and Cole (2005) affirmed this finding in their research. Looking at the student responses, I found that many of their grammar errors resulted from simply trying to translate their English into Spanish, which is why so many students had trouble with the word *it* for example. Many students believed they had to translate *it* into Spanish even though the word is not written separately but just understood when used as a subject pronoun. Word order is also very different in English and Spanish and as long as students try to answer questions in English first and then literally translate their answers into Spanish, there will be many grammatical errors. Therefore, the more students are immersed into the target language, the sooner their writing will more closely resemble that of a native speaker. Taylor, et al (2005) found that students needed to deconstruct their knowledge of the English language before they could

successfully write in a second language. Writing needs to be integrated into the speaking, reading, and listening components of language study and cannot be taught in isolation.

Students wrote more when not being graded on grammar. As Baker (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) stated, “The study of grammar is very much a personal issue, a racial and class issue, a political issue-and doing it backward like this, motivation first, rules last, examining the dialects before the formal language, is something with which my students will cooperate (p. 59). This quote deals with students who do not speak what we would call *proper English* but rather a dialect. It does not specifically deal with foreign language but I think the quote is relevant in a world language teaching and learning context just the same. The thoughts expressed in this quote reflect the whole language approach to writing, which encouraged students to write for the joy of writing and not for grammatical correctness.

Grammar is a major part of the curriculum in Spanish 3, but most students do not enjoy Spanish grammar any more than most of them enjoy English grammar. The purpose of my study was to get my students to write more in Spanish. In order to accomplish this, I decided that I needed to motivate them by using art. I specifically chose not to concentrate on the grammar when the students answered questions about the art. Students were clearly relieved to know that I was not going to be grading their grammar. As a result, they were more

willing to be risk takers in their writing. I could tell from their responses that students were attempting to answer in complete sentences as instructed. I could also see that students would still attempt to express their thoughts in writing even when they could not figure out how to do so in grammatically correct sentence form.

Students were more active participants in the learning process when there was a sense of classroom community. Right from the start of the unit, students understood that this was a learning process for all of us. They knew that they were an integral part of me attaining my goal of earning my master's degree. They knew we were in this together and that had a definite impact on their behavior and participation. Students frequently asked if something was part of my thesis and were more anxious to participate when they knew it was.

Freire (1970) stated, "From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization...they must be partners of the students in their relations with them," (p. 75). This couldn't be more true. The students knew they were my partners in this endeavor and they responded in a very positive way. They understood that I was doing something in an attempt to help them and they, in turn, were happy to help me. I do not think this unit would have worked if this feeling of classroom community did not exist with this class. I intentionally chose this particular class

because I sensed that this feeling existed and the results showed that this was correct.

The personal lives of students had a profound impact on class dynamics. During this unit of study, there were some serious personal issues that arose. There was the murder of the brother of one student. The murder victim was like a brother to another one of the students in the class. One of the students who consoled him had a brother who was killed in a drunk driving accident a year earlier. Several other students were friends of the boy killed in the drunk driving accident. All of this affected the class dynamics. Students definitely had a closer relationship with each other than they might normally have. Students clearly cared about each other and this showed in the way they worked together on assignments. Students who might not normally have interacted much with each other, talked together and worked together.

As Dewey (1938) stated, “Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is the desire to go on learning,” (p. 48).

This quote says that there is more to education than the specific material found in a lesson. Children learn all the time from everything that goes on in the classroom. The most important thing we, as teachers, can do is to get our students

to keep on learning just as Dewey states in the last sentence of the quotation. Dealing with the personal issues that arose during this semester was definitely a learning experience for everyone in the classroom, including myself.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The writing that students generated through their study of Spanish art demonstrated several patterns of grammatical errors that will be addressed in future lessons. The student writing will be very useful in providing work that can be examined and corrected for grammar. The student work showed exactly where there are deficiencies in written ability and this will make future grammar lessons more relevant and focused.

I will continue using art as part of the curriculum but I will spread the art lessons throughout the year instead of into one concentrated instructional unit. Artists will be discussed as they appear in the text with other artists added in as appropriate. I will still give writing assignments using art as the subject. These writing assignments will be incorporated into my Spanish 1 and Spanish 2 classes as well.

As a result of this study, I see the importance of peer interaction and I will provide more opportunities for students to work with each other on assignments throughout the course of the year.

The process of reflection has become very important to me. I will continue to use my reflections to help direct my lesson planning. I have become a mentor

to a beginning teacher and hope to continue in that capacity in the future. As a mentor, I will stress the importance of self reflection when planning lessons. This self reflection cannot take place without careful observation of what happens in the classroom. I have learned to be a better participant observer and will also pass this on to any teachers I mentor.

Inquiry will remain a part of my curriculum planning. As a result of the observations and reflections throughout this study, there are several questions that have arisen that I will address in the future as I continue teaching. I wonder how I might increase student speaking in Spanish as well as in writing. Can I use art to stimulate speaking? What other topics can I find that will stimulate creative thinking in my classroom? Can I take the written responses the students wrote in this unit and use them to provoke more detailed, thoughtful writings? What will happen if I separate the three components of this unit, music, dance, and painting into separate units?

Teaching is an ever-evolving process. As a result of this action research, I know I will continue to investigate questions that arise as I teach and reflect on my lessons. I also hope that my students have learned as much as I have from this experience and they will leave my classroom as better writers.

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APPENDICES



Appendix A: HSIRB Approval



MORAVIAN COLLEGE

August 13, 2007

Julia B. Miles
1814 Homestead Ave.
Bethlehem, PA 18018

Dear Julia B. Miles:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Using Art as a Stimulus for Writing in a Spanish 3 Classroom." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail (medwh02@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415

Appendix B: Principal Consent Letter

I am currently working toward earning a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. During the 2007-2008 school year, I will be taking courses and conducting a research study that will help improve my students' ability to write in Spanish. I will be using exposure to various types of Spanish art to motivate my students to express their opinions and then write about them in Spanish. I will conduct this study in one of my Spanish 3 classes. The study will take place between September 4, 2007 and December 20, 2007.

For the study, I will be collecting data by: observing the students as they work, collecting student writing assignments, interviewing all students, and surveying students at the beginning and end of the study. All students will be involved in writing about Spanish art as it is part of my regular course curriculum. There are no anticipated risks to students in this study.

Participation in my research study is entirely voluntary and will not affect any child's grade in any way. Students may withdraw from the study at any time. Students who choose not to participate or who withdraw will still be required to complete all classwork, but their data will not be included in my study. A permission form signed by each student and a legal guardian will be required for each participant in my study.

All student names will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms in the published report. All research materials will be kept locked and all data will be destroyed after the study is completed.

If you have any questions about my research, please let me know. My Moravian professor is Dr. Joseph Shosh who can be contacted at Moravian College (610) 861-1482 or by email at jshosh@moravian.edu.

Please sign and return the consent form at the bottom of this page. The copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Julia B. Miles

As principal of the teacher conducting this research, I give permission to Julia B. Miles to conduct this study. I understand that Mrs. Miles will be observing and collecting data as part of her research on improving student writing.

Appendix C: Parent/Student Consent

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently working toward earning a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses help me find ways to make my teaching more effective. During the 2007-2008 school year, I will be conducting a study in order to write my thesis and complete my degree. My study will focus on helping my students increase their ability to write in Spanish. I will be exposing students to various types of Spanish art in order to motivate students to express their opinions in written Spanish. I have chosen your child's Spanish 3 class to take part in this project. Spanish art is part of the regular Spanish 3 curriculum. I do not anticipate any risk to your child due to participation in this project. The study will take place between September 4, 2007 and December 20, 2007.

For the study, I will be observing students as they work, collecting student writing assignments, interviewing all students, and surveying students at the beginning and end of the study.

Participation in my research study is entirely voluntary and will not affect any child's grade in any way. Students may withdraw from the study at any time by a note signed by you. Students who choose not to participate or who withdraw will still be required to complete all classwork, but their data will not be included in my study. All students' names will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms in the published report. All research materials will be kept locked and all data will be destroyed after the study is completed.

If you or your child have any questions, please contact me by note, phone, _____, or email at _____. In addition, you may contact our principal at the same phone number or your child's guidance counselor. My Moravian professor is Dr. Joseph Shosh who can be contacted at Moravian College (610) 861-1482 or by email at: jshosh@moravian.edu.

Please sign and return the consent form at the bottom of this page. A copy is included for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Julia B. Miles, Spanish Teacher

My child may participate in this project. Yes No

Parent/Guardian signature _____

Student signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Pre Study Survey

Student Survey

1. Do you like to write in Spanish? Yes No
2. On a scale of 1-5 how confident do you feel writing in Spanish?
- | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| Not at all | | | | Very confident |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
3. Would you like to improve your Spanish writing? Yes No
4. Do you like art? Yes No
5. Do you like Spanish music? Yes No
6. Do you like Spanish dancing? Yes No
7. List any Spanish artists you know of.

8. Do you have a favorite Spanish artist? Yes No
- Who?

APPENDIX E: PRE-STUDY WRITING SAMPLE

Pre Study Writing Sample

Answer the following questions in Spanish in complete sentences.

1. Do you like art?

2. Why or why not?

3. What type of art do you like the most?

4. Why do you like that art?

5. What type of art do you dislike?

6. Why?

APPENDIX F: MUSIC QUESTIONS

Music Questions

Answer the following in Spanish in complete sentences in the present tense.

1. What type of music is this?

2. Do you like this music?

3. Why or why not?

4. What do you think about when you hear this music?

APPENDIX G: DANCE QUESTIONS

Dance Questions

Answer the following in Spanish in complete sentences.

1. What is the name of this type of dance?

2. Do you like this dance?

3. Why or why not?

4. Do you like to dance?

APPENDIX H: ARTIST QUESTIONS

Artist Questions

Answer the questions in Spanish in complete sentences.

1. What is the name of the artist?

2. What type of art is this?

3. Do you like this art?

4. Why or why not?

5. Which painting did you like the most?

6. Why?

APPENDIX I: POST TEST

Test

- I. Write a 2 to 3 sentence paragraph about one of the music selections we listened to. Include the type of music, whether or not you liked it and why.
- II. Write a 2 to 3 sentence paragraph about one of the dances we watched. Include the type of dance, whether or not you liked it and why.
- III. Choose 3 of the painters we studied. For each artist, answer the following questions. Put your answers into the form of a paragraph about each artist.
 1. What is the name of the artist?
 2. Did you like or dislike his art and why?
 3. What is the name of at least one painting by this artist?
 4. What type of art is this painter known for?
 5. Where is the artist from?
 6. What century or years did the artist paint?

APPENDIX J: POST STUDY SURVEY

Post Study Survey

1. Do you like to write in Spanish? Yes No
2. On a scale of 1-5, how confident do you feel writing in Spanish?
- | | | | | |
|---|----------|---|---|----------------|
| | Not Very | | | Very Confident |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
3. Did your Spanish writing improve? Yes No
4. Do you like art more now? Yes No
5. Did you learn anything about Spanish music? Yes No
6. Did you learn anything about Spanish dancing? Yes No
7. List any Spanish artists you've heard of.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Who is your favorite Spanish artist?
- _____
9. Do you think studying art helped your Spanish writing improve?
- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
10. Did you like this project? Yes No